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YOUTH IS NECESSARY!

Marcin Roman Czubala Ostapiuk

Complutense University of Madrid, Spain
mczubala@ucm.es

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Abstract

The European Union and its Member States are facing not only the negative effects of the economic crisis, but also nationalism and right-wing ideology uprising. Incidents of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia are no longer separate cases.

Throughout, this commentary we ask about the role of youth, its importance to the European project and involvement in the formulation and implementation of public policies. We also emphasize the need to improve the progress of this social group and its greater participation.

Nationalism and right-wing ideology, incidents of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia, growing nationalism and the negative effects of the economic crisis are some of the problems that the European Union and its Member States are facing nowadays.

Given that hostile scenario, we ask ourselves about the role of youth and the importance of its link to the European project. That is why, through this brief commentary, we would like to reflect on their value for the future of the European project and the necessary progress in the framework of community integration. Can we prosper without taking into account the voice of young people?

There are many opinions that advocate the failure of the European project if one does not consider the position and needs of young people, many of whom are critical of current political and socio-economic performance. In addition, the circumstances faced by this social group and the progressive loss of opportunities due to external factors that do not depend on it make its role in the decision-making process considered not only decisive, but also critical.

The involvement of youth in the formulation and implementation of public policies is a key issue for progress and the establishment of a new agenda to be developed. Taking as reference the educational or associated fields, we observe that the European youth develops perfectly in the intricacies of the current reality, being clearly prepared to occupy the role of an active and dialogical actor, as well as to face the challenges raised in the analysed context.

Unfortunately, youth participation in public life shows a clearly different outcome. The spaces in which young people can express themselves in an effective and formulated way, together with their ability to interact with the leaders of the public or private sector, are still small. Moreover, their institutionalization still leaves much to be desired. That is why we believe we need to develop more that aspect.

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The *structured dialogue* is an example of good practice that allows the formalization of youth proposals and their presentation to political leaders, as well as the corresponding public bodies. In this way it also expands the spaces of expression and interaction between both parties.

However, the further development of the will of the analysed group in the area of interaction and expression of their postulates and needs seems to be essential. It would allow it to be heard and not feared by the rest of the actors, especially in the moments of tension that we are currently living.

As for the governmental position, it is essential to institutionalize a process of dialogue between both parties in order to progress in this area. We cannot assume that the process of establishing and improving our democratic system is complete. Especially given the present exclusion of the different social agents, including youth, from dialogue and participation in decision-making, making somehow the mentioned process to become void.

It must be pronounced through an intergenerational communication, as well as the commitment of both parties. This new approach must involve the participation of all actors. In this way, it is essential to forge new mechanisms of cooperation and mutual understanding, generating a closer approach, new communication channels and the establishment of new spaces and platforms of understanding. What does not work should be changed.

Another aspect to be addressed is civic and ethical education, present in parts of the world outside the Europe. This should be a compulsory subject in the social and educational life of young people, thus promoting citizenship as a whole, making it an active actor, as well as facilitating the exercise of participation from childhood.

Nevertheless, and after a deep analysis of the subject, we realize that there are many more existent spaces that are not fully exploited. For example, youth associations are often not considered to be a sufficiently talented speaker for dialogue with both, the public and private sectors. Due to this widespread tendency among the different Member States of the Union, many of these entities exist with a single purpose and objective, far from active citizen utility, while general youth participation suffers from deflation, thus causing an even greater gap between society and decision-making bodies, as well as reinforcing the problems that the European Union is currently facing.

That is why we ask ourselves how to involve young people in public policies and in the construction of the European project? How do we change the perception about the EU that so far for many of them has been boring and distant? Especially at such a delicate time that the European Union is facing now.

Fostering new initiatives for participation as a *structured dialogue*, is one of the key measures that allows us to know the collective positions of young people and to get their message to political leaders. The development of new spaces for the exchange of ideas, opinion and free expression characterized by open, respectful and fluid atmosphere would serve for youth groups as a meeting point with different personas from public life. It would also lead to reaching relevant conclusions that mark new integration and work agendas, as well as including them in public policy programs for youth and shaping their role in the European community context.

Nor should we forget the importance of higher education institutions and their role in the analysed process. The exchange of good practices on youth programs as well as critical and constructive thinking multiply the opportunities available to young people, focusing on the progress of this social group and its greater participation.

Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go and it seems that nobody will offer us, just like that, the opportunity to participate. It is imperative that young people get involved, since much of the development of this process depends on us alone. However, system failures and its very configuration are not the only obstacles we encounter. Often young people themselves lack the will and are unable to achieve long-term goals. Therefore, we consider it necessary to work out concrete, clear and short- or medium-term objectives that will facilitate the dynamization of public policies focused on youth. There is also a need for greater funding and other stronger steps, underlined above, to bridge the gap between governors and young people, whether at the municipal, regional, state or even supranational level, not only allowing the disenfranchised youth to overturn the EU and its development, but to deal better with the current problems of the European project.