

Shaping hopeful resistance in trust-eroding societies

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In the Netherlands, once predicated as a high trust society, citizens' trust in institutions and decision-makers has declined significantly. The massive childcare benefits scandal deserves special mention as it exhibits a structural type of distrustful policy and state sponsored violence against its marginalized citizens that has to this day not yet been properly dealt with. It targeted mainly non-Dutch origin households of lower socioeconomic status, a demographic well known to youth work. Internationally, multiple analyses have juxtaposed (adult) democratic values of trust, peace and social freedoms with (youthful) street cultures characterized by negative peer-pressure, poor social development and violence. However, prominent political leaders from the United States to Europe, Turkey and elsewhere have systematically undermined democratic legacy. Demonizing entire people groups at home, supporting brutish wars abroad, and criminalizing major as well as minor forms of dissidence, are but a few examples.

In these bleak circumstances, we ask: what emerging forms of hopeful resistance can we detect in societies where trust as a public value has eroded? We investigate youth work settings and programs for possible answers to this question. We employ a micro-interactional and emotion-focused sociology to trace different constructive interaction rituals. These contain cognitively and emotionally restorative effects, providing a counterweight to young people's debilitating and discouraging experiences.

We demonstrate how youth workers and their participants harness these experiences, inviting and challenging (local) politicians and other power-brokers into joint interaction rituals. These micro-dynamics can positively feed into higher-level public social processes geared toward rebuilding trust.