NETWORK OF UNIVERSITIES ON YOUTH AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
Connecting identities
Draft concept note – Joint Theme

"I am, because we are"
(Ubuntu philosophy)

1. Introduction and context

The definition of identity is a paradox in itself. Dictionaries often give two meanings for the word identity. On the one hand, *identitas* (from Latin) means "sameness". But on the other hand, identity refers to the essential character that defines somebody, that makes someone unique. It means "difference". The confrontation between the two dimensions of identity is essential not only to understand oneself but also to understand *who I am* in relation to *the other*. In turn, the confrontation between the two dimensions of identity is crucial to the understanding of inclusion and diversity.

With its two dimensions, identity is a complex and contextually sensitive combination of elements, which define an individual through time, situations, contexts and settings. Identity encompasses physical, social, cultural, political, economic and geographical dimensions i.e. gender, religion or profession. It is multi-faceted. There are individual and collective identities. It can be self-assigned (how a person perceives himself or herself) and hetero-assigned (how others perceive a person's identity)[1]. Holding multiple identities can provide an individual with numerous benefits, such as opportunities for social interaction or accumulation of skills and abilities[2]. Yet sometimes – as Amin Maalouf put it[3] - these many allegiances that forge identity conflict with one another and confront individuals with difficult choices. Such a process could lead to isolation and marginalisation, amongst other.

The complexity of the matter is aggravated by the dynamics of our highly interdependent societies. Globalization has an undeniable impact on self and identity since the points of interaction and friction between people have increased. One particular good illustration of globalisation and its impact on identity is the dramatic increase of the volume and scope of international migration. This mobility is transforming societies and cultures, creating Diasporas and developing enriching transnational identities on the one hand[4] and inspiring xenophobia and stereotyping, on the other hand.

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1 EU-CoE Youth Partnership (2011). Guidelines for intercultural dialogue in non-formal learning/education activities. Accessible at: http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8492613/ICD2014.pdf/73add476-4e8e-4522-8fb5-67df5e4ccfc8
2 BOURN Douglas (2008). Young people, identity and living in a global society. In Policy and Practice: a Development Education review. Centre for Global Education. Accessible at: http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue7-focus4
3 MAALOUF, Amin. (2001). In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong. New York: Arcade Publishing. French Original: (1998) Les Identités meurtrières. Paris: Grasset
4 UNESCO World Report (2009). Investing in cultural diversity and dialogue. Accessible at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001852/185202e.pdf

In transcending a definition by opposition, the philosophy of *Ubuntu*[5], however, focuses on the "sameness" dimension of identity. It acknowledges one's humanity in recognition and affirmation of *the other*[6]. Or as Desmond Tutu[7] put it, "I am because other people are".

The *self*, the *other* and *we*, individual and collective, fluid and multi-faceted, self or hetero assigned… navigating the complexity of our many multiple identities is a crucial process for personal integration. It is within this context, that the Network of the Universities on Youth and Global Citizenship identified **Connecting Identities** as the overarching theme that will connect all different Universities[8] in 2016.

For 16 years now, inspired in the principles of *Ubuntu*, the different universities have offered a space where young people and youth workers from all over the world come together as part of a global youth movement that works against exclusion and discrimination and for inclusion and diversity. The educational model developed in these Universities has been enhanced by its various partners and largely inspired by the Global Education Guidelines[9], systematized by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and by the new framework provided by Council of Europe Recommendation on education for global interdependence and solidarity[10].

The Network provides an exceptional space for young people and youth organisations around the world to meet, debate, build their capacity and co-operate on youth policy related issues. This year's theme would allow us to reflect on how youth organisations and youth work can accompany young people in such sensitive and meaningful processes of identity construction that ultimately define them as citizens and global citizens.

The topic will also contribute to the fifth cycle of structured dialogue with youth people in the Trio Presidency (the Netherlands-Slovakia-Malta) between January 2016 and June 2017 which will focus on the overall thematic priority of "Enabling all young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe - Ready for life, Ready for society"[11] and the Council of Europe's Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019).

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[5] As define in "About the Name" (Official Ubuntu Documentation. Canonical. Retrieved 5 January 2013) Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term roughly translating to "human kindness." It is an idea from the Southern African region which means literally "human-ness", and is often translated as "humanity towards others", but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity".

6 ONYEBUCHI EZE Michael (2010). Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa.

7 TUTU Desmond. (1999). No Future Without Forgiveness.

[8] The Network, created in 2011, includes the University on Youth and Development (UYD, Spain); the University of Participation and Citizenship (that used to take place in Uruguay); the African University on Youth and Development (AUYD, Cape Verde and Kenya); and the Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship (MedUni, Tunisia)

[9] North South Centre of the Council of Europe (2012). Global Education Guidelines. Accessible here: https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/GE/GE/GE-Guidelines/GEguidelines-web.pdf

[10] Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)4. Committee of Ministers to member states Council of Europe. On education for global interdependence and solidarity- Accessible here: https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1784485&Site=CM

[11] European Youth Forum. COMEM 0301-15-FINAL. A Framework for the next Structured Dialogue cycle: Enabling All Young People to Engage in a Diverse, connected and inclusive Europe. Accessible here: http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/01/0301-15_Resolution_Skills_for_Inclusive_and_connected_societies_FINAL_0116.pdf

2. Youth and identity

Youth has a certain unique quality in a person's life and identity construction; it is a bridge between childhood and adulthood. It is during adolescence that young people have to negotiate their ideas about who they are with the social expectations of the wider society, including parents, teachers, peers and authorities (for example, local government or the police) and, at the same time, they have to make their own decisions of who they want to be or are[12].

Youth is also the key period of life for political socialisation, the process that guarantees the acquisition of values and capacities to perform as a fully fledge citizens. Some authors argue that citizenship involves making connections between 'status and identities as individuals' with the 'lives and concerns of others with whom they share a sense of community'[13]. However, these connections are more and more complex as the world has become a Global village. Indeed young people are most directly affected by globalisation since they experience it on an everyday basis through employment patterns, the friendship groups they develop, social media, and cultural exposure. The fact that they are mostly affected by our global societies is neither good or bad, but it rather gives them a unique scenario full of choices and opportunities to build one's identity taking into consideration other elements than the usual traditional ones (i.e. life styles such as dress code or food habits, access to global culture, worldwide communication tools, etc. instead of local community culture, cosmogonies and religions, folklore and restricted social patterns). This global exposure encourages young people to constantly re-think and revise their sense of identity and place within society.

3. Connecting identities

Individual or collective, there exist multiple identities within one-self. People often live so-called "identity crisis" when they live at the edges of more than one individual and communal affiliation, with the challenge of bridging different loyalties and identifications. Often, individual and collective identities need conciliation to attain and maintain personal integration[14]. But above all, as Amin Maalouf proclaims[15] identities should be rich and colourful, they should accommodate all our different allegiances and all the diverse cultural backgrounds we are connected to.

In transcending what is identified as "identity crisis" we should aim at connecting the multiple identities we are confronted within our global world: to explore the multiple identities every individual consists of and to enlarge our perspectives; transcend the mere traditional elements of race, nationality, religion, wealth, social status. By connecting all our identities we will promote a sense of common humanity and therefore contribute to building a culture of peace.

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12 EU-CoE Youth Partnership (2012). Youth transforming conflict T-kit. Accessible at: http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/7110680/T-Kit12_EN.pdf/9791dece-4a27-45e5-b2f1-b7443cb2125b
13 BOURN Douglas (2008). Young people, identity and living in a global society.
14 JOSSELSON, Ruthellen and HARWAY, Michele (2012). Navigating Multiple Identities: Race, Gender, Culture, Nationality, and Roles. Oxford University Press
15 MAALOUF, Amin. (2001). In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong. New York: Arcade Publishing. French Original: (1998) Les Identités meurtrières. Paris: Grasset

4. What is/can be the role of youth organisations and youth work?

Youth organisations and youth workers have a long tradition of supporting young people in their self-definition processes and in the understanding of the world around them. Youth organisations can provide a safe space for young people to develop their identity among people who can stabilise them and provide a social framework in which 'identity crisis' can be overcome. Youth organisations also provide a good training ground to help others to overcome a crisis, transform conflicts, receive and give feedback, and develop many other competences needed to deal with other groups in the future and with many other identity crises to come. They are unique knowledge producers and educational providers, in formal, non-formal and informal settings. They have the expertise, pedagogical approach and the capacity to outreach and promote awareness.

Youth work and youth organizations often deal with topics related to identity[16]:
- the development of young people's self-esteem and sense of belonging
- critical reflection on shared and diverse values in the Global village
- the promotion of the value of diversity amongst different groups, countries and cultures
- critical reflection on related controversial issues, including ethnicity, cultural and national identities, as well as minority/majority relations
- the understanding of multiple identities, beliefs, cultures, traditions and histories of the people
- the promotion of human rights and raising awareness of how to challenge racism, discrimination, radicalization and violent extremism
- dealing with phenomena such as migration, economic inequality, conflicts, and media that structurally influence and at times constrain personal and group identities

Concretely, international and/or intercultural encounters are often spaces for 'crisis' of identity themselves. When people from such a variety of nationalities and cultures come together, different values and lifestyles intermingle and provoke questions about differences and similarities. By facing those questions and dealing with possible answers, the 'crisis' can be a catalyst to grow and further develop the individual's identity through the educational processes that offer different perspectives. By providing these opportunities to meet difference, youth work contributes to develop critical thinking and open-minds, so as to value diversity as opposed to stereotypes and/or prejudice[17]. And ultimately youth organisations and youth work have a relevant educational role in citizenship education and intercultural learning.

In this conceptual framework we will aim at:
- Discussing to what extent questions of identity lie at the core of many problems and solutions today such as how to combat radicalisation and violent extremism. In this sense we will analyse

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16 SALTO-Youth. Understanding You(th). Exploring identity and its role in international youth work. Accessible at: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2311/UnderstandingYouth_OnlineVersion.pdf?

17 SALTO-YOUTH.net publications. 2008. ID booklet: Ideas for inclusion and diversity. Accessible here: https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-1050/IDbooklet.pdf

why it can be very fruitful for youth organisations/workers as well as for the young people to learn more about their own and other people's identity.

− Promoting global youth work while advocating to policy-makers and practitioners to give greater consideration to the relationship of globalisation to identity and a sense of belonging, and the implications this relationship has for national policies and programmes.

− To contribute to the fifth cycle of structured dialogue with youth people in the Trio Presidency (the Netherlands-Slovakia-Malta) between January 2016 and June 2017[18] and the CoE Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019)
    o Sharing existing ways and identifying new ways to work towards inclusive societies.
    o Discussing the role that international organisations, national, regional and local authorities could play in promoting and assuring inclusive societies.

− Sharing of good practices and methodologies to promote global citizenship/development education and competences for a democratic culture bearing in mind that the complexity of identity related issues pose educational challenges and demand a series of competences to deal with such matters in a constructive way.

− Improving the recognition and support for new learning settings particularly contributing to the recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning[19].

> *[...] A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are."[1]*

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[18] Further information here: http://www.provox-jeunesse.fr/sites/default/files/implementation_plan_v_cycle-_fnl.pdf
[19] CoE Resolution 1930 (2013). Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge.