



EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK

Fourth edition: Connecting Dots and Moving
Forward, Together

Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, 5 - 8 May 2026

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.



**EUROPEAN
SOLIDARITY
CORPS**

US, THEM and NOTHING in BETWEEN

Our intentions for this Deep Dive Session



**Not providing answers,
but exploration and looking to future
possibilities.**

What do we ask to you?

To practice care; curiosity and plurality,
confidentiality,
(staying in the same deep dive if possible!)



What we would like to explore with you?

polarisation

*positioning of youth
workers
(neutral or not)*

fragile democracy

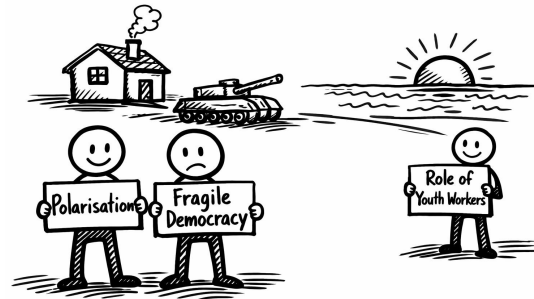


How do we connect the dots?

What are the relations among these three elements (fragile democracy, polarisation, positioning of youth workers)? Each item represent one concept (you can also personalise and write on your item which concept are represent it).

What are the key elements that define the context we are looking at (drawn the context in which these elements are)?

What tensions (positive or negative) and dynamics are most visible (rappresent those with lines, words,...)?





MEGA- TRENDS

Sitra 2026

SITRA

THE ABILITY TO NAVIGATE THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT

The information environment is **becoming more complex**. Algorithms and artificial intelligence speed up the production and **filtering of information**, which may reinforce one's own views, create bubbles and spread misinformation even faster. Managing the information environment requires **critical media literacy**, regulation and, above all, a clear view of how AI should be used in a sustainable way for the benefit of society, businesses and people.



THE POPULIST USE OF POWER CHALLENGES DEMOCRACY

Platform-driven, social-media-based and AI-fuelled political debate amplifies the personalisation of power.

Individual politicians may become more significant than their parties. At the same time, capabilities that are crucial for successful politics, including the ability to compromise, may weaken.

Commitment to traditional parties and civil society organisations is declining, and young people in particular are looking for quick and direct ways to make an impact. Yet democracy will continue to need deliberation, reflection, organising and compromise.



DEMOCRACY WEAKENS AND AUTHORITARIANISM GAINS GROUND

A clear majority of the world's population already lives in countries that cannot be considered democratic. Within democracies, too, views on the value of democracy are wavering. The future of democracy depends on its ability to deliver tangible benefits for people – better and faster than authoritarian alternatives.

Do citizens believe it is the best way to safeguard rights, security and a shared future? How democracy can compete with the authoritarianism and on which level?



THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIONS AND IDEOLOGIES IN SOCIETY GROWS

The role of religion in political decision-making has become more prominent, for example, in restrictions on abortion rights justified on religious grounds, or the electoral success of religious parties in different countries. In Finnish society as well, religion has been used as a tool for politics and influence, including during the reform of the Marriage Act.

How will the political use of religion affect the equality of society, individual freedoms and the legitimacy of decision-making?



THE DEBATE ABOUT THE ECONOMY'S NEW DIRECTION IS INTENSIFYING AND BECOMING MORE POLARISED

There is growing support for **renewing the structures** and underlying mindsets of the economy, but there are differing views on the extent of the renewal required. Some companies actively seek ways to increase the positive impacts (handprint) of their operations in addition to minimising harm (footprint), and forerunners are adopting regenerative business models that enhance the vitality of nature and communities.

At the same time, **economic debates still tend to emphasise the short-term horizon**, the preservation of the status quo, productivity and economic growth, while new initiatives are given less attention.



TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

While AI applications can support information seeking and learning in many ways, we should also monitor and assess how the use of AI is changing our relationship with knowledge and our understanding of learning.

Does faster information acquisition and production also lead to a deeper understanding?

Are the AI applications we use transparent, and do we understand how they work and potentially affect our perceptions of the world?



NEURODATA BECOMES MORE COMMONPLACE

Combining AI with neurodata, which refers to data monitored from the brain and nervous system, will broaden the use of such neurodata. In addition to the treatment of diseases,

it could be used to monitor well-being at work, but also to influence people. Neurodata could be used for marketing or political influence, which threatens democracy and privacy and has created the need to protect mental privacy.

UNESCO has adopted the **first international recommendation on the ethics of neurotechnology**.

It aims to ensure that neurotechnology promotes human well-being without jeopardising human rights



How do we see youth work field in the future?

1. Individual brainstorming (5–7 min)

- Reflect on **possible futures in the next 7 years**
- Focus on youth work and young people in today's context



The possible/probable future

This future considers what might realistically unfold based on what we know today and the evidence we have. It relies on thinking about what could/will/might be and challenges us to navigate the future with clarity and pragmatism.

It is short and medium-focused.



How do we see youth work field in the future?

2. Small group work (15 min)

- Share ideas in groups
- Select **maximum three preferable futures**

for the next 7 years

Which futures would you choose — and why?

The preferable future

This future is guided by our hopes, values, ideals, judgment, what is right and wrong, assumptions, etc. It is about what we want to see rather than what we expect, and it therefore contrasts with undesirable outcomes or an 'unpreferable' (undesirable) future.

It is medium/short-term focused.



And how do we see youth work field in the future?

3. Plenary sharing

- Groups briefly present their selected futures
- Identify **common patterns** and tensions

What does it mean, for you as youth workers, to prefer a future? What is our potential future?



(Our) potential future

This is the future of possibility and purpose, shaped by a wide range of 'what we might become'. It calls for the importance of the awareness of that potential within the bigger picture/larger context, for an in-depth reflection on our place in a larger environment and for transformative growth.

It is long-term focused.



Walk and Talk in couple

- What are the main challenges in terms of polarisation processes across these levels: local, national, European?
- What was told here could be an European trend and also in own country?
- How do you see the role of youth work?



Reflecting about....

- What are the scenarios/context in which we can take action?
- If democracy is fragile, what are the actions of youth work in equipping young people and communities with the tools to build less fragile democracies regarding the different stakeholders?











