

"I hope that it will be possible to improve the recognition of youth work."

JUGEND für Europa spoke with Doris Špurej.



Doris Špurej works as a youth worker in the Youth and Cultural Centre in Maribor, Slovenia.

JfE: Ms Špurej, what do you do in Maribor?

Špurej: I organise leisure activities, workshops and various events with and for young people. I especially work with young people with a migration background or with young LGBT people and others with support needs to realise their ideas. I work at the local level. My institution was founded by the municipality of Maribor. This shows that it is very important for the municipality that we have a youth facility in Maribor. We have ten youth centres in Maribor where young people can spend their free time, and we have different programmes that you can join.

JfE: So you have practical experience. What can we learn from Slovenia from your point of view?

Špurej: I would like to give three examples of good practice. First, in some municipalities in Slovenia, there is a participation budget for young people. This means that the voices of young people and what they want for the future of the local community are better heard. The second example is a national professional qualification for youth workers. This helps professionalise the field, especially in countries like Slovenia, where youth work is something new and there is no study and training for youth workers yet. And the third example, that we are probably most proud of, is a national network organisation of youth work actors that looks after the interests and needs of youth centres all over Slovenia. Here, youth work actors meet regularly and talk about current challenges or exchange examples from practice. It has also improved communication between youth workers and other decision-makers, because we are constantly in contact, and you can see what is happening in practice. I would like to see such a possibility to exchange practical experiences also at European level, maybe a network of youth workers.



JfE: What are the biggest challenges in your work?

Špurej: One challenge is that we still don't have national standards. There is also a lack of systematic funding for youth work and support for more professionalisation of the sector. Youth work only has that in Slovenia in the last 15 years. The three elements would contribute to the stability and sustainability of youth work and its offers. Because often there are only pilot projects. The European Union also only ever supports innovations. Even if they turn out to be good in the end, they aren't further funded. This is difficult for us because most of the funding we receive comes from the European Union. Of course, we need to strengthen or push funding at national level as well.

JfE: You have just said that you often use European Union funds for youth work. What other possibilities do you see at European level to support your work on the ground?

Špurej: What would really help me personally is support through research and development of youth work. It would help me design my offers and evaluate my work. I would also like to know what impact my work has on young people and also on society. I can see that my work has an impact, but my statements about it will never have the same weight as the results of research. I think if research shows that my work is important for the local community, I can more easily ask for funding for our activity. In Slovenia, as a small country, it is sometimes very difficult to get funding for research on youth work.

JfE: Do you have expectations for the Bonn Process?

Špurej: I hope that it will be possible to improve the recognition of youth work, so that people see that youth work is a part of educating young people to become responsible, self-confident and empathetic adults. I believe that Slovenia can play a big role in this because we hold the Council Presidency after Germany and are now involved in the Triad.

JfE: We both hope so then, and I wish you every success!