

Discussing *Bern-ing* Questions at the first SWP Youth Water Group Meeting

Swiss Young Voice – Swiss young expertise for a water secure world SWP Youth Water Group – Kick-off Event

by Indira Urazova, supported by Elodie Feijoo Seara and the SWP Secretariat

On September 25, 2019, young minds from all over Switzerland gathered in Bern to discuss the challenges they face in the water sector. The event, organized by the Swiss Water Partnership, brought together young people and experts from the fields of water engineering, social sciences and water management to investigate the needs of young people in the professional water world.

Students and experts first learned more about each other's exciting work through two warm-up exercises that allowed them to understand the important place water has in their lives. One young professional, Katarina, shared her experience of growing up on a farm with no water connection in Ukraine. Darcy, an experienced water engineer teaching at the ETH Zurich surprised everyone with a similar story about growing up in a village with no water supply in Africa. Elodie, from the Graduate Institute in Geneva, told everyone about her Master's thesis on the use of water as a weapon in the Syrian war and her fieldwork experience in Turkey. As it turned out, most people in the group had some kind of a personal connection to water issues, and this revelation broke the ice and provided an excellent base connect with each other.



Warm-Up Exercise - Getting to know each other – identifying joint challenges



The meeting proceeded with the presentation of SWP's Youth Strategy on the engagement of youth in the water sector. Darcy succinctly summarized the important points about SWP's role in promoting water issues among young people, and participants were able to move on to discussing what they could contribute to the strategy. As young participants shared their aspirations and frustrations about being a beginner in the water sector, it became clear that their concerns could be broadly divided into two themes, aligned with two sub-goals of the SWP Youth Strategy:

- Make the water sector more attractive to pupils and students
- Support young professionals to enter the Water Sector in Development Cooperation

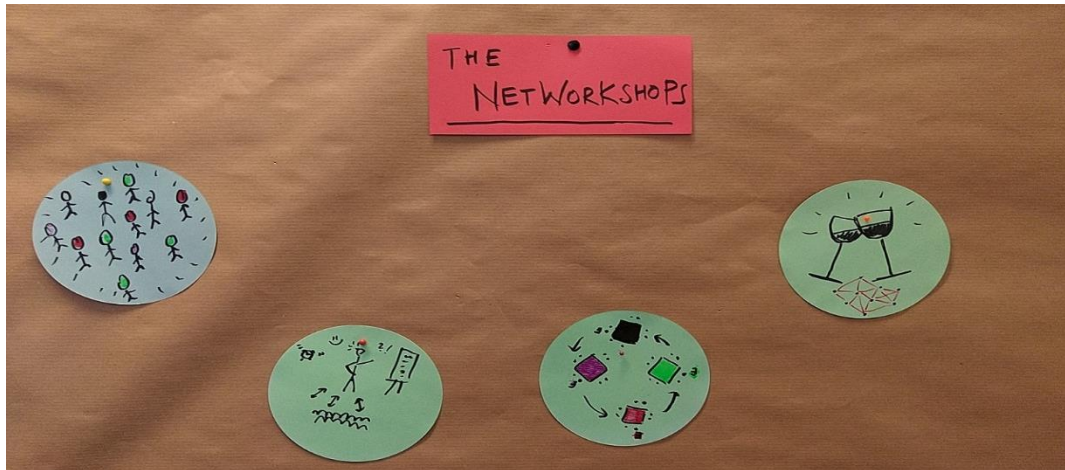
After a short discussion, participants defined two main challenges falling into one of these themes and split into two groups to come up with a working solution to these problems.

The first group took up the task of making the water sector more attractive to Swiss young people. The group came up with an exciting idea about '**A Youth Water festival**' that would gather hundreds of school and university students on the World Water Day 2020. The idea is to present the water sector and its diversity to those unfamiliar with it, as well as to provide more precise information and networking possibilities to the others. The needs of two different target groups would as such be met in a single event. The festival would have activities, such as a river clean-up and a movie screening followed by a discussion, but also stands allowing young people to meet experts from the sector. It would also promote innovation with an innovation competition and presentations of latest technologies. Finally, there would, of course be an artistic component with music concerts and water street art.



The second group took on the challenges young people encounter in the professional water world. Visibly concerned, the students shared their experiences of going through the difficult process of finding opportunities in the sector and pointed to the power imbalance that does not allow young people to change the sector from the bottom. Guided by Sarah from the World Water Parliament for Youth, the students brainstormed ideas about changing the current situation. The result - both useful

and entertaining event called '**Networkshops**' or '**Netwatershops**' that would allow students to network and learn from the experts in the field. The core of the programme would include a few short talks by water experts, a water-fair segment where students would talk to the experts and learn about the inner workings of their organizations, and finally a networking aperitif, where young people and experts could socialize and get to know each other.



The event was followed by Sarah's presentation on the governance structure of the World Youth Parliament for Water. The students and young professionals gained an insight into how to potentially organize a SWP Youth Water Group. The topic of YWG governance is next on the agenda, and the participants agreed to convene again sometime in November to discuss the issue.



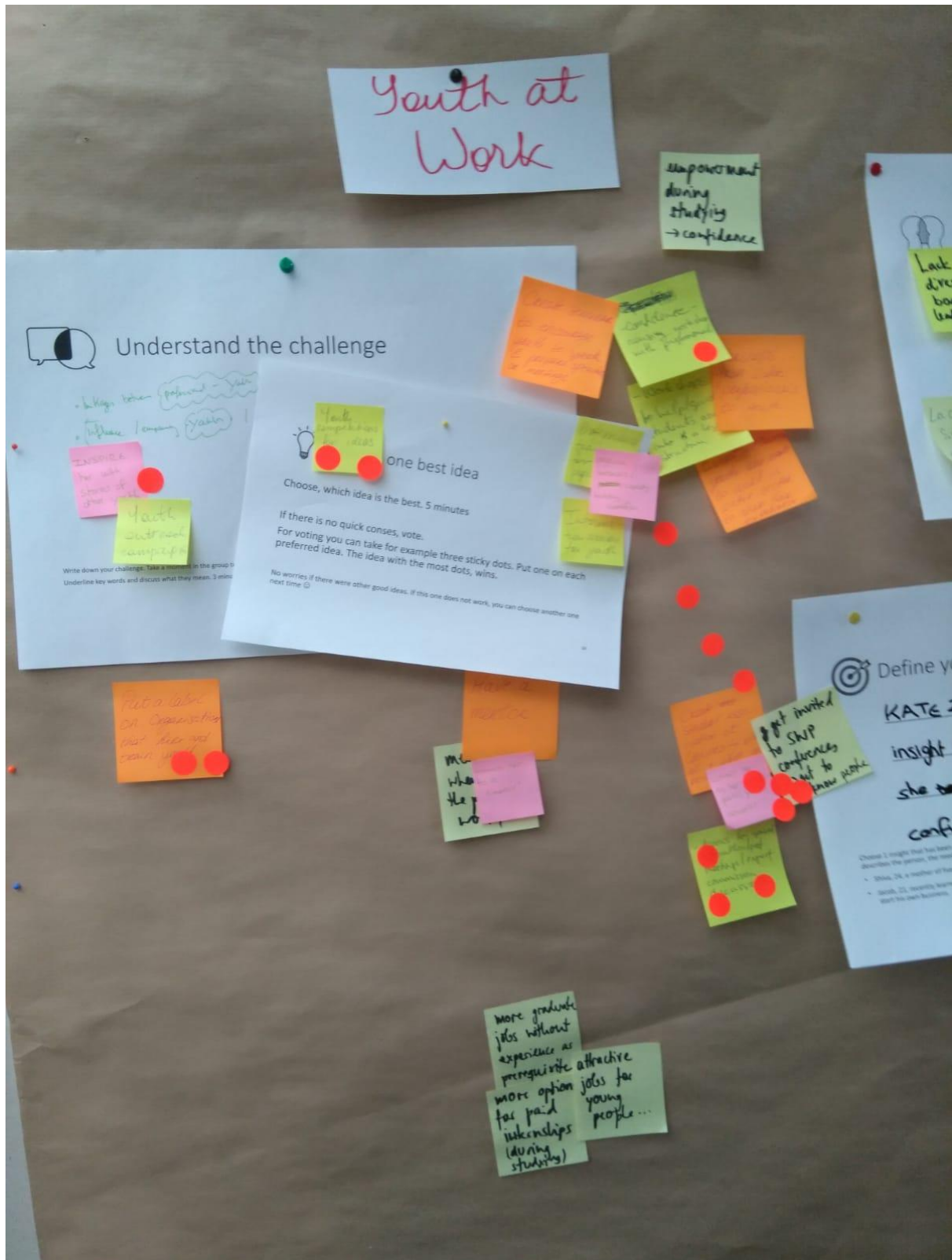
After the fruitful day of deliberations and discussions, all of the participants, by that time hungry, were happy to enjoy their conversations over a lovely aperitif.

More information on the two ideas developed during the workshop can be found [here](#):



2019-Sep - SWP
Youth Group Activities

For further information, please contact the SWP youth focal point Sandra Fürst:
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Swiss Young Voice

– Swiss young expertise for a water secure world

SWP Youth Water Group – Kick-off Event
25 Sep 2019, Bern

Participants

	First Name	Name	Organisation
1	Elodie	Feijoo Seara	IHEID - Graduate Institute - Geneva Geneva University - Water Initiative World Youth Parliament for Water (WYPW)
2	Indira	Urazova	IHEID Geneva University - Water Initiative
3	Katerina	Polyakova	IHEID University of Geneva - Tsinghua Initiative - Geneva SDG Solution Space
4	Katharina	Schulthess	ETHZ, Environmental Engineering (Professur Siedlungswassertechnik) Engineers Without Borders (EWB)
5	Noémie	Probst	ETHZ GUV Geomatik und Umweltingenieurverein
6	Luca	Schaufelberger	ETHZ Bachelor
7	Eveline	Schaffner	Viva con Agua
8	Sarah	Dousse	International Secretariat for Water - Solidarity Water Europe
9	Darcy	Molnar	ETHZ
10	Loukas	Garanis	GIWEH - Global Institute for Water, Environment & Health IHEID University of Geneva
11	Sandra	Fürst	Swiss Water Partnership / Skat