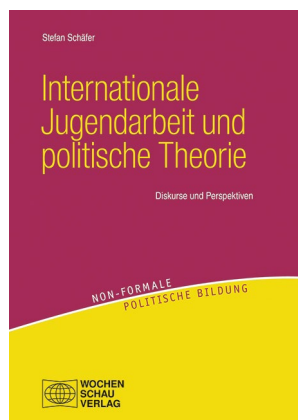


International Youth Work and Political Action¹

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Book presentation



Political Action refers to the practice of involvement in public affairs. Political Action never concerns just one individual and their privacy, but always relates to human relations. Through political Action, we become entangled in interpersonal relations and become part of a collectively shared and shaped world.

International Youth Work is particularly linked to political Action. Due to its international orientation, International Youth Work can never be solely individually justified, such as referring to the potential for personal growth and skill development. International Youth Work always carries a political rationale that refer to issues of togetherness in the world.

At its' origins after the Second World War, this political dimension still stood prominently at the core. International Youth Work was intended to contribute to international understanding after the horrors of National Socialism. In the following decades, the justifications became more individualized. The primary emphasis shifted from promoting international understanding, establishing international contacts, and building international cooperations to the argument that international youth encounters could be learnt interculturally. While this led to a professionalization of pedagogical practices, the political dimension simultaneously receded into the background and was no longer the subject of critical examination and reflection.

The Working Group on the Political Dimension of International Youth Work in the context of Research-Practice-Dialogue from 2013 onwards embarked on a targeted exploration of the questions and issues

associated with the concept of the political dimension. It became apparent that there can be a broad discussion about the political dimension of International Youth Work, that the term incorporates a wide range of values, normative ideas, and intentions, and that participants articulate various political interests, hopes, and desires through this concept. The political Dimension has a wide range of topics; From strengthening political education, to European civil society, sustainability and global learning, democracy skills, cosmopolitanism, racism and re-nationalization, Europe and European funding programs, reaching disadvantaged target groups, and much more. Gradually, it became increasingly clear in the discussions that we simply lack the conceptual tools and theoretical understanding for an adequate examination of the question regarding the political dimension of International Youth Work.

In December 2018, the conference „The Political Dimension of International Youth Work“ took place at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences. Current perspectives from political theory, educational philosophy, and political education were brought together and discussed during the event. The examination of political theory is particularly relevant to understanding the political dimension, as this academic discipline explicitly focuses on the political sphere. Within the field of educational philosophy and the adjacent field of political education, current perspectives from political theory are incorporated and related to educational theory and practice. The book „International Youth Work and Political Theory“ builds upon the themes of the conference in Cologne, delving into the relationship between the pedagogical and the political and discussing the implications using examples from International Youth Work practice.

At the center of this discussion is the concept of „political difference“ between politics and the political. Instead, the term of politics focuses on the dynamic questioning and engagement with the institutional and normative order. While politics refers to the institutional



structures and established norms and rules of a society, the term of the political encompasses practices that aim to change the existing order of politics. This occurs through acts that can range from more or less radical approaches, sometimes even subversive, but always with an emancipatory intent from the grassroots level. Emphasis is placed on the contingency of political orders, highlighting their historical development and potential for change, the plurality of political interests and perspectives, which offers a variety of possibilities for shaping political relations, and the inherent conflictuality of political processes, encompassing the clash of opinions and the differences among political actors in the struggle for power.

When applying this concept of the political to International Youth Work, one thing becomes particularly clear: the political dimension cannot be solely understood through the linkage of International Youth Work with politics. This perspective has always

been at the forefront, which is understandable given that institutions and organizations involved in International Youth Work are dependent on political decisions, goal formulations, task assignments, funding programs, and so on. It also should be possible to critically question the political objectives and task assignments imposed on the practice of International Youth Work by politics and funding bodies, and to examine the power relations that are reproduced as a result. The efforts should not only focus on aligning International Youth Work with current politics and funding programs. Instead, greater attention should be directed towards understanding the underlying understanding of politics within International Youth Work, how it is constructed by youth work organizations themselves, how organizations engage in concrete political actions, and the points of conflict that arise between their actions and the current politics of funding and the power relations reflected therein.

Working approach from RPD



Networking and coordination



Cooperation projects



Research and evaluation



Innovative concepts

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„Research-Practice-Dialogue“ (RPD)

Since its foundation in 1989, Research-Practice-Dialogue (RPD) has contributed significantly to research activities regarding trends and future perspectives of international youth work. Research-Practice-Dialogue encompasses interdisciplinary and cross-organisational exchange between academia and practice in the field of international youth work.

transfer e.V. is the coordinating body of the network.

Fact Sheets inform about projects, research (results) and innovative concepts relevant for the further development of International Youth Work and children and youth group travel.



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