UNIVERSITY ON YOUTH & DEVELOPMENT DECLARATION

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17th University on Youth and Development - Connecting Identities

Joint Declaration

The present document aims to reflect the vision and opinion of over 200 young people and the organising partners who gathered in Mollina, Spain, for the 17th edition of the University of Youth and Development, under the joint theme "Connecting Identities". Representing around 60 nationalities, these are some of the issues that were identified as presently affecting young people around the world, as well as some proposals to tackle those trends.

The group recognizes diversity as a core factor in the development of both individual and collective identities and proposes actions towards creating peace and increasing empathy and acceptance among all.

Youth as a complex identity construct
Diversity is not recognized and valued as an integral part of the identity construction process of individuals Identity is a complex combination of elements, which defines an individual through time, contexts and settings. Young people's background, their choices and their actions contribute to this creation of their sense of "self", which in all cases cannot be reduced to a single element or aspect. Young people have complex identities and often juggle many identities that can or not be in contradiction with each other. The repetitive misuse of terms like "NEET", "disengaged" or "radicalized" youth can reduce young people to a single aspect of their current situation, ignoring other elements that are essential to understand their situation and empower them to change it.
Decision makers should see young people as the complex individuals that they are and this multiple identities should be encouraged and not restricted.

Diversity in a globalised world
The increasing diversity of our societies is also highlighting the need for mechanisms that allow citizens from different backgrounds to live peacefully together in the same community. Globalisation brings an increased sense of loss of community, which lead some groups of people to retrench inwards in an attempt to preserve their perceptions of what defines their national identity in the face of rapidly changing societies.This reaction often leads to the resurgence of prejudices and stereotypes , and the promotion and maintenance of divisions, and discriminations in our societies.

Exploitation of prejudices, stereotypes and fears
The rise of populist and nationalistic movements across the world is a worrying trend. The manipulation of the political construction of the "Other" as an enemy for political gain is a dangerous, misleading and very prejudicial development for the cohesion of our societies. The refusal to accept difference, and those who fall beyond the traditional identities and hostility towards certain communities reflect the urgency of presenting counter-narratives and solutions to the root causes behind these beliefs, such as social exclusion and structural oppression.

What must be done

Mobility and Intercultural Learning

It is important to create and disseminate opportunities to cooperate and share experiences, methodologies and diverse solutions to common problems and find synergies.

These exchanges should provide a space to learn and share about each other's realities, including cultural, social, religious, political, ethnic and geographical backgrounds, where individuals feel comfortable to express their identity and learn about the others' without being judged.

It is essential to take measures against various barriers that challenge mobility, including visa requirements in order to guarantee true accessibility to our activities.

Education

In order to build more democratic, inclusive and peaceful societies, a more global approach to education is needed, where democratic practices and citizenship education is present in all stages of learning to create a critical mass in society.

Recognising the diversity of identities and of our societies requires an educational approach (formal and non-formal) that promotes critical thinking, self reflection and intercultural competences. A diverse world requires us to learn about people who have different backgrounds than ourselves. Media literacy is particularly crucial in an interconnected world where social media and internet often prove to be unreliable and overwhelming sources of information for many young people.

Using Global and Non-Formal education from a very young age is a powerful approach to: understand different identities, how they're shaped, the value of diversity, the overlapping of various types of identity, the effects of globalisation and other factors in the development young people's identities.

Social Policies

Building a social model that provides equal opportunities for all, with special focus on youth and other underrepresented groups, will facilitate access to social rights and empower those in need, establishing a real framework for human rights to be fully applied.

Democracy and participation

Public policies and initiatives should be developed towards promoting inclusion and a peaceful diverse society. All policies should be developed in a transparent, and accountable way involving especially those being affected by the issues being discussed. Permanent communication with citizens is key, and real participation should be sustainable and mainstreamed at all levels of governance, and not reduced to decoration or tokenism.

Globalisation

Living in a globalised world can provide opportunities to welcome and reflect on intercultural identity among young people and to strengthen global citizenship by advancing on fundamental causes such as human rights, access to education and equal opportunities.

Role of youth organizations and youth activism

Youth organizations and activism play a crucial role in connecting identities, advocating and developing more inclusive decision-making spaces. Creating partnerships and dialogue among people by sharing a common vision and standing together in promoting the values of diversity must be a priority

Diversity is a key element for a healthy society therefore youth organisation must address the root causes for any threats towards it.

Youth organizations must amplify the voice of young people in the construction of a global society by fostering critical thinking, building intercultural sensitivity, and developing methodologies for self-awareness to explore the power of the individual as a changemaker.

By promoting human rights and constantly challenging racism, discrimination and violent extremism in everyday work, youth organizations support a better understanding of multiple identities, beliefs, cultures, traditions and histories of people.

Youth organisations and activists are supporting the development of young people's self-esteem and sense of belonging no matter the differences, therefore shaping their identities and ensuring the creation of open and respectful citizens for the future. It is crucial to actively work on phenomena such as migration, economic inequality, conflicts and media that structurally influence personal and group identities.

CONCLUSIONS

All young people, no matter of background and identity, are right holders.

But all over the world they can not freely express and live their identities, even though there are institutional frameworks and commitments by governments to uphold their rights and beliefs; on the contrary they are not protected and even they are persecuted by those who pledge to protect them.

This is why Youth needs safe spaces such as the University to gather and celebrate our diversity and develop the sense of belonging and bring it as well to local communities. In this sense, Youth Organisations are an important catalyst to this glocal approach, which contributes to the development of young people and society. Thus, a sustainable support to youth organisations to make sure they can reach out to more young people, empower them to claim their rights and have a positive impact on society.

The theme of connecting identities allowed us to reflect on how youth organisations and youth work can accompany young people in sensitive and meaningful processes of identity construction that ultimately define us as global citizens.