

TONE OF DEMOCRACY



INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE 2021
GOTHENBURG

Conference Participants

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INTRODUCTION

Democratic institutions can always be made more inclusive, more receptive to the wishes of more people, and more responsive to their power. To put it another way, there is room to strengthen democracy's "people" component by involving more people in decision-making; there is also room to increase democracy's "power" or "will" component by giving people greater real power. Throughout history, struggles for democracy have usually focused on one or the other of these aspects.

Many people claim that young people are unprepared to engage in the process and that they will only be able to do so after they reach the age of 18 (or whatever age their country gives them the right to vote). In fact, many young people become politically involved long before they are eligible to vote, and the influence of this participation can be greater than the single vote they will acquire later – and may or may not use – once every four or five years. Politicians are typically eager to pander to the youth vote, therefore they may be more receptive to young people's concerns.

Many young people are involved in environmental organizations or other protest groups that oppose different global problems. At a local level, young people can begin to engage in community life and political activity in one of the most essential ways: they can be more aware of the specific issues that concern them and those with whom they interact, and they will be better equipped to make a direct impact. Democracy is not limited to national or international issues and it must also begin in our own backyards. Youth organizations are one of the ways that young people experience and practice democracy, and hence play a vital role in democracy, provided, of course, that they operate independently and democratically.

INTERGENERATIONAL INEQUALITIES

Introduction

Our generation has boundless potential, and yet the pressures we face are threatening to overpower us. The Covid 19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing social inequalities caused by systematic discrimination and climate change. Future generations are going to inherit a tormentive social situation, widening the intergenerational gap. Youth and indigenous people representation is not guaranteed by institutions, which undermines the sustainability of decisions.

We propose concrete solutions to tackle these inequalities by utilising the generations of knowledge that we share.

We believe in justice for the older generation, fulfillment for the current generation and security for the future generation.

THE RIGHTS OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

Every country has its own Constitution or Basic law which guides its values. Constitutions usually do not include the words “future generations”. Ignoring future generations leads to poor long term decisions. This is reflected in the election process, which focuses on upcoming elections rather than intergenerational equality.

The policy propositions in the name of future generations do not go far enough in securing their rights; we propose that these rights are included in state constitutions as well as federal unions such as the EU and the African Union.

YOUTH DELEGATIONS AND YOUTH BUDGETS

Young people around the world are solving current challenges by coming up with innovative solutions. However, because of structural discrimination, young people still don't have a seat at the decision-making table. That's why we propose the implementation of youth delegations. In the United Arab Emirates for example, all ministers are obliged to have youth delegates who advise them on all policies. This allows senior government officials to thoroughly reflect on other perspectives, especially youth perspectives. Simultaneously, youth delegates have the possibility to actively draft policies. Youth delegation programmes facilitate intergenerational dialogue and can bring about meaningful change, if they are implemented in the right way.

We propose that every major city has access to a dedicated youth budget which is managed by the young people themselves.. This participatory budget programme is well established in the US city of Boston, which allocates one million US Dollars to young people each year. Some of the projects proposed by the young people which have received the investment include school heating systems to help students concentrate in class during the winter, shelters for those who are experiencing homelessness and the planting of more trees in the city to help fight climate change.

Youth budgets should be scaled up around the world in order to ensure meaningful youth participation.

UNITED NATIONS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S CLIMATE CONFERENCE

Covid-19 has particularly shown the scale of inequalities between indigenous communities and alternative communities, many of whom may historically have been unexposed to viruses and illnesses however have had to deal with the impacts of covid 19, and of course climate change. Representation of indigenous groups on international platforms, such as diplomatic forums has been questionable, and there have been concerns over protecting the intellectual property one indigenous groups on such platforms, as much of their indigenously preserved knowledge can be incredibly insightful and valuable to wider alternative communities.

Indigenous communities have a wealth of knowledge and historical understanding on ecosystems and sustainability. However, representation on an international platform for indigenous groups is lacking. We propose the implementation of a United Nations Conference that is led by indigenous communities.

In addition to this, it is important to recognise that the sustainable practices of indigenous groups must be respected, credited, and protected through legal frameworks, such as the paperwork proposals submitted before the proposed conference.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH STEERING GROUPS

It is estimated that more than 13 percent of adolescents aged 10–19 live with a diagnosed mental disorder as defined by the World Health Organization. Covid 19 has exacerbated the existing mental health struggles faced by everyone, particularly young people, across the world.

We propose the implementation of youth steering committees in which young people utilise their own lived experiences to shape mental health policies through co production. Coproduction is where professionals and young people work together to write policy proposals. Both professional contributions and lived experience are equally important in co-producing active support systems which can implement meaningful change.

This model of co-producing youth mental health services is well established in the city of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. The youth mental health steering group Think 4 Brum provides young people with the support and encouragement to have their say, as well as offering training opportunities to further their personal development.

We are past debates for increasing youth participation; there is vast evidence that confirms that the youth have an appetite to contribute to the change. With these proposals, we hope to further the debates started into tangible changes to truly energise democracy.

GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES

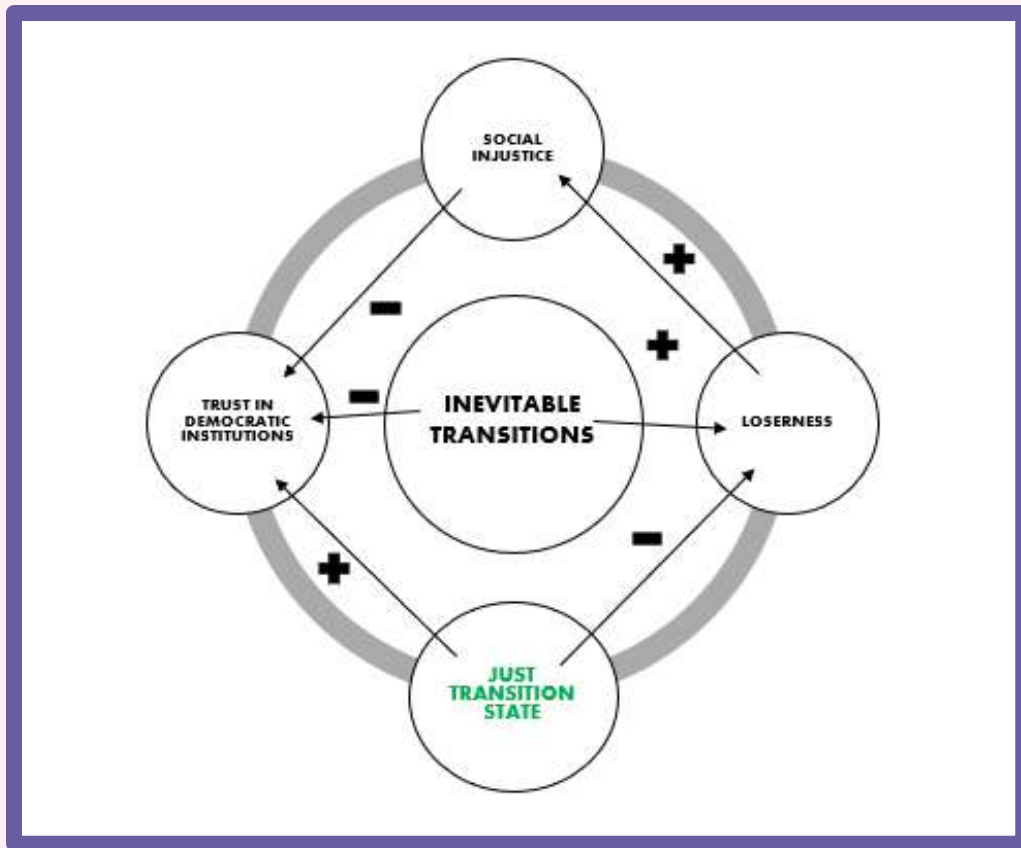
Liberal democracies face two inevitable transitions: the digital transition and the ecological transition. Although both transitions are related to each other, it is important to highlight that the social consequences of these processes have, in a similar sense, a direct impact on our democratic systems. Understanding that digital and ecological transitions imply a change in humanity's way of life, both processes will generate significant social inequality and exclusion in both inter- and intranational contexts. Most-vulnerable communities will face harsher challenges in adapting to the new age.

Digital and ecological transitions will have social consequences, which will include a decrease in trust in liberal democracy due to inequitable development within and between nation-states.

The increase in levels of social exclusion due to these inevitable transitions will increase citizens' perception of democracy as both unjust and unable to provide certainty. We have observed a decrease in democratic trust in historical transformation periods, like the Industrial Revolution and subsequent transition to the welfare state. When individuals and communities within democracy feel forgotten or excluded from the social benefits of rapidly changing conditions in society, they are less inclined to trust the democratic institutions in place which are intended to protect and support them. Trust in democratic institutions and certainty are basic necessities in ensuring liberal democracy for current and future generations. For example, essential decarbonisation objectives will leave many industries behind; laborers in the mining and coal industries in particular will be left

without job alternatives. If governments are unable to offer just alternatives to these communities, it is understandable to assume that the individuals and groups most-affected by both digitalization and climate change will develop intensified feelings of distrust in democratic institutions.

Consequently, we face a global democratic challenge: it is impossible to avoid these changes, but our current system is incapable of guaranteeing an environment of protection and inclusion that avoids an intense expansion of democratic disaffection among the "losers" of these processes. The aforementioned example regarding the mining and coal sectors is a very useful case to understand how many citizens will suffer from the two new transitions, making them theoretical "losers" in the global system.



These challenges present a specific question: *How do we maintain trust in democratic institutions for current and future generations to preserve democracy?* We propose two targeted solutions to promote inclusivity in both the ecological and digital transitions at the supranational level and to turn “losers” into “winners”. These two proposals will form the basis of the “Just Transition State” like a new public system that guarantees an equal distribution of the transitions’ effects.

INTERGENERATIONAL GLOBAL LOANS SYSTEM (IGLS)

Our first proposal is based on an inter-generational and inter-territorial solidarity system that manages to jointly redistribute the costs of the transition processes. This system, developed through international institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF or the UNDP and state-based, will allow the development of loans with differential levels of interest according to criteria of historical justice and intergenerational commitment. The redistribution system will include specific considerations for each country based on its levels of development and its history of contamination.

International concessional loan scheme for climate and development related issues remunerated over a longer-than-typical time frame with higher interest rate for high-income countries and lower interest rates for low-income countries

GLOBAL DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

An equitable inclusive digital transition will include granting all citizens and communities access to digital tools, which are increasingly used in democratic processes (e.g., social media), as well as granting all citizens rights and equitable access within currently unregulated digital spaces.

End users, digital creators, and communities face issues such as: inequitable access and digital discrimination, regulation of freedom of expression and hate speech, privacy and data protection inconsistencies, and imbalanced surveillance practices.

We contend that the primary concentration of power lies with unregulated companies operating in the digital space, limiting the rights and access of individuals operating on digital platforms. Human rights, particularly economic, social, and political rights must be protected in the digital sphere. Because the internet and digital technology ignore national borders, and operate on a truly global level, an international solution is necessary to address and protect the human rights of all users in the digital space. In order to address these issues, we propose the implementation of Global Digital Citizenship, which will be endorsed by a new UN Treaty on Human Rights. The primary aim of the proposal is institutional recognition of human rights in the digital space in order to allow users and communities to exercise and defend their human rights.

The current THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL'S ROADMAP FOR DIGITAL COOPERATION outlines potential ways to improve user rights in the digital age. A treaty ensuring Global Digital Citizenship would ensure these rights, mobilize support for companies, governments, and stakeholders to respect them, as well as ensuring the ability of individuals and communities to defend their rights in the digital sphere. Institutional recognition is important in furthering rights; a UN Treaty enshrining digital global citizenship would allow cases to be brought before the International Court of Justice (World Court).

A small scale example: In the EU, human rights are ensured both offline and online. Individuals can bring cases regarding digital rights violations to the European Court of Human Rights only after *all domestic institutional attempts to address the situation have been exhausted*. The EU's enshrinement of digital rights into the

European Convention on Human Rights is a small-scale example of the implementation possibility of Global Digital Citizenship.

LEARNING AND EDUCATION

MANDATORY CAREER SERVICE AT ALL HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE EU

There is an imminent need to ensure democracy in our societies, in order to achieve this it is essential that students from all backgrounds access higher education. In this case, it is important to recognise the existing barriers, especially for students of marginalised backgrounds, this includes but is not limited to, students of working- class backgrounds, refugee, asylum seeker and migrant students, students from rural areas and students with disabilities. The proposal of the implementation of a mandatory career service at all high schools in the EU is both urgent and necessary.

Problem

There is a significant gap in the transition period from high school to higher education. This gap especially impacts marginalised students (working class background, refugees and migrants, rural areas). Lack of knowledge and access to higher education for marginalized students, especially those who come from non-academic families and backgrounds. There is indeed a lack of practical career services on site at high school level in the EU, which is essential to support a just and equal transitional period for all students. The current situation results in a status quo of an

discriminatory system which is undemocratic and elitist in its nature.

Inspiration

The model of the mandatory high school career service is inspired by Widening Participation Units (WPU) in Northern-Ireland. These are university units that reach out to marginalised student groups, by mainly targeting high schools through different inclusive programmes. These programmes include but are not limited to visits and organising orientation days at the respective university. As a post-conflict region, Northern Ireland started developing its Widening Participation strategy in 2010. At almost 50% Northern Ireland now has the highest participation rate from young people of any area of the United Kingdom and it outperforms the other regions in increased access to Higher Education for students of marginalised backgrounds.

Solutions

The key solution is exemplified within the proposal of a mandatory career service at each high school in the EU. The service provided would be proportionate to the number of students. Furthermore, we propose to implement this service through an API support system. This support system has three essential parts: Advice and help, practical support and integration process. Advice and help concerns information and access to university and course options that are available. Practical support concerns support with the

application processes, this includes CV writing skills and writing motivation letters as part of the application. Finally, the integration process will address the bureaucratic reality and the associated

financial hurdles that exist for marginalised students such as finding housing and scholarship opportunities. The proposal

includes mandatory one-on-one meetings with the career services every semester during the last three years of high school; this model is designed to stress the importance of it being a long-term and sustainable support system.

The complementary solution is designed to provide additional support within the high school education system, which is focused on a mentorship program. This includes connecting high school students with university students, preferably those who have graduated from the same high school. Mentors provide orientational support and practical help as well as guidance throughout the application process whilst tackling the bureaucratic structures in place. This adds an additional support layer, which further aids the democratisation of education at the high school level.

Importance and Aims

The implementation of a mandatory career service based on the API support system and complemented through a mentorship program at all high schools in the EU will effectively close the significant gap while transitioning from high school to university. This is of utmost importance in schools and regions where there is a high concentration of students from working class, migrant and rural backgrounds who tend to remain relatively excluded from higher education. This proposal is both timely and necessary to ensure a sustainable process of the democratization of educational access in the EU.

21ST CENTURY EDUCATION

Introduction

In our world today, the need for 21st century skills have been imperative to excel in an increasingly digital and global world. Nevertheless, there is a lack in teaching 21st century skills in the education system around the world.

As such, we propose creating a subject in formal education, specifically high school education called 21st century skills course.

This course will include two aspects: intercultural communication and media literacy. This subject will start in high schools in the European Union and the aim is to eventually spread across the world.

Solutions

Media Literacy will teach students crucial skills such as critical thinking, creative writing and media consumption hygiene. It will raise awareness on the importance of being informed about events and processes happening around us, but also be careful and critical with the information you receive. The plan is to have some of the classes conducted together with journalists and other professionals working in the sphere of media. In the classes, students will learn to analyze current events and problems in society, which will eventually teach them to actively participate in the decision making process and will contribute to shaping an informed civil society.

For intercultural communication, the main focus will be on providing experiential learning activities such as partner schools from different countries, study trips, penpals, teacher exchange,

and language exchange. This will allow students to develop their 21st century skills and foster them as global citizens. The grading criteria for this course will be different from the traditional grading styles and students will be graded on their contribution and development of intercultural skills throughout the course.

Importance and Aims

The 21st Century skill program aims to develop students' 21st century skills by creating a new curriculum. This will in turn lead to fostering global citizens with the tools and mindsets to contribute actively to their society, democratizing education in the process.

THE BIG COLLABORATION PROJECT

Introduction

Wherever they are, whatever they study, youngsters around the globe should be empowered to develop their ideas and turn them into concrete projects and actions. This policy proposal comes from the acknowledgement of an urgent need of developing the potential of young people's ideas.

In order to do so, we want to build a connection between students and professional players to provide them with practical tools of action.

Solution

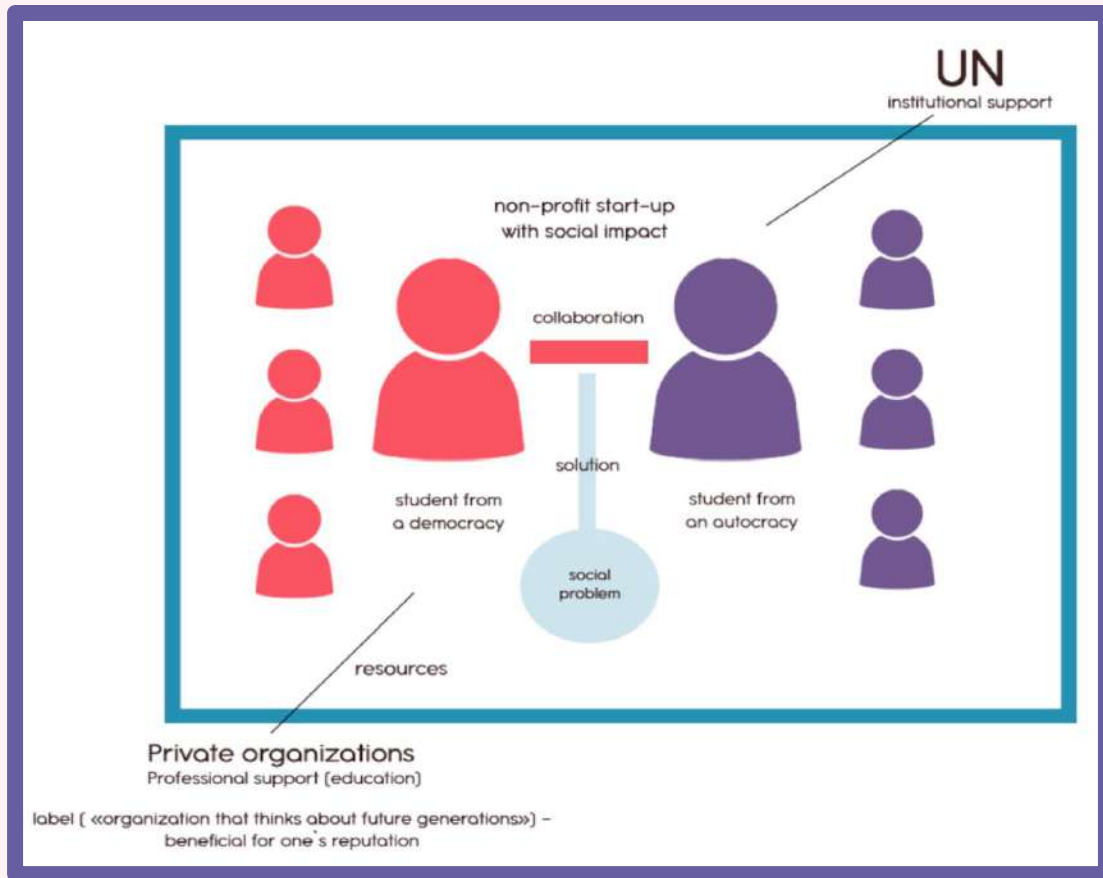
The three main actors involved in the process are the UN (or an ad hoc international organization), private entities (e.g. businesses and third sector organizations) and the students themselves playing the central role.

Firstly, the UN provides an institutional framework of action and the supervision of the most delicate aspects of the project.

Implementation would take the form of legislative or executive action through which various aspects - such as supervision, monitoring, problem resolution, collection of data and a possible certification system - would be detailed.

Secondly, private sector involvement would provide professional support (business model development) and funding to the ideas in order to ensure their realization. For the purpose of attracting their investment a certification of social commitment system could be implemented.

Finally, schools should facilitate the involvement of students into the network providing a referent for the program and ensuring the empowerment of students through similar measures. As a collateral effect, prestige would derive from the activities and certainly the project would improve their environments at reduced to no cost.



Importance and aims

Allowing for the interaction among youngsters from various countries should happen most importantly with attention to the political, national and cultural background of students so as to ensure the effectiveness of the exchange of ideas. Besides, the general focus on extracurricular activities allows to circumvent non-liberal establishments unfit to meet the needs of students.

Other positive effects would be the strengthening of the link school businesses and school universities.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY ACTIVISM PLATFORM

This proposal's aim is to empower local communities to increase their levels of activism and take local action into their own hands. Our policy proposal is named, "Community Activism Platform". Since the moment we come into this world we are part of a community. First of all we will tend to build a conscience and awareness about the importance of local communities and how important it is to be part of a community, part of action, and part of something bigger than ourselves.

Problem Statement

One of the most challenging political issues regarding democracy worldwide is local empowerment and participation. People often feel isolated and excluded from their own local communities, and thus from political action. This phenomenon, as we view it, can be explained by two main factors, interconnected by a causal relationship: the lack of accessibility to an attainable system of community decision-making, and the absence of motivation to participate that naturally follows. Nevertheless, we believe that this political apathy, the wide-spread social exclusion, the sense of isolation, the feeling of non-belonging, as well as the more and more often general mistrust and suspicion towards the democratic institutions and politics must be faced head-on and urgently.

Solution

As Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt put it, in their 2010 article, there is a correlation between social engagement and political participation. Local movements have a role in normbuilding, which can help with creating a more democratic behaviour and more social and political engagement. We propose to strengthen social engagement with what we like to call Community Activism, a global effort to mobilise local people into a more trustworthy, simple and rewarding system of change.

We propose building a support system to access trustworthy resources through a knowledge platform. This would evolve through a three stage evolutionary process designed to provide access to resources aimed at implementing local projects, focused on areas such as sustainability practices, educational projects or cultural events.

With this project, we aim to overcome what we consider to be the two main local participancy barriers discussed above, and give a chance for people to express their voice, regardless (but not necessarily independent) of a more institutionalized, traditional and formalized system of change. This will empower local groups to take local action into their own hands while giving them a sense of purpose and increasing inclusiveness.

Model and Process of the solution/Implementation

We want to provide the communities with both tools and education. We believe that these resources are vital for social engagement. For example, if a local community wants to create a learning hub or art project, we want to provide them with knowledge on how to do it and how to get funding for it.

The whole project is going to be organised in 3 stages:

Stage 1: Knowledge Platform

After we decide the community areas and fields we are going to work with, and identify their needs and difficulties that they are facing, we plan to create a European knowledge platform, that might go global, and an offline support agency who will assist communities or individuals who cannot access the internet world. The platform will aim to offer knowledge, resources, tools and means to make community life easier.

Stage 2: Growth & Management

Stage two would be to expand the work into the field, such as research/ creating strong partnerships with NGO, who meet our standards and our vision of work. These NGO-s would be the mediator between the main organisation and local communities. Worldwide connectivity is stage two, and the most important one. Stage two will aim to create a headquarter organization who will be the oversight and managing head for all the infrastructure and platforms and also ensure growth and expansion throughout Europe or Globe.

Stage 3: Expansion into new Communities

Stage three is going to be most difficult to achieve, after we identify the big problems that community faces nowadays and figure a way to inspire, to motivate to get citizens and communities to get engaged and involved we will move on mentoring, creating strong relationships and trying to give the communities and the citizens a sense of purpose, belonging or trying out activities in communities where they feel may belong to

a physical community. This means finding ways to involve people or communities who aren't able to access the online world.

To do all that we will create marketing campaigns to reach more people, to increase involvement and inclusiveness, through Social Media platforms, through local advertisement (radio/tv, newspapers, magazines), through promotional events partnered with our NGO-s in city centers or town centers and lastly through activism, activism blogs or influencers such Leonardo Di Caprio or Greta Thunberg, and kind of creating an online platform when anyone can bring a proposal for an event or activity in their community, online or offline.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we aim to empower communities through providing them with a platform that lets them easily access information and resources on social engagement, through a website or physical meeting settings. By doing this we hope to improve inclusiveness and motivation amongst people. This proposal will make it possible for communities to be involved in social engagement without necessarily being a part of the institutionalized, traditional and formalized system of change.

CONCLUSION

We have created room to improve the "power" and "will" part of democracy, by giving the people more real power. Drawing advantage from diversity (of thought and experience) while having the same aims and expectations is a motivation for participation and change. The opportunity to interact with representatives of different cultures empowers and gives hope of being entitled and having a say. Displaying a variety of promising ideas for the future that give hopefulness... Changing individually to change together is breaking stereotypes and making the story of that democracy true.

GOTHENBURG, 2021

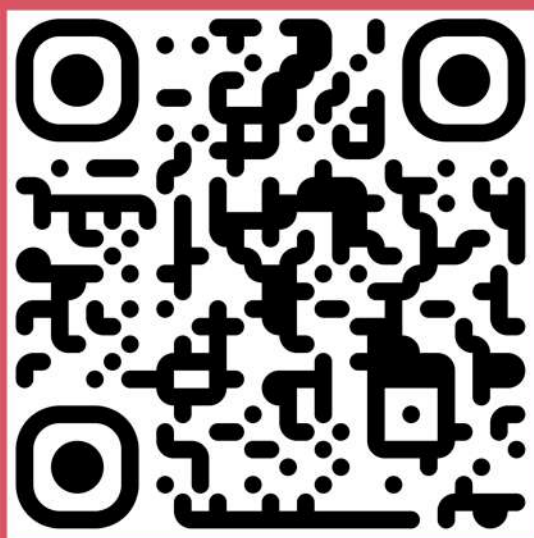
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