

Strategy Paper

Diversity-Oriented-Organizational- Development (DOOD) within Understanding Europe

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1. Preamble

In this preamble, we lay out our definition and understanding of diversity, create transparency around the process we are engaged in and reflect on who we are in a power-critical manner.

1.1 Relevance and purpose of this paper

This document defines the purpose, relevance, aims and targets of our diversity-oriented organizational development (henceforth referred to as DOOD) process in Understanding Europe. Given Understanding Europe's widespread network of young people, its multiple stakeholders, and a high turnover of volunteers, we recognized the importance of a document that clearly pins down the relevance, vision, values, aims and goals of this process, not only for us as a project team but also for all volunteers. This document should therefore serve as orientation, guidance, and base for what needs to be done in the field of DOOD within the Understanding Europe Network. It reflects the program's responsibility to translate its pro-pluralist and anti-discriminatory stance into a coherent and accountable strategy. Importantly, DOOD is a process rather than an outcome. Consequently, this document is part of this learning process and might therefore be adapted along the way. We are always grateful for your comments or feedback.

1.2 Definitions of Diversity & Inclusion, Powersharing & Empowerment¹

We base our understanding of **diversity** on Surur Abdul-Hussain's and Roswitha Hofmann's definition, which points out, that:

- diversity as a term has a descriptive and not action-oriented approach
- heterogeneity and difference are often used synonymously with the term diversity
- the term diversity focuses on similarities and differences between people
- the term diversity focuses on historically grown social differences that resulted in social inequalities

Freely translated after: *Surur Abdul-Hussain & Roswitha Hofmann (2013)*

Inclusion is to be understood “as the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect

¹ A glossary with explanations of technical terms can be found on our website: <https://understanding-europe.org/en/education/glossary/>

for rights. Thus, social inclusion is both a process and a goal.”² We extend this UN-definition of social inclusion to people disadvantaged based on gender identity, sexual orientation, health status or nationality. Becoming a more inclusive network means “tackling social exclusion by removing barriers to people’s participation in society, as well as by taking active inclusionary steps to facilitate [...] participation”.³

Diversity and inclusion build on one another. While diversity focuses on the recognition of differences and the representation of different people, inclusion ensures that all people with their differences are feeling valued and have equal access opportunities to participate.

DOOD is furthermore strongly interlinked with the ideas of powersharing and empowerment. **Powersharing** refers to the process of reflecting upon the responsibilities that arise from economic and social privileges, which are the result of historically developed and continuing oppressive structures. Powersharing means to actively work on opening up and redistributing resources, accesses, and discourses.⁴

Empowerment can refer to two different understandings. First, empowerment can be understood as a “decolonial, community-oriented concept for self-empowerment, healing, and (re)appropriation of agency for people with discrimination-experience”⁵. As an institutionalized organization with a certain power-position, we cannot claim to provide such empowerment. Within the context of our work, we therefore refer to a pedagogical concept of empowerment as explained by Abushi and Asisi (2020)⁶. Here, the aim is to create social spaces in which reflection and peer-to-peer support can take place, and “in which members of socially marginalized groups are no longer seen as deficient but are perceived and empowered as ‘experts in their own right’”.⁷

² UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development. Report on the World Social Situation 2016, p. 20.

<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf> [08.04.2021]

³ ibid.

⁴ Nassir- Shaninian, N.A. (2020). Powersharing: es gibt nichts Gutes, außer wir tun es!, in Jagush & Chehata (eds.), *Empowerment und Powersharing* (pp. 20-28). Beltz Juventa, p.20.

⁵ Nassir- Shaninian, N.A. (2020). Powersharing: es gibt nichts Gutes, außer wir tun es!, in Jagush & Chehata (eds.), *Empowerment und Powersharing* (pp. 20-28). Beltz Juventa, p.20.

⁶ They base their definition on the work of Barbara B. Solomon in her book “Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities” (1979).

⁷ Abushi, S. & Asisi, P. (2020). „Die Anderen” empower? Versuch einer Begriffsbestimmung für politische Bildung und pädagogische Praxis, in Jagush & Chehata (eds.), *Empowerment und Powersharing* (pp. 214-226). Beltz Juventa, p.220.

It is important to stress that the abovementioned principles and definitions do not only apply to the work of the project team of Understanding Europe at the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe but are to be understood as standards for the entire Understanding Europe Network. They are to be grounded in all aspects of working culture, organizational structures and approaches to collaboration and outreach.

1.3 Who we are

Understanding Europe is an educational network run for and by young people in Europe. It offers and advises on educational projects committed to civic participation and a democratic and open-minded Europe. It was founded and is steered by the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe, who acts as the umbrella organization of the entire network.

The Schwarzkopf Foundation was founded in April 1971 as “Heinz-Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe” by Pauline Schwarzkopf. In memory of her husband and the horrors of the Second World War, she gave the foundation the task of promoting the idea of European unification and peace among young people. In 2008, a historical research report on the life and work of Heinz Schwarzkopf revealed his National Socialist past, having been a member of the National Socialist Party and the Schutzstaffel (SS) during his lifetime. These findings led to the renaming of the foundation to “Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe“, honoring the life and work of Pauline Schwarzkopf. In responsibility towards historical events and the present, the foundation’s charter was amended, explicitly adding the goals of fighting right-wing extremism, racism, including anti-Muslim racism and anti-Semitism. Today's offers, events, programs and networks aim to strengthen young people from all backgrounds to be active European citizens who, through engagement and the sharing of opinions, contribute to a pluralistic, democratic society of mutual understanding, solidarity and peaceful collaboration in Europe.⁸

The main activities carried out within the Understanding Europe Network are organized, conceptualized and carried out by volunteers from all over Europe, who implement the project in their local contexts. The educational basis for our network is the peer-to-peer approach: learning with and from each other and empowering each other on equal terms. Participation in decision making and shaping processes of the entire network play an important role – as does ownership when it comes to adapting qualification, coordination, and the development of new educational materials to the needs of the different local settings and circumstances.

⁸ Read more about the history of the Schwarzkopf Foundation here: www.schwarzkopf-stiftung.de/en/50-jahre-schwarzkopf-stiftung-junges-europa

The Understanding Europe Network benefits from its transnationality and diversity, as it enables transnational perspectives and cooperation, facilitates exchange and learning about each other's realities, and, ultimately, fosters empowerment on equal terms between the volunteers involved. It focuses on dialogue-oriented educational formats, which always link the content and knowledge to the realities of the participants involved. Our educational formats induce power- and discrimination-critical thought processes; amongst others by questioning where dominant knowledge comes from, challenging (political) power-structures and hierarchies, and making sure to “build a stage together, where [pupils] can meet as equals”⁹. This is reflected in our educational methods and approaches¹⁰.

Understanding Europe is steered by a project team at the Schwarzkopf Foundation in Berlin, who, next to securing funds for the project, also lay out a strategy for the long-term development of the project. In cooperation with funding partners, they set the thematic agenda for the network. Impulses and guidelines of the Schwarzkopf Foundation are communicated to the Understanding Europe Network regularly in a written update format, at the European Summer School, or at the bi-annual Coordinators' Meetings, which are training opportunities organized by the Schwarzkopf Foundation for the network. The project team aims at building its strategy and agenda based on priorities of the network. Decisions within the network are being made in a consultative and consensus-based manner.¹¹ Being comprised of and its activities being carried out by mainly young people from all over Europe, the Understanding Europe Network sees its structure as an opportunity to amplify young voices and demands related to their (critical) perception of a diverse Europe. The educational network aims to strengthen young people in creating a critical-visionary perspective on Europe, developing skills and competences to actively shape the society they live in as citizens.

⁹ Gülcü, Can/Pilic, Ivana (2019): Partizipative und diskriminierungskritische Kulturpraxis: Strategische Partnerschaften und Allianzen bilden. Eine Einleitung. In: Die Zukunftsakademie NRW 2013 – 2019: zak nrw. jetzt change grow impulse. work book, pp. 346 – 350, https://www.zaknrw.de/files/redaktion/Workbook/zaknrw_workbook.pdf [29.11.2019].

¹⁰ More information about our educational approach can be found on our website: <https://understanding-europe.org/en/about-us/educational-approach/>

¹¹ More information about Understanding Europe's set-up can be found on our website: <https://understanding-europe.org/en/about-us/understanding-europe/>.

2. Our Vision of Europe

Understanding Europe's vision is a Europe¹² of openness, inclusiveness, solidarity, and democracy. We envision an open-minded, pluralistic, and radically diverse¹³ European civil society, in which all young people have the room, power and tools to play an active role and shape their present and future.

Our vision, other than an abstract image, informs our daily praxis and reminds us that DOOD in Understanding Europe means a process of constant learning, of questioning existing knowledge and beliefs. A critical-visionary Europe can only be achieved by reflecting on Europe's past, present and future. We need to decenter dominant narratives and perspectives on Europe and create "a sense of responsibility for what happens in, around and because of Europe, including awareness that European democracy is a privilege and needs to be constantly renewed"¹⁴. Also today, there are many barriers to joining a discourse on an open, post-national and inclusive Europe, restricting access to the European narrative¹⁵. Striving for our vision of Europe therefore means that we must actively engage with Europe's historic and current mechanisms of violence and exclusion, its colonial and imperial past and their continuities, and its power position in a globalized world. It requires listening and learning from perspectives that have largely been precluded from the history of Europe and its integration, such as those from BPOC¹⁶, queer people, Jewish people, Muslim people, and people with a disability¹⁷, giving room to different lived realities and experiences and investing in building new European narratives together.

¹² When speaking of Europe, we do not limit itself to the existing institutional setting of the European Union. Rather, we refer to the framework, values and vision of the European Convention of Human Rights by the Council of Europe and its 47 member states, whose stated aim is to uphold human rights, democracy and rule of law in Europe.

¹³ "Radical diversity" refers to "a social phenomenon and practice concerned with transforming homogeneous institutions and practices into plurality, diversity, heterogeneity [...]. This would make diversity itself mainstream." Perko and Czollek (...), "Diversity in außerökonomischen Kontexten": p. 166

¹⁴ Ohana, Y. (2020), What's politics got to do with it? European youth work programs and the development of critical youth citizenship. *Jugend für Europa special 10*. <https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jefe/projekte/critical-youth-citizenship/>

¹⁵ El-Tayeb, F. (2011), *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

¹⁶ BPOC stands for Black People and People of Color and is a self-designation of people who experience racism. The term does not describe any shades of skin color: it is about marginalization due to racism. More information: <https://diversity-arts-culture.berlin/en/node/69> [in German]

¹⁷ We are aware that there are also people who refer to themselves as a "disabled person" to highlight that they do not have a disability but are disabled by the way our society is build. Others prefer to put the person first, which is why we here decided to use the term "person with a disability".

3. The values of Understanding Europe

Understanding Europe is based on the following values, that guide our – h approach to working with and within the network but also shape our general understanding of Europe:

- **Open-mindedness and pluralism:** Our network is based on the idea of transnational cooperation, diversity of perspectives and tolerance of ambiguity¹⁸. By listening to others, we can learn about different lived realities and broaden our horizons.
- **Fairness:** In our work, we want to give all young people the same access to our network. We do not tolerate any discrimination based on nationality, *race*, ethnicity, class, religion, belief, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, health, ability, or other status within our network (see also our definition of inclusion in the preamble of this paper).
- **Justice:** Structural inequalities, racism, discrimination, and other barriers do not give everyone the same access to our offers and the network. Creating a just network means actively addressing these barriers, evaluating who has access to decision-making and resources, as well as making the network a welcoming place for all (see also section 5 “Target groups”).
- **Solidarity:** We want to strengthen allyship within the network and beyond and aim to “work in solidarity and partnership with marginalized groups of people to help taking down the systems that challenge these groups’ “basic rights, equal access, and ability to thrive in our society”¹⁹.
- **Democracy:** Understanding Europe is run in an open, consultative, and consensus-based manner. Opportunities (e.g. participation at the European Summer School) are given to our network members in a fair and transparent manner. Our work and educational practice is furthermore based on the Competences for Democratic Culture, which puts at its center democracy as a practice and a set of values and attitudes rather than institutions and procedures alone²⁰.

¹⁸ “Understanding plurality and dealing with contradictions, meaning tolerance for ambiguity, is measured by the ability to ‘take ambiguity and insecurity into consideration and to be able to tolerate this,’²² [...] To not only with-stand ambiguity, but to also be able to react to it sympathetically, without aggression and without feeling dis-comfort.” Naika Foroutan (2019): Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft – Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie. transcript Verlag, Bielefeld. pp. 128

¹⁹ See: <https://thetoolkit.wixsite.com/toolkit/beyond-allyship>

²⁰ See also: <https://understanding-europe.org/en/about-us/educational-approach/>.

4. Our aims within the DOOD Process

4.1. Aims for project team at the Schwarzkopf Foundation

The aim for our work in the project team at the Schwarzkopf Foundation is to enable inclusive and diversity-oriented peer education processes.²¹ We want to support the development of diversity competences²² and to advocate for a truly open, inclusive, and diverse Europe. Central to our work is to recognize the expertise of young people. Following our concept of empowerment (see preamble), we aim to create space for young people to engage with their role in a democratic Europe, to find their voice to advocate and speak up for their issues. Moreover, we want to use our work, platforms, and network to amplify young voices from communities who experience marginalization. This also means to engage in powersharing and to make available our resources for our youth organizations and marginalized communities. To find out more about our resources, please refer to the section “Who we are”.

4.2. Aims for our network

We envision an Understanding Europe Network that is designed in a participatory way and enables participation in both the conceptualization and management of its activities and educational work. We want to refrain from a top-down determination of the conditions for diversity and inclusion, but instead aim to actively practice powersharing, through which we can support empowerment within and engagement for a diverse and inclusive network of youth organizations that strengthen each other, provide for exchange on a European level and make diverse perspectives visible to each other. A central aim is to thereby also diversify our network, which is described in more detail in section 5.

²¹ Racism critique means a comprehensive examination of social structures and individual behaviours that are influenced by racisms and that amplify racism. “Racism critical education has as its goal to encourage pupils to be able to recognize and deconstruct racism [...]. In the further educational process, pupils should be able to comprehend, which function the construction of differences has and had, [...] and which consequences this has both for those people constructed as ‘others’ as well as for the whole of society.” (Freely translated from German, Simon & Fereidooni, 2020, p.3-4)

²² See our educational approach: <https://understanding-europe.org/en/about-us/educational-approach/>.

5. Target groups of Understanding Europe

In our work, we address young people from all over Europe. With young people we mean people between the ages of 14-29, regardless of nationality, *race*, ethnicity, class, religion, belief, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, health, ability, or other status.

We are aware that our programs do not reach all people equally. Both in non-formal education and international youth work, there are structural and institutional barriers inhibiting marginalized groups to access formats such as ours. While studies have shown that young people from all different backgrounds have an interest in international encounters and youth work²³; especially young people with lower educational backgrounds, who come from rather precarious living conditions, who have a disability and/or a history of flight or migration, have been disadvantaged in their access to such programs.²⁴

We aim to address these existing barriers in our work. We have decided to initially focus on barriers deriving from racism²⁵ and classism²⁶, to set an impactful focus in our work in diversity-oriented organizational development. However, we are aware that these are two of many more forms of structural and intersectional inequalities that need to be addressed. We intend to expand our focus on different mechanisms and structures of exclusion in the following years. We are committed to making our activities as inclusive as possible for everyone and to continuously educate ourselves on how to further reduce barriers to participation.

Reducing barriers to participation also means listening to, working closely with, and sharing resources with organizations and groups that do not enjoy the same social capital, networks, and resources as we do. Our key alliance partners are those who are concerned with the development of a positive self-reference of discriminated and marginalized groups, such as migrant self-organizations and other people affected by discrimination. Additionally, we cooperate and share our learnings with other youth organizations who also want to engage in diversity-oriented organizational development.

²³ See Becker & Thimmel (2019), p.36, in “Die »Zugangsstudie« als kritischer Forschungsimpuls für Theorie und Praxis in der Internationalen Jugendarbeit in Deutschland”

²⁴See also:

https://www.th.koeln.de/mam/downloads/deutsch/hochschule/fakultaeten/f01/publikation_europe_for_all.pdf.

²⁵ The experiences of people who face racism can differ greatly. When we say that we want to focus on racism, this means (but is not limited to) racism against BPOC, Sinti and Roma, Muslims, Jewish people? and other religious minorities.

²⁶ The term classism refers to the discrimination of people based on their (assigned) economic, social and educational-political status/background.

6. Specific goals for the DOOD-process in Understanding Europe

We have laid down specific goals for the years 2020-2024 of the DOOD process in Understanding Europe. These goals by no means fulfil all the aims we have laid out above but are to be understood as measurable and specific priorities to work on at the start of this process. These goals and their outcome are not weighted equally, especially when it comes to the impact their outcomes will have. They are, however, all important steps to track progress and set priorities. All processes within the scope of the DOOD-process in Understanding Europe should align with these goals, however, we also specifically launched a **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Fund** for Understanding Europe in 2020, which financially supports three local Understanding Europe teams per year to intensively work towards achieving and implementing these goals in their projects. The three selected teams of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Fund do not only receive financial support but are also accompanied by a professional coach for DOOD during the funding period.

- **Knowledge Transfer:** The Understanding Europe Coordinators, Fellows, Peer Educators and Trainers have knowledge and continuous opportunities for training on the topics of discrimination, racism, and power structures. They can transfer this knowledge to their work in the project. Considering the high turnover of volunteers in our network, this is an ongoing and continuous process which will be re-evaluated at the end of every year.
- **Spreading Awareness about the Process:** The Understanding Europe Coordinators, Fellows and Peer Educators and Trainers understand the relevance, necessity, and processes of diversity-oriented organizational development. Considering the high turnover of volunteers in our network, this is an ongoing and continuous process which will be re-evaluated at the end of every year.
- **Outreach, Inclusion & Accessibility:** Our activities change in a way that they become more interesting, attractive, and inclusive towards BPOCs, persons with a history of flight or migration, Roma and Sinti, Jewish people, people of other religious minorities, and people who face discrimination due to their socio-economic status (to be understood intersectionally). Specifically, this means amongst others, addressing current barriers to participation by adapting our calls for participation, our communication strategies, attending and implementing anti-discrimination trainings, supporting the creation of safer spaces. This results in more diverse trainer teams and a more diverse audience of students we reach with our offers by 2024.

- **Inclusive Methods:** Our courses are designed in a way that is inclusive and dialogue-oriented in order to reach students that do not yet have access to democratic citizenship education²⁷ (e.g. vocational schools, rural areas). By the end of 2024, we aim to have revised and extended our educational material to become more power-critical, inclusive and diverse. Moreover, we want to be able to present a noticeable difference in the schools and participant groups we have reached with our offers.
- **Formalizing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:** We want to institutionalize diversity-oriented processes and develop guidelines for our work in Understanding Europe (e.g. for the selection of staff and external speakers, project communication, the organization of events or calls for applications). These are to be developed continuously from 2021 onwards every year with the aim of being able to present a collection of standardized processes by the end of 2024.

²⁷ See also: <https://understanding-europe.org/en/about-us/educational-approach/>.