

EUROPASYMPOSION 2011 – Europe Next Generation Report



More than 50 people, coming from 11 European nations, took part in the "Europe symposium", placed at the meeting centre St. Benedict in Kancevcic, Slovenia. Coming from different cultural backgrounds they met to discuss about chances and challenges of Europe's next Generation. Miss Siyka Kovacheva, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, gave a lecture on constructions of the new generation of Europeans and its impact of family, education, religion and culture.



On the elements of trends and changes in youth transitions the participants worked at the future of Europe according to the "open space technology" as presented by Mr. Erich Kolenaty, a specialist on this method. Several days people learned to communicate and share their opinions, their feelings, their know-how in groups that were formed according to their interest and knowledge. Some of the topics: dialogue of cultures, family models, justice and peace, liberty/freedom of speech and expression, plurality, diversity, respect, solidarity, integration, the importance of life long learning through true dialogue, compassionate listening & communication from heart & mind, cultural exchange.

Social and biographical construction of the new generation of Europeans: The impact of family, education, religion and culture

Some facts were considered to have an idea of the next generation and who will carry out the project of European integration. These are challenges to the present generation's understanding of youth, new trends in youth conditions and diversity of transitions. On these elements scenarios for the near future can be drawn.



Youth has been present in the public debates in both democratic and authoritarian societies over a hundred year – an interest that springs from two main concerns: how to save youth from social risks and how to save society from youth. Youth protests in Eastern Europe in 1989 or later on in France and Greece or currently in Northern Africa and the Middle East are of course a source of renewed interest. But how can we understand young people today and foresee their future?

The lecture attempted to answer these questions above by looking upon the changes in youth transitions underway in modern societies focusing upon the influences from the trends in family life, education, religion and culture in European societies. Youth is no longer a clear cut phase in the life course but has turned into a condition with an uncertain outcome. In the 21st century youth transitions have become less standardised, more flexible, less associated with one another, and more reversible than in the past. The process of individualization has affected all young people in the continent but their individual biographical journeys are still shaped by the welfare, gender and family regimes and the dominant religious and cultural norms of their own country, as well as by the structural inequalities within the country among different subgroups of youth.

Further on Ms Kovacheva examined some common trends in youth condition in Europe such as the delay of family formation and parenthood, the longer stay in the parental home and the pluralisation of family forms; diversification of educational paths by combining formal with non-formal and informal education and training, as well as combining work and studies and lifelong learning, the flexibilisation of work and precarious jobs and the rising mobility for studies, work and travel in the enlarged Europe; the growing importance of leisure in the process of identity formation and the spread of consumerism and global cultures, the more individualised forms of religious affiliation and more individualised and expressive forms of political involvement. It also presented different models of youth passages to adulthood based on biographical interviews conducted with young women and men in Bulgaria.

Building upon the understanding that social change is not only influencing youth transitions but is also driven by young people responding to the changing world, the lecture ended with the presentation of two possible scenarios for the mid-term future: the first one of 'United Europe' – a society allowing and valuing mobility, flexibility and social inclusion, and the second of 'Balkanization of Europe' – a society ridden apart with polarization between cultures, religions, material wealth and social exclusion.