

“Facing the challenge: When we are played off against each other, we play together, still and again!”



International Training Seminar

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Understanding Play-off

Twenty young participants sit in a big circle, blank white papers lying on the floor. Every single paper stands for a form of “Play-off”, as the participants know them from their communities. The papers are filled in a thoughtful quietness. Soon all papers are completed, all seats are taken again.

This workshop was part of the International Training Seminar “Facing the challenge! When we are played-off against each other, we play together still and again”, which took place in Budapest, Hungary in May 2017, invited by European Playwork Association (e.p.a.), an international youth and community organisation network based in Hamburg.



The term “Play-off” sounded strange from the first moment, participants from 16 different countries confirmed. Dominika from Bratislava, a member of the project team, explained the background: “The idea for the seminar came from the concerns about increasing xenophobia and more and more aggressive public hate speech in all European countries. This needs to be challenged in youth work too.”

e.p.a. promotes “Play” as a powerful intercultural non-formal learning method in its daily youth work. “Play-off”, as an opposite concept was chosen, in order to describe a negative phenomena linked with conflicts, discrimination and segregation between different groups in our society. As “Play-off” cannot be translated directly into all languages, participants with 18 mother tongues choose other definitions to describe the phenomena: “Kijátszani egymás ellen” in Hungarian, “birbirine düşürmek” in Turkish. With increasing understanding of the term, its importance for the current European development and its impacts on the life of young people, it becomes clearer.

Back to the circle: We ask who would like to share some experiences of Play-off? Dan from Liverpool picks up one of the papers and begins with the highly topical case of Brexit. He describes the whole election as a big political Play-off, where the UKs presumable interests were set against Europe. Young people – the future of the UK – are the losers in this Play-off.

Bruno from Lisbon reports about the “institutional Play-off” between youth work organisations in his community, and how hard it is to see the own role in these conflicts and become proactive for more networking instead of battle for resources. Cuts in the social sector have made Portugal vulnerable and caused a lot of Play-off.

Sanin from Sarajevo tells how it is an obligation in Bosnia to choose an ethnic group even if the person doesn't feel belonging to one group – for him a form of ethnic Play-off as there are new differences and prejudices created.

Other – moving, worrying and eye opening – examples followed. They show how in many countries refugees are currently played-off against other inhabitants based on religion as a dividing aspect. “In Finland too”, Sinianna from Turku confirms.

Csaba from Budapest reports about the Hungarian reality with increasing discrimination and xenophobia: “The Play-off is apparent everywhere in the Hungarian society. But there are many people who try to build bridges between divided groups. We do this daily in our youth centre”.

“The role of youth and social work is essential when challenging Play-off-development”, Konstantina from Thessaloniki adds. “As Greece is carrying a lot of responsibility to host refugees and at the same time struggling with high youth unemployment and with a lack of economical perspectives, it is really important to consider the needs of all young people”.

A few hours back, when talking about Play-off, the room was full of question marks. Now at the end of the workshop there is a new awareness of the global character of the Play-off-development and the importance of Universal Human Rights. The conditions might be different but the mechanisms of discrimination, distribution conflicts and power abuse remain the same in all countries. Before the workshop finishes, Dan invites everybody to stand up in a circle. The pensive atmosphere is soon changed by a dynamic and funny group game.

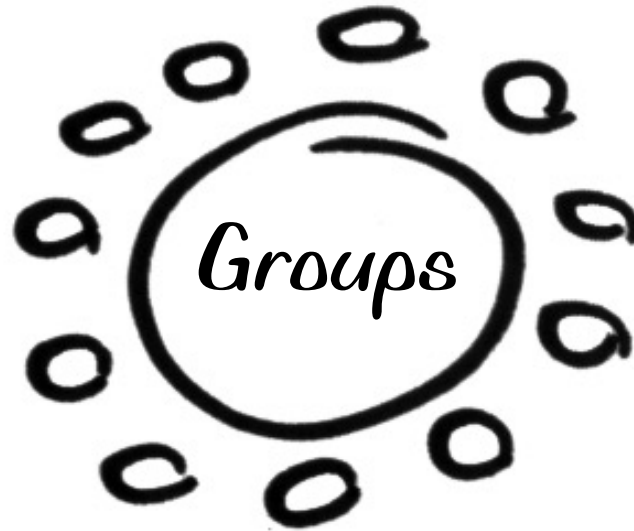
International Youth activities offer great chances to support youth organisations Europe-wide to promote Human Rights education in their local communities and to challenge Play-off through international networking. The e.p.a. seminar in Budapest was supported by the European Youth Foundation of Council of Europe and held in its European Youth Centre Budapest.





What is Play-off about? "A little e.p.a. theory of Play-off"

The most important "ingredient" for Play-off-processes is the idea of "different groups". Play-off needs groups, who are played-off against each other.



The division of groups is often made up only in our heads. And always simplified, as the reality of group membership is not one-dimensional: we all belong to different groups in society.

The question is also: do I see myself as a part of the group or do only others define me as a part of a particular group?

It can be about hierarchy; one group is favored at the expense of the others

It can be about isolation and segregation

It can come to conflicts between groups

But: sometimes Play-off also means not to take seriously the needs of particular people, who would like to be recognised as a group or would be needing extra support

MECHANISM OF PLAY-OFF

Played-off by whom?

- Play-off can be politically motivated and initiated. Currently this is visible in the argumentation of populist parties in many countries. On the other hand; Play-off-development is often caused unintentionally by the politics. There might be cuts in the social sector without considering the consequences of the distribution conflicts on social climate in local communities.
- Media plays an important role for the appearance of groups in public awareness. It can escalate conflicts or work as a mediator to convey different perspectives.
- And after all; we are all a part of different Play-off-processes with our thinking, acting and communication.



What is the link to Youth Work?

- Youth organisations and initiatives are important stakeholders in local communities, having the task to prevent and avoid Play-off-phenomena. Where this negative development has already gotten in, we need to “repair” and respond.
- Discrimination and Xenophobia, as sources of Play-off-development, that have negative impacts on young people’s access to social rights and equal opportunities.
- Young people are susceptible and vulnerable to negative group descriptions, which brings with it harmful effects as social exclusion, marginalization and radicalization.
- Youth work has the task to support young people in their active citizenship. Empowered young people, who know their rights, are more able to define their opinions and wishes and become active against Play-off-development and for a democratic and equal society.
- Talking about the Play-off on the European level, young people have a big role to play. They know the advantages of the European opportunities better than any other generation before and it is their common European future they should create instead going back to the national-state-orientated Play-off.
- Human Rights education can work as a key for change in the heads of young people. “All different – all equal” offers a valuable approach to respect each other!

- “Play” as a method brings people together and prevents Play-off supporting participation, intercultural communication, inclusion and equality.





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