

Report

Experimental Constitution Week at Rønshoved

*We would like to acknowledge the hospitality of the people at Rønshoved, the beautiful school and the surrounding. We would also like to give a big **thank you** to Rønshoved Højskole for having us at the school and for the wonderful week there.*

Expectations

All participants had very high expectations from this week. First, all of them wanted to have a final text of a Constitution by the end of this one-week course. They expected a lot of debates on constitutional but also on other European matters that usually the national Constitutions do not contain.

Process

The "Minimum Constitution" was taken as a point of departure for the debate. In the beginning it was planned that the participants of the course simulate completely the process of the Youth2002 project, but after a debate on the first day the programme was slightly changed. Instead of having two drafting groups the participants decided that it would be much better if the debate and the drafting processes went together in one forum/ room/ group. This was made so, because the participants anticipated that most of the negotiations and agreements would take place in the joined forum anyway, this is why it was useless to divide 13 people in two groups.

The participants started by discussing the first question and realized that it will be better to proceed with the question number 5 (policies) and describe the policies the European Union should address. By acknowledging what is in fact wanted from each specific policy, it was easier to conclude and agree on what kind of a Union we want. The questions and dilemmas like: do we want a federate or a confederate Constitution, what will happen with the states if..., and do we want the states to remain or not, took almost two days.

At the end, the participants decided that their Europe should something different from the currently known options. Once the participants agreed on this, they went on with the concrete design of the new structure of the European Union.

The group of the Experimental Constitution Week was visited by two journalists of regional newspapers (der Nordschelsvige, and Jyskevestkysten). Articles in both these newspapers appeared during the course and the participants were pleased to see themselves and their work already taking a lot of the publicity in this region.

Time frame

The programme lasted from April 21st - 28th. Our work started each morning at 8:30 on weekdays and 11:30 on weekends, and ended at about 22:30- 23:00 each evening. At the end the final calculation showed that we had **56 working hours**, (without the coffee breaks).

Outcome

Even though the participants managed to draft the text of the Constitution, many questions still remained unanswered and many discussions unfinished. A lot of the points of the Constitutions itself are still opened. It is so, mainly because of lack of time (there was not enough time to discuss things until we reached an agreement, this is why the participants left some questions opened) and lack of information (the participants realized that in order to go through a drafting process there is a need of additional documents, declarations, resolutions, charters examples of national Constitutions et c).

Conclusions

It is important that the participants come to the Youth2002 project with a certain pre- knowledge

All of the participants at the Experimental week had different knowledge and discussed on different levels. At the same time it was very important to know how are the current systems functioning in order to define the changes participants want in the future constitution.

There should be more time for participants to debate on the problematic questions

The question number 1 of the "Minimum Constitution" concerning the definition of the future model of the Union seemed to be the most complicated and the most time consuming one. The largest part of the negotiation process took place on this level. Each issue presented by the participants brought its own dilemmas and in order to go

from one question to the other certain ground decisions had to take place in the debate.

There is also a need for a continuous debate on the questions without too many disruptions and a person, a part from the participants, needs to take notes of the ideas pumping up during the debate.

Each participant should be able to discuss on all questions

Participants can be spread in groups but not according to a question or issue of the Constitution, because questions are interrelated.

The experience of the Experimental Constitution week shows that it is very important that the participants of the Youth2002 reach an agreement on the answers of the 6 questions from the: "Minimum Constitution" and not the formal part, the wording of the Constitution, primarily because of the very narrow time frame offered. So, all participants should discuss all questions.

One suggestion is that more space should be given to the participants for new ideas for the future Europe. Time should not restrict the participants to come up with new ideas about the Future Constitution of Europe, as it is one of the founding ideas of the Youth2002 project.

Mjellma Mehmeti, ACC

Participant's Personal Evaluations

Agota

In my personal opinion the most important conclusion that can be drawn from our one-week constitution writing process is that there should be no in-advance models offered to the participants. The most precious- genuinely characteristic to youth ideas come into being when absolutely free brainstorming is allowed. Of course, our experience shows that time frame is an obvious limit to this, but nothing else should direct their thoughts in a definite direction.

Moreover, the most profitable experience is that they learn how to think constructively in a group, as individual ideas can only benefit from arguing in common.

Writing a common European constitution is in fact a simulation of an already existing community on that level, therefore it implies trying in practice the ideal of European identity. It is a valuable experience that it is after all possible to agree for people from such various backgrounds, representing so many interests and values.

Aranxta

Rønshoved has been the meeting place where we, the thirteen volunteers of Youth 2002 project, have been gathered for one week (21th-28th April). The meeting started with high expectations, all of us wanted to do the best and find some way of making Europe better and, of course, united. Although none of us knew how different our opinions could be. During this week we have worked very hard, 56 hours in total. We did not need someone who tells us when we had to start and when to stop, we were conscientious and we always had a clear idea that the main thing and our main purpose for that week was the Constitution. We discussed several times but in same way we were able to reach an agreement and I think that the result was quite good. In my opinion, the most important thing of this event has been the fact that thirteen people from thirteen different identities were working together in a pleasant and open-minded way with a common talking point: the future of Europe.

Barna

The comparison between the given time frame -about 1/3 of the total- for the preparation of the constitution during the two weeks of the summer event and the time frame, which we used on the experimental week, has to be seen through the "Constitution glass". This basically means that the value of the implied debates and outcomes has to be in accordance with the aim of the project.

The experimental week was completely dedicated to set up a Constitution, based on the main questions (6 points).

Firstly we discussed the 6 points in the frame of the actual states' constitutions and actually this part can and most possibly will take in the summer the whole time designated for this problem (27 hours).

After the main debates we tried to write a constitution in terms of: articles, chapters, acts etc. similarly to how it is now in the state constitutions. This took the second part of the week and it meant in fact that we ended up producing an unfinished (we had not enough time to talk about all measures) but it seems to be the same as the ones in use nowadays.

Consequently, if we take into account the last day's (night's) process among the schools, it can be concluded that negotiating about constitutions written "article by article" is, and will be impossible.

The above-mentioned conclusion might lead the organizers/facilitators to take measures in advance, for instance, participants will be told before the discussions start to settle up a given frame of constitution (deciding from among the federal or con-federal model, but everybody should work with the same). And thus the common aim can be reached, drafting only one constitution after the negotiations.

Another option would be to give 6 main points/questions, which have to be answered-for example, each in one page- allowing them to think and debate freely in both of the frames: reality-imagination, constitution-list of competencies, states-Europe. In this case the negotiation process will be eased, as not only one vision will be chosen in the end, but actually one of the ideas, which fits most the young peoples' common vision and could be accepted by all of them. The latter can equally be very realistic but also virtual/imaginary. Important is only that it will be the "product" of young Europeans.

Dasa

My main concern about writing a constitution was the time limit we had (only one week). We spent 56 hours trying to figure out what kind of Europe do we want and to compromise on each single topic and experiencing the working process of drafting a constitution for a new political system. Even if we had some knowledge about the functioning of the present EU we still couldn't find an answer on some problems, because of the lack of experience.

Regarding the six questions of the minimum constitution we understood, that they can not be taken separately, because each question is related to all the others and just after answering to all of them we could started with drafting the single articles of the document.

Ha

Concerning the week in Røshoved, it was very exciting and interesting. It was a great idea to have done this simulation because now i can imagine how the work this summer will be and above all how difficult it will be. Since Rønshoved, I became aware of the importance of this project. I realized that I really have to prepare myself. Indeed, everyone come from different countries, have different backgrounds...and it's amazing that during this weekend we really did, created something and these things made the project concrete. I am really satisfied by it! Besides, journalists are interested in us, and its very encouraging!

So thanks to youth 2002 to give us (young Europeans) this great opportunity to trying to change the world in a good way....

Hanna

For me this week was above all instructive, and I came home more aware of the European structure and the task waiting the participants this summer.

So many important questions (with and without the Minimum Constitution) had to be answered before and during the process of writing our constitution; realistic/idealistic, federate/confederate/other, what has a place in our constitution?, etc. This made the process during the intense week interesting but we also realised more what it is going to take to manage the project Youth2002.

One experience is that a constitution can end up looking in many different ways, and if all the schools come with a fixed "article-by-article-constitution" that might contain totally different "systems" and institutions, the negotiation-process will be extremely hard.

Based on the experiences this week I think we will have some very interesting two weeks this summer.

Hannes

If you want to write about something, you'll have to know about it. As we saw from our experience, it took us three days to discuss what, why and how? Therefore I think it's essential that the participants know generally, what they want from Europe, before coming to Youth2002. Lena had an idea to have them write an essay "My future Europe", I think they should do it as it might help them to get a better overview. I think that the schools should also provide an information kit (essentials of EU, constitutions, institutions, who does what and etc.) for the participants to use while drafting.

I think the drafting process should be very well organized by the coordinators. It makes it easier. I'm not suggesting setting frames as such. It was Bo's idea not mine. But apparently the participants won't have the luxury to discuss one topic for three days, so in my mind some sort of borders should be set and the programme shouldn't be very flexible.

Helena

Concerning the methodological conclusions of this experimental constitutional week, in Ronshøved, I must highlight that it is very difficult to agree on a common model for the future of Europe, since participants have different personal beliefs (and I must say that, at Ronshøved, everyone was to a certain extent pro-Europe, thus, the situation will be even more complicate in the summer, when probably there will not be a consensus on this point). This is the most time-consuming discussion within our project. Moreover, without an agreement on this, the whole task of writing a constitution is undermined because, without a clear vision on the model, it is impossible to answer the other questions of the minimal constitution, since the institutions, policies and rights/duties are intrinsically linked to the concept of what Europe will be. The conclusion I can draw from Ronshøved is that there is no point in rushing this agreement, in order to get the rest of the work done, because if there is no clear agreement on the conceptual framework/model, then arguments caused by this lack of agreement, will continuously come up again and again, and the work will not go further.

Concerning the material produced at Ronshøved, although it might be criticised as too vague and unrealistic, it is what we want Europe to be. It is a feasible model for the European Union - and obviously realistic, as far as if people want to make it real. The constitutional text might not be as detailed as I wished it to be. This is justified by the lack of time to develop it further (please, take into consideration that we worked for around 56 hours, which is more time than the participants will have to work on their constitutions this summer).

Sean

I was impressed with the standard of everybody's thoughts and that although there were disagreements among the group we managed to come up with a constitution.

I think that it will be different during the two weeks at the different schools, and that we will need the two weeks, because I don't think that any agreement will be reached in one week when there will be a lot more of us, working on the constitution.

However I really feel that the whole project will be a success, whether we reach an agreement or not simply because of the experience all one thousand of us will get from this. In saying that though I think that a constitution will be written and that an agreement will be reached so for me it will be a success in both ways.

One of the difficulties on this is how each group when they come to the schools writes the constitution. What we want is a constitution that is a joint effort of all the participants at each school, but if each group answers all the questions alone then they will come up with their own constitution. So what do we do, have each group answer each question separately or have each group answer all the questions. The worry is of time, if each group writes their own constitution there may be difficulties joining them together. So it is a question of trying to reach a way that the participants can mix their ideas and make a constitution that represents all of the participants, and making sure that time doesn't get eaten away, as we know it can when we find it hard to agree.

Simona

What I found out was, that it would be impossible to work without a person, that knows English language and special terms fluently (e.g. our experience on debated about the same thing BUT in the different words). Secondly, there should be a person, who would write things down - kind of the secretary. Also, it is important to finish the question in the same day, not to continue the discussion on the next one. The volunteers should definitely know the Constitution of their countries - then they would find things and the whole process easier. And the most important thing, at least for me, concentration on the work they are doing. If they'll work honestly, I think, that the time they have will be enough.

Valentina

I THINK that the week in Ronshoved has been very hard. We worked a lot, and it can be seen from the constitution we made!!!! I am quite confused about what will be going on July, but I'll be excited of course!!!

Well, I hope that is all!