

**Pressemitteilung****Universität Bielefeld****Jörg Heeren**

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überregional**Major project on the quality of life of disadvantaged young people in Europe**

**Bielefeld University to coordinate the EU project 'SocIEtY'** The European Union is investing 2.5 million Euro in the 'SocIEtY' research project launched on Friday 1 February. A total of 40 social scientists will be carrying out comparative national studies on how far young people are able to participate in society in a self-determined way and exploit their developmental opportunities.

The major project is being coordinated by the Bielefeld Center for Education and Capability Research (BCA) at Bielefeld University. Thirteen partners from 11 European countries are working on the development of innovative social and institutional ways of improving the quality of life of the young people concerned.

SocIEtY stands for 'Social Innovation – Empowering the Young for the Common Good'. The researchers are basing their analyses on the Capability Approach, and using it to find out what young people themselves consider is necessary to live a good and successful life. 'The number of young Europeans who are socially disadvantaged is growing continuously. By applying new approaches to research, the project will discover which are the decisive social mechanisms for this situation,' says Professor Dr. Hans-Uwe Otto from Bielefeld University's Faculty of Educational Science. He is the speaker of the BCA and is responsible for the scientific and organizational coordination of SocIEtY together with Dr. Alkje Sommerfeld, who is also a member of the BCA and the Faculty of Educational Science.

The 13 research teams will observe the life situation of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years and ask them about their expectations and their ideas on a successful life – particularly with regard to work and education. 'We are particularly interested in the aspects of participation in society and equal opportunities,' says Dr. Alkje Sommerfeld. The major project will assess how the quality of life of these young people in Europe is developing within the given political, social, and cultural conditions. This also always concerns the possibilities of social support and political self-determination they can be expected to have.

The innovative research approach actively integrates young persons through, for example, reflexive group interviews and interactive video work in jointly organized workshops. Young people should be given a chance to have their interests heard and taken into account by decision makers in politics, administration, and industry. 'The ideas and wishes of young people should be a challenge to decision makers in politics and administration, and oblige them to make the necessary corrections,' says Professor Otto. 'The project is the first of its kind in the EU. It is making a major contribution to reshaping European youth policy by linking the ability to engage in self-determined action with the opportunities in society.'

The project will run from 2013 to 2016. Participating institutions include the Università Degli Studi Di Pavia in Italy, Edinburgh Napier University in Great Britain, and the Working Life Research Centre (FORBA) in Austria.

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Professor Hans-Uwe Otto (left) and Dr. Alkje Sommerfeld are coordinating the research project involving 12 European partners. The project is studying equal opportunities for disadvantaged young people in Europe.  
Photo: Bielefeld University