Young Cultural Diplomacy
A Quarterly Journal

Theme: “Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for fostering Youth Education and Development”
(September 2013)
Introduction

“Young Cultural Diplomacy” is a program undertaken by the Organization for Youth Education and Development. The intention of the program is to put forward perspectives of youth on cultural diplomacy - the way they view and understand it, while at the same time to explore how cultural diplomacy can be used in order to support the development of youth worldwide.

The main activities of the program include research, publications and conferences. One of the components of the program is this quarterly journal, where we assemble a collection of articles and interviews contributed by young practitioners of cultural diplomacy who analyze cultural diplomacy and offer innovative perspectives of how it can be utilized, implemented and practiced to support the youth.

The September 2013 issue of our quarterly journal is focused on the theme:

“Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for Fostering Youth Education & Development”

Topics addressed in this issue include:

• Initiatives to be undertaken to combat youth unemployment
• Volunteer work as a career catalyst
• Sports as cultural diplomacy
• Tackling poor educational conditions affecting youth
• The fight against corporate child labor
• Contemporary nationalism in Spain

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Child labor is work that is likely to interfere with a child’s education and development; labor that exceeds a minimum number of hours, labor that is hazardous; and/or labor performed by a child who is underage according to state legislation. A child is considered a person under the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2009).

According to UNICEF data (2009), child labor is mainly used in the following work areas: organized begging, domestic work, bonded child labor, the fishing industry, food processing, the sex industry, construction brick making, agriculture, child soldiers, textiles, and tourism (including sex tourism). The recent statistics from the UNICEF fact sheet on child labor display some worrying trends:

- Some 246 million children are engaged in child labor;
- 171 million (70 per cent) of these children work in hazardous conditions – including working in mines and dangerous machinery, working with pesticides and chemicals in agriculture;
- The Asia and Pacific region harbours the largest number of child workers in the 5 to 14 age group, 127.3 million in total (19 per cent of children are working in the region);
- Sub-Saharan Africa has an estimated 48 million child workers. Almost one child in three (29 per cent) below the age of 15 is economically active;
- Latin America and the Caribbean harbours approximately 17.4 million child workers (16 per cent of children in the region are working);
- 15 per cent of children in the Middle East and North Africa are working; approximately 2.5 million and 2.4 million children are working in developed and transition economies respectively (UNICEF, 2011).

The statistics above clearly show that egregious child labor is an unresolved issue in certain regions of the world, mainly in Asia and the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa. These regions comprise of less developed and developing countries, which, wallowed in poverty and mendacity, not only fail to protect their children, but, use them as daily workforce.

It is a fact that over the year after year child labor is becoming an issue of increasing severity. With a lapse of time the concept of child labor gained a mark of the new era: ‘era of transnational corporations’. Currently, one frequently hears of the notion of a ‘corporate child labor’. Several well-known transnational giants have already been involved in legal prosecution, during which they were charged for using child labor in their production cycles. Some multinational companies strive to take advantage of cheap labor offered by children in third world countries. They hire these children in sweatshops to work in extremely unfavorable environments. The children end up working for long hours with minimum pay.

In 1996 a huge scandal arouse around Nike’s company activity in Pakistan. A British magazine “Life” published a picture with a 12-year-old Pakistani boy named Tariq, who was stitching parts of a soccer ball together for 60 cents a day. This case inspired enormous indignation on the part of social activists. In the US and Canada people were standing in front of Nike outlets holding the pictures of Pakistani boy in their hands.

In 1996 another well-known sport wear company Adidas was involved in a child labor scandal (Burke, 2000). In Indonesia Adidas violated international labor law on several accounts. Children as young as 15 were made to work 15-hour days; expected to do at least 70 hours a week and punished for refusing to do overtime; paid less than $50 a month, rates below the International Labour Organisation’s demand for a living wage; penalized for taking leave during medical difficulties and had illegal deductions taken as punishments for minor misdemeanors (Burke, 2000).

The same year Microsoft’s Xbox has been accused of exploiting children in between the ages of 16 and 17 to manufacture its Xbox console in Dongguan, southern China. It has been proven that in some of the findings, the factory was overcrowded with more than 1,000 child workers. As much as 14 children had to share a single room and work on less that 37p a day (Foley, 2010).

A very recent example of the use of child labor is that of American Apple company. As revealed by an internal audit, Apple Inc used child labor in the making of its products by employing 106 underage workers across 11 facilities in 2012. “According to a report, the company also discovered wage problems and forced pregnancy tests”. In 2013, three Chinese factories making Apple products run by Pegatron Group violated standards set by Apple. The organization said the 70,000 employees at the three Pegatron plants averaged up to 69 hours per week, and that “many workers” were under 18. Pegatron, a Taiwanese company, came under the spotlight and was pressured to better oversee often-poor manufacturing conditions in China after 13 workers for one of its suppliers committed suicide in 2010 (RT, 2013).
wholly involved in child labor scandals. And the list goes on. It turns out that grand companies with big names stemming from the “Western world” are utilizing cheap labor forces from less developed countries. Here a question arises: is it a new wave of neo-colonialism or does it have something to do with a failure of the “corporate ethics” concept in the contemporary world? It looks like big sacks of gold are focused only on making more money, even while neglecting their breach of the international law. Or is it simply a poor local management that tries to create jobs for those in need and the whole hassle around child labor has nothing to do with the famous brands? It is difficult to give a definite answer, as the issue is not transparent at all.

Surprisingly enough, there are those who argue in favor of child labor. Those are usually economists, who see only the material benefit in creating more jobs. They believe that child labor may ultimately serve for the benefit of the underdeveloped country, which cannot offer alternatives and cannot create a better life for its people. Still being miserable, the wages for the child work are much higher at the global firm or organization. Transnational companies stop doing unmentionable things and cannot create a better life for its customers, furthermore children are unable to defend themselves and claim their rights, and due to . All children should have the right to childhood and the right to be protected against abuse of any kind including child labor. They also have a right to education, recreation, and the right to be included in the formation of policies that affect them. They have the right to be heard and the adults have the responsibility to listen to them.

Corporate child labor is a big problem in the world today and governments are unable to enforce the labor laws that prohibit it. There are various approaches that can be followed to fight child labor and ultimately prevent it. Stopping the companies and shutting them down does not solve the problem. The best method to fight child labor is to make sure transnational corporations are playing a fair game on international markets, especially in the sensitive regions mentioned above.

Where has all the “corporate ethics” of transnational corporations gone? This is the right time to speculative on the value of Cultural Diplomacy in the contemporary world. Cultural Diplomacy has more power than it may seem at the first glance. Cultural Diplomacy is a strong and efficient soft power tool, which can be efficiently used to tackle human rights discrepancies. The concept of Cultural Diplomacy presupposes that all the cultures around the world are different, but equal. Cultural Diplomacy can be practiced by either public sector, private sector or civil society (Constantinescu, 2011). This means that transnational corporations such as private businesses, as well as civil society worldwide should take a lead in the transformation of the attitude towards human rights issues and tackling the problem of child labor. Once transnational corporations stop doing unfair business in the pursuit of bigger revenues, by enforcing control over their subsidiaries in developing countries, the amount of children involved in the cycles of production will remarkably decrease. On the part of the world civil society, more significant effort can be put it to try and combat these practices. People all over the world can try to abstain from buying products of the companies which utilize child labor. At first glance it does not seem to bring any palpable effect; however, even if a small percentage of people do that, the issue will acquire a broad resonance.

Only through mutual collaboration can a good result be achieved. Companies can put labels on their products to show that the goods are not made via the use of child labor. Companies can then put the labels on all of their goods in a visible location so that the consumers can check and determine that the goods are not made by children and that the company is not involved with child labor and does not support the act. A code of conduct can be established together with supplier guidelines, that can help curb child labor. The code can be used through the use of auditors to make sure that the suppliers of goods and services do not use child labor and end up convincing their clients. Standards can be used to encourage companies and big multinationals to achieve them. The companies can attain these standards and get an achievement and acknowledgement for not using child labor. All the above should be implemented worldwide. In this way cultural diplomacy will be exercised for a common benefit of combating child labor.

Olga Karazei

Sources


We are NOT the Lost Generation
By Vladislav Strnad

The full scope of the unemployment crisis is outlined by President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy: "Unemployment levels are alarmingly high, concealing many different realities and causes that often run deep. And we are under no illusions: the problem won’t be solved overnight. But that is no reason for adopting a “mission impossible” mindset."

Increasingly the term "Lost Generation" can be found in the media. Young people cannot find work, potentially never knowing stable employment with its rising wages and income security in old age. Indeed, it is the current generation who are expected to have worse living conditions than their parents or grandparents.

In the labor market, young people are referred to as a “risk group”. There are several reasons why young people are often out of work. It is difficult to find the first job because they are lacking practical experience, which they cannot receive until they find a job; a classic "Catch 22". A large proportion of unemployed youths are school drop-outs and, looking at current trends, it is likely that in the future there will be even less work for people with lower levels of education, further limiting employment opportunities for young people. Furthermore the number of jobs is shrinking due to development and modernization, which causes companies to reduce their workforce to just a small number of highly skilled employees.

These young people have been hit hard by the economic crisis; a large proportion of graduates find themselves jobless. Youth unemployment in Europe has reached a record level and in 13 Member States it has exceeded 25%. The highest unemployment rates are in Greece, Spain and Portugal whilst the lowest are in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.¹

Generally education plays a key role in employability, but candidates’ skill sets must also match the demand of the labor market. Many industrial enterprises in the meantime are seeking graduates with the prerequisites such as appropriate language skills, organizational and management skills, knowledge of business environment and business processes, and with the willingness to comply with the requirements of the company.

There is a similar situation in vocational and craft schools. In many centers of education students do not receive the knowledge and skills that are required by the labor market. Simply, there is a gap in the skills students are taught and the skills employers require and in many cases diplomas do not guarantee expertise. The best evaluation of the quality of education is the market.

Whilst the development and modernization of enterprises is essential, the restructuring and optimization of modernization frequently results in jobless, with young employees often being the first made unemployed. Youths are frequently accessing part-time jobs and working for lower salaries. Furthermore, the lack of professional knowledge and also the irresponsible approach to school choice causes young people to do work which does not reflect their personal interests, or that does not motivate them nor bring them joy.

Even educated graduates are not safe from unemployment and some colleges are considered to be producing “non-working intellectuals”. After completing their education, graduates are often testing their luck abroad, hoping for better conditions, a better life and personal realization. If they get the job, they need to work hard to build on its position at the expense of their personal life, family, more specifically their future family, which they are more commonly establishing at a later age than their parents.

Notably, unemployment in the beginning of young peoples’ careers is bringing uncertainty and loss of confidence. Long-term unemployment or recurring job loss has profound consequences. Young people feel betrayed, redundant and demotivated and some of them are resigning themselves to unemployment leading to “deskilling”. They live off of support, becoming dependent on their parents or the state. Eventually they lose their qualifications, ability to study and it becomes difficult for them to return to an active life.

The European Council invited Member States to prepare for November a plan for establishing a guarantee scheme for young people. The initiatives will be funded through the EU employment initiative and the Youth Guarantee scheme, as well as increasing youth mobility and the involvement of social partners.²

² 2. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/137631.pdf The full scope of the unemployment crisis is outlined by President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy: “Unemployment levels are alarmingly high, concealing many different realities and causes that often run deep. And we are under no illusions: the problem won’t be solved overnight. But that is no reason for adopting a “mission impossible” mindset.”
³ 3. 4. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/137631.pdf The European Council invited Member States to prepare for November a plan for establishing a guarantee scheme for young people. The initiatives will be funded through the EU employment initiative and the Youth Guarantee scheme, as well as increasing youth mobility and the involvement of social partners.
Structural Fund and six billion euros will be available in January 2014. The first contributions will be made available to the most severely affected regions of the EU, where youth unemployment rates exceed 25%. The amount will be increased by another two billion, drawn from the unspent funds of other structural funds. The European Investment Bank will contribute through its initiative “Working for the Young” and the program “Investing in Skills”. Additionally the European Council has backed these programs.

Initiatives “Your First EURES job"4 and “Erasmus+"4 are also supporting the cross border professional training. Great importance has been placed on other programs such as ERASMUS (program for education and training, that is focusing on the mobility and cooperation in higher education in Europe),5 COSME (Program for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and small and medium enterprises),1 and Horizon 2020 (program for funding European R & D and innovation2 and EASI (program for employment and social innovation).9

Member States have also undertaken measures to modernize their systems of training and education, to strengthen cooperation between educational institutions and businesses, and to improve the participation of young people with few qualifications in the labor market. To improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships, the European Alliance for apprenticeships was created to provide greater involvement with the private sector, social partners, and businesses. The concept of dual links between schools and businesses has worked for many years in Germany and Austria. Countries that have strong systems of vocational education and training, such as Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Austria, also tend to have lower youth unemployment.10

Member States reflected the recommendations of the European Council in its budgets, structural reforms, social policy and employment policy. Governments bear the full responsibility for the success of national initiatives and for the maintenance of social dialogue and are responsible for the efficient utilization of EU funds. The European Council will discuss and regularly evaluate the economic situation.11

States also undertook measures to reform the tertiary education system. These reforms will increase diversification, enhancing the quality of teaching and resulting in a more flexible labor market and graduates meeting employers’ requirements successfully. Budgets of public universities will become dependent on the quality of education, employability of graduates and outcomes of the institution’s research.

It is expected to introduce an effective system of student financial aid, study grants for all students, social scholarships for students from families with low income and disabled students, business scholarship, education savings, student loans and occasional student employment offers. States will provide information which would enable students to make quality decision about their future career choices.

Member States reflected the recommendations of the European Council in its budget, structural reforms and EU employment and social policy. The European Council underlined that Member States must act alone to reform their education systems and the labor market. As van Rompuy said “Employment policies are primarily the responsibility of national governments, with the European Union supporting their efforts”. Leader States should therefore ensure the exchange of experiences and best practices with other members.12

Today’s world is very difficult for young people because the completion of school education alone is not enough to ensure employment with society and the job market having high expectations. You have to ask questions, analyze problems, and information to find solutions, to use scientific knowledge in different areas of everyday life. How successful young people are depends partly on themselves and on their ability to adapt to the realities of the labor market.

Indeed, those adaptive students are more and more eager to study abroad. They are attracted by a higher quality of teaching, the title of a school with a good name, creative freedom, greater consistency of study with practice, and experience in international teams give the courage and enthusiasm for life and increase the competitiveness for career building.

Youth employment problems, of course, are part of and a result of the economic situation. Their solution is associated with the restart of the economy. Joint efforts of the EU and the exchange of experiences lead to the increase of educational levels and their relationship to practice. We are not the Lost Generation. We will be the generation we want to be!

Young Cultural Diplomacy
“Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for fostering Youth Education and Development”
(September 2013)

Vladislav Strnad

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1) The American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) is a prestigious university with graduate employability rates and financial evaluation upon first job remaining very high. What do you think are the main reasons for this and where do you place the American system of higher education as a factor for this success?

The American-style of education encourages student involvement in the teaching-learning process. This style of learning is present in all AUBG classes, whether they are taught by Americans, Bulgarians, or other international faculty. Our style of learning creates a confidence in our students to interact with others and fosters their ability to express themselves both orally and in the written form. Also the liberal arts experience, unlike the purely discipline-based education, gives our students a broad exposure to ideas, thoughts, and concepts in a variety of areas of study. Students become critical thinkers and problem solvers, skills which employers value highly. AUBG students have little trouble finding employment at home or abroad.

2) United in Diversity’ is how I briefly entitle my yearlong Erasmus experience at AUBG. What impressed me the most about the university in general and the studying itself were the equal conditions and opportunities for all students. How does the AUBG manage to shape the coexistence between students from diverse places and cultures?

First of all AUBG only accepts good students. Such students are usually quite open-minded and expect to experience new ideas, establish new friendships, and recognize that the world has become increasingly “flat”. Students come to AUBG with an expectation they are being prepared to enter a world community. Beginning with New Student Orientation much work is done by our staff to develop in our students an understanding of the diversity in people, cultures and religions. The residential experience, all students living together in on-campus housing, provides a learning laboratory where students learn to work, learn, study, eat, play and enjoy recreational opportunities together, regardless of their country of origin. This model has been very successful and was the basis for the founding of the University in 1991.

Global Civil Society as an Actor of Cultural Diplomacy
New Trends in Volunteering & their Implications for Cultural Diplomacy

By Katarina Erdelyiova

How can current students and future employees operationalize the meaning of this powerful quote whilst the education systems in many countries are standing on such weak legs? Sadly, the reality of being a student enrolled in a study program lacking enthusiasm, with neither interest nor future aims, is a widespread phenomenon. Such a tendency proves to be a formidable vision. It is without question that one works best when the previously mentioned attributes are present. Failing this, one’s work is usually not efficient, creative nor useful with respect to future self- and community development.

Why can voluntary work be more worth than a pay-check?

Each year, an increasing amount of young people, mostly aged 18-25, decide to leave their home country for voluntary work. This usually happens in the summer, lasting from June until October. However, many of these positions are offered for six months to one year, whereas these opportunities are often used by the fresh graduates or university students taking a gap year. A common reason why graduates do not jump directly to the labor pool is that they are often not ready to make the sudden step from university lecture halls to the first job they get upon graduation, which most probably will not be their dream job. Seeking a voluntary job is the perfect way for a person to explore themselves and what
one wants, or indeed, does not want. In a similar situation are the students still in the process of completing their education, but taking a gap year. The vast majority of these students believe either that they chose a wrong career path or at least they are not outright convinced about its direction.

As published in one of the articles in Financial Times, a survey carried out by TimeBank through Reed Executive, the following career benefits of volunteering were the strongest. While 84% of those responsible for hiring agree that volunteering is a way to help people find work, over 70% of employers believe that those who volunteer have a better chance of earning a higher salary and gaining promotion. Not to mention the fact that when recruiting, 80% of employers value volunteering on a CV.

Volunteering and Cultural Diplomacy

Volunteering can be easily associated with citizen diplomacy (people’s diplomacy) - a concept in international relations having its origin in U.S. foreign policy - when an average citizen or group of citizens of one country purposely engages in a mutual relationship with one or more countries in order to support, promote and shape the reciprocal foreign relations in a meaningful, constructive and mutually beneficial way. The “delegates” of citizen diplomacy are usually students, teachers, artists, humanitarians, athletes, business-people and last but not least volunteers abroad - a combination of adventurers and tourists.

If we think about the strong bond that connects citizen diplomacy with Cultural Diplomacy, one can easily presume that these two cannot exist without each other since Cultural Diplomacy as well as citizen diplomacy has the power to act as an effective tool in improving foreign relations. It has the ability to embrace many forms, for example being a complementary part of official governmental foreign policy trends, as well as it can function separately by itself in situations where official diplomacy fails.

Anyone who cares about their country’s reputation, anyone who feels comfortable in the vibrant society of nowadays globalized world, anyone who has the courage to spend quality time in a foreign country and anyone who feels responsible for the overall welfare and is willing to take crucial steps for changes in order to achieve it - can automatically become an ambassador for their country while working on their future and prospects.

As for the examples of volunteering as a tool for Cultural Diplomacy, these are represented by various NGOs which are supporting intercultural dialogue, either in a broader or narrower sense. When it comes to specification, one could mention Zugvögel, interkultureller Süd-Nord-Austausch e.V., a German organization which is offering south-north exchanges lasting for up to 12 months for adventurous inhabitants and people from Latin American and Africa seeking knowledge and experiences from the more economically developed Germany. Obviously, the program is based on a bilateral agreement, which allows German people to travel, offer their know-how, and take action in countries like Ecuador, Nepal, Rwanda and Uganda.

There are a plenty of similar organizations and programs such as the European Volunteer Service, VolunTourism.org, CrossCulturalSolutions.org, NetAid, UNVolunteers just to name a few. With a little research and effort, each person can find voluntary service providers and NGOs in their area and filter them easily accordingly to one’s interests for a cause.

How to become a volunteer:

Either before, throughout, or after our study years, each of us tends to have an interest in a certain cause. The basic point is to consider why one wants to volunteer. It could be beneficial for a common cause or to help one’s community, as well as for improving the volunteer’s skills, making new friends and learn more about the obstacles that arise whilst fighting for the particular cause.

Look for NGOs and organizations via various search engines. Unless one is not a “voluntourist” it is recommended to start on a smaller scale and look for an organization or NGO that is concerned with the cause in one’s area.

Choosing an organization might seem as an easy task, but one, however, does need to run a process of self-examination to reach a certain level of self-knowledge to become self-content and to be able to self-create. Despite this complicated formula, it is very important for each potential volunteer to know their qualities, strengths and weaknesses in order to make the best out of their work. Voluntary work can be both office and field based.

Once all these steps have been completed, the only thing that is left is to let those in charge know about your preferences within the organization so that the most convenient working environment can be set up for both the volunteer and the organization.

It is rather difficult to make predictions about the way in which will trends in volunteering will evolve. As argued above, voluntourism is one of those tools that does not cost much effort or money, the only things needed for successful action are a good sense of coordination and organization within or between countries and continents, human willingness to help, and engagement for a particular cause or against a specific matter. It has the power to create or improve the cultural equilibrium between two or more countries whilst a win-win situation can be easily maintained. Nevertheless, throughout the years, several experts made undeniably clever and justified remarks upon the possible chance of damage that might occur especially in the case of voluntourism, in the sense of the negative impact on the development of societies, whilst intervening into other countries’ domestic affairs (examples usually lead to volunteers working at orphanages). However, while these claims are valid, volunteering service providers and cultural organizations are actively keeping track, making estimates in advance and taking control over the possible effects their actions might have on the society of the host country in order to avoid any negative impact and create the environment and conditions for the mutually most advantageous help.

Katarina Erdelyiova
Olympic Athletes as Cultural Ambassadors: Young Cultural Diplomacy in Practice

By Sanja Pancic

The Olympic Games represent one of the largest international gatherings in the World. It provides the opportunity for nations to send delegations of athletes which can serve as cultural ambassadors for their respective nations. The Olympic stage has been seen as a positive environment for establishing and maintaining international relations, providing the opportunity for countries to present themselves on a global stage, pursue recognition and cultural validation as part of a diverse community.

Sport has been acknowledged as a tool of sport diplomacy with athletes able to act as cultural ambassadors for their people. With the purpose of presenting Cultural Diplomacy in practice, this article will be focused on the personal experiences of two Olympic Athletes in order to raise awareness about universal values, global communication and cooperation between people.

The Olympic Athletes Biographies

Sofia Papadopoulou is an extraordinary Olympic athlete honored with bronze medal in sailing at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games for the Greek National team. As a current Olympian she hopes to surpass her result at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. As a young Olympian she works hard to teach and motivate young sailing generations to accomplish their dreams and become valuable ambassadors of the country. Aside from her sport career she is also a Masters student at the International Olympic Academy, strongly believing that education plays a very important role in shaping personal identity and the identity of the culture.

Dr. Hussain Haleem is a passionate Olympian who was the first flag carrier and captain of the Maldives National Team at the 1988 Seoul and 1992 Olympic Games, competing in the marathon race. His sport career is glorified with many medals and national records in athletics that still inspire others and gives him the strength to take part in the most difficult sport competitions such as the Ironman triathlon. As an official vice-president of the Maldives Olympic Committee, he has had the chance to compete in 3 different Olympic Games, as well as the chef de mission at the 2010 Singapore Youth Olympic Games and the team leader for the Maldives 2012 London Olympic Games. As a sport expert he has written four books as well as a number of articles and publications in order to share his experience, hoping that they can motivate youth to celebrate the joy of sport and become better people upon moral values and strong dialogue skills. His personal motto is to never give up on dreams, love life, and respect others.

The Olympic Games as an Environment for Dialogue

Sport has been acknowledged as a tool of Cultural Diplomacy that celebrates positive values such as fairness, social inclusion, communication and friendship. Moreover, the personal experiences of the Olympians highlight the importance of a dialogue in a sport environment that strengthens the relations between people and neglects all the differences between them.

Hussain: “Being part of the Olympic Games, athletes have the chance to experience life in the Olympic village, meet different cultures and introduce their role models. It is unique opportunity to hear the life stories of the athletes and motivation that stands behind the hard work and persistence. It provokes interaction between young people enhancing the mutual dialogue, based on shared experiences and values. At first such communication could be perceived as modest, but eventually all the timidity evanesces. This unique environment creates opportunities for dialogue based on common ground leading to the one ideal spirit of equality.

Sofia: “You feel like you belong to a big family where everyone respects your personality, recognizes your abilities and your efforts, no matter which religion or culture you are”. Being part of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Sofia had the opportunity to share ideas, skills and feel accepted and protected. As a personal example, she faced disadvantages that changed her perception on life and inspired true sympathy and belief in people. During the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games training session, along with her sailing partner, they faced serious complications in transporting their boat into the water, due to some electrical malfunctions and an issue with a crane. It seemed that nothing was possible to carry the 900kg boat into the water in order to have a proper preparation before the competition. Noticing the problem from a distance, a group of Chinese volunteers did not hesitate to approach and kindly offer their help. Sofia: “We couldn’t understand each other because they did not speak English but we just started working together to put the boat into the water.”

This incident demonstrates that people are capable of working alongside one another despite the language barriers and cultural disparity. It has been represented as an example how Culture Diplomacy can greatly contribute in enhancing the country's international perception.

Sport inspires Youth Communication and Socio-cultural Closeness

Throughout history, sport has played a significant role in softening the relations between countries. Back in the Ancient times, the Olympic Games were held even during the war periods, which did not influence the realization of the global event and the gathering of sport and cultural representatives. Countries have for centuries been using sport as a tool for reducing tensions and establishing sustainable socio-cultural relations.
Hussain: “Sport can bridge differences in a way of bringing people together, learning about others culture, religion and customs. It helps us to understand each other better”. During the qualifications for the 2008 Olympic Games, Sofia Papadopoulou and her sailing partner had to compete against thirty other countries, representing the deciding moment in their career. Often it can be difficult to establish positive communication with their opponents due to the high pressure of the race and concentration required. However, Sofia’s personal experience has demonstrated an opposite image. Her sailing partner and her had trained and worked closely with the Russian team, preparing the boats together, exchanging knowledge and experience in order to maximize the chances to qualify. Sofia: “We learned their language, culture, and tasted each other’s food”. It represented a unique opportunity for young people to become closer to each other, exchange practices and serve as promoters of their countries.

Youth Olympic Games as a Lasting Legacy for Intercultural Relations

Every country has a chance to present itself on the global Olympic stage and acquire certain recognition. Although it is not always easy to establish an equal representation of the countries, due to their economic and social status, however such challenges can be overcome via sport educational programs (Hussain Haleem). The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) represents an ideal cultural exchange and sporting event with an effective strategy to bring young people closer to each other, exchange experiences and ideas. By practicing sport, young people become stronger individuals, capable to socially adjust to the environment and show tolerance and respect on every ground. It is a path that leads to the creation of valuable cultural ambassadors able to spread the positive message and values around the world, thus establishing sustainable international relationships.

The current landscape of education both in the developed and developing world is characterized by persistent inequalities. Universal primary education is a major challenge, particularly for emerging countries, where marginalization related to sex, health and ethnicity has an undeniable downward-spiral effect on its people’s social and intellectual development. It is a fact that improvement of children’s living conditions is hampered by the lack of access to quality basic education. According to UNESCO, human development factors such as unemployment and poverty are doubled amongst the sectors of the population that are unschooled or have had to drop out of school prematurely.

The core of the problem derives mainly from the lack of financial resources that countries are capable of allocating to educational infrastructure, technology, research, as well as teacher training. For some countries though, the effective monitoring of the allocation of resources to the appropriate areas in education is a major issue that requires collaboration with the international community as well.

Mexico, despite being the country which spends the highest percentage in education out of all the OECD members, has one of the world’s lowest education standards. In the most recent Pearson Global education report, The Learning Curve, Mexico’s education system was ranked 49 out of 52 evaluated countries. ¹

Many education experts in Mexico consider it a “failing system”. Statistics from the private organization Mexicanos Primero indicate that out of 100 students be...
Another important focus point lies with the teachers themselves. Most of the public school teachers belong to the National Union of Education Workers, Mexico’s largest union. Since the 1990s, the union has taken control over hiring teachers and approving quality standards, whilst also managing the budget allocated to education. Teaching positions are limited, but once a teacher obtains tenure it is considered an assured position and from then on the teacher cannot be laid-off. Applications to these positions only started to be given through contests in 2008, and for the most part these tests showed that teachers were generally not yet qualified to teach a class. A tendency in the system, as Mexicanos Primero declares, is that it does not necessarily promote or compensate well-qualified teachers. Corruption and nepotism in education have been widespread for decades. Teaching jobs and promotions are often sold or exchanged, or passed down through families. Additionally teachers often skip classes or use unqualified teachers as substitutes such as last year students, while still receiving their full salary for the class. A survey from the Research Institute for Education Development (INIDE) of the Iberoamerican University in Mexico shows that 67.5% of junior high school teachers have skipped class, and 70% of them lack qualification to teach. This lack of qualification, although measured through standardized tests, has no negative consequence for the teachers whatsoever. However, the low teaching standards and missed classes by the teachers have, in turn, led to student absences.

The lack of quality education and its unequal distribution has shown to be a continuous threat to major human development areas in Mexico such as health, citizen participation, and law abidance. Criminally statistics are directly related to the sectors of the population that have not finished their basic education. According to the INIDE, 30% of the people who are in the Mexican jails are between 18 and 30 years old.

Reforming the failing education system is one of the country’s most challenging goals. Long-term economic competitiveness, as widely stated by economists, has shown to have a strong link with the knowledge and skills of the young people who enter the workforce. If well-trained workers tend to be more productive and earn more money, then focusing on training the country’s future workers will be a determining factor of its economic success and stability.

As in Mexico, education remains a highly inaccessible right in developing countries. More than 72 million children aged between 5 and 10 are not in school, according to the UNESCO report on Education for 2012. Most importantly in achieving universal primary education within a country is the capacity of the young population to become aware of this need and actively participate in reclaiming efficient reforms in this sector to its government.

Outstanding educational performance and a qualified workforce in a country where more than 70% of the population is under 25 years old is an imminent must for Mexico. In 2012 the organization Mexicanos Primero launched a widespread campaign raising awareness about the state of the education system in Mexico. The documentary called “Barely Passing”, filmed in most part by students with borrowed cameras, inspired hundreds of thousands of young people to demonstrate for education reform. The documentary not only succeeded in permeating traditional domestic media and cinemas across the country, it was also available through the internet and was screened abroad. Appealing to the youth through cinema and the domestic media, the movement gained visibility and resonance and this year 180,000 young Mexican students voted for a quality education framework.

After a year of intense petition rounds and demonstrations carried out across the country this past August 24th President Enrique Peña Nieto pushed forward a new reform of Mexico’s education system, aiming towards lifting poor standards and helping boost economic growth. The reform states clearly that professional merit will be the only way to become and remain a teacher. It does not, however, specify any institution that will oversee teaching standards or how they will be assessed. Experts and economists fear that Mexico’s largest teachers union, the National Union...
of Education Workers, will lobby against a implementing any such institution. Ricardo Raphael, researcher for the Center for Investigation and Economic Teaching says proper implementation of the education reform in Mexico will inevitably reduce the rates of uneducated or poorly educated people, which in turn will lead to a more prepared workforce and a boosted econo-

The value of Cultural Diplomacy, though the use of cinema and cooperating with national and international media, has shown to be an effective soft power tool in appealing youth to mobilize and participate towards an education reform. Civil society took the lead in the transformation of the attitude towards such an important sub-
ject for the development of a country. The global civil society is also at stake of the quality and coverage of education across borders. The OECD’s 2012 evaluation recommends awareness and citizen participation to claim better monitoring and establishing clear and evaluable standards in education. Cultural Diplomacy is thus an undoubtedly relevant tool to push forward to activate the civil society and appeal the much needed reforms that will transform the education system in full and that will be recognized by all stakeholders. This is undoubtedly a priority to undertake at this point in time.

Valentina Martínez

Sources


Catalonia is an autonomous community in northeastern Spain, bordering France and the Mediterranean Sea, and is recognised as a nation containing its own nationality by the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, establishing Barcelona as its capital. Throughout the history of Spain, and even prior to the establishment of the Spanish state as we know it today, the Catalan region has enjoyed a distinctive culture, gastronomy, literature, history and language as compared to the country it belongs to, forming a unique and singular Catalan identity. In recent years however, and parti-

by influenced by the severity of the current economic and financial crisis in Spain, Catalonia has made a firm claim for independence, with its Prime Minister Artur Mas acting against the Spanish Constitution and vowing to conduct a referendum in the region in the form of a secession consulta-

By Jennifer Velasco

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referendum claim, and how Cultural Diplomacy may or may serve to ease the existing conflict.

In response to the general question ‘what do you think of Catalonia’s talk of separtating from Spain?’ Irene Izquieta (22), a student in ComillasPontifical University in Madrid, answered ‘I do not want Catalonia to separate from Spain because, during these economically-implicated times, this would only cause more upheaval in a country whose population is going through very hard times.

However, Catalonia’s claim is a historical one, and even if I do not agree with the secession, I understand the reasons that justify the claim’. It wasn’t until the marriage of Ferdinand II of Aragón and Isabel Iof Castile that the region of Catalonia was unified with the rest of Spain, as, prior to this union, Spain was divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Aragón, grouping today’s regions of Aragón, Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Valencia, and the kingdom of Castile. Anna Boira (21), a Catalan student, explains on the historical bifurcation that Catalonia feels towards Spain by citing two historical occasions in which the region has attempted secession and this, in turn, has been denied by Spain: Barcelona’s fall on September 11, 1714 and the 1934 failed attempt for independence, to which Madrid responded on September 11, 1714 and the 1934 failed attempt for independence, to which Madrid answered ‘I do not want Catalonia to separate from Spain because, during these economically-implicated times, this would only cause more upheaval in a country whose population is going through very hard times.

After Franco’s death in 1975, Catalonia voted for the adoption of a democratic Spanish Constitution in 1978. With the return of democracy to Spain, Catalonia was able to rebuild its national heritage by recovering political and cultural autonomy, so we asked young individuals on their thoughts regarding the main reasons and motives for Catalonia’s pleads for secession. In response to this question, Irene declared there are many reasons behind the secession pleads, but overall, Catalonia has a unique culture and this creates a very strong feeling of belonging to this area.

Another very important reason is the fact that they do not feel their culture is represented with the general Spanish culture’. Expanding on Irene’s assertion, FrancescoHoms, a Catalan economist and politician, declared in an interview for The Guardian our statute of autonomy, agreed between our parliament and the Spanish parliament in 2006, and then supported by our people in a referendum, was unilaterally rewritten by the Spanish constitutional court in 2010, in a case brought by Mariano Rajoy, now prime minister of Spain. Furthermore, the Spanish education minister, José IgnacioWert, has made explicit threats against Catalan language education and the Generalitat’s control over Catalan education, such as the ‘Wert Law’ in 2012. These events have changed the relationship between our citizens and the Spanish state. Having a distinct opinion with respect to the Catalan question, Marina Rodríguez (22), a student born and studying in Madrid, proclaims ‘as far as I am concerned, the Catalans believe they have the historical right to be independent, as well as having their own sense of identity and belonging to a Catalan nation. I can see why they claim it but I do not think it is legitimate. I think that it is a historical and cultural claim that has torn apart the national belonging of people of Spain’.

Lastly, some believe that propaganda plays a strong role in Catalonia with respect to the Catalan’s feeling of uniqueness in terms of culture, as exemplified by Cristina Fernández (21) and JoseluMontojo (21), two students from Madrid who affirm that, throughout time, the Catalan government has manipulated its population to trust in the cultural distinctiveness of Catalonia as opposed to Spain.

Despite this cultural discrepancy, the recurrent manifestations advocating Catalonia’s secession from Spain have become more prominent in the past two years due to the devastating impact of the financial and economic crises in Spain. As Carlos Rodríguez (21), a student in Madrid, explains ‘Catalonia has got it into their heads that it wants to be an independent state as it is being negatively affected by the rest of Spain’. Anna provides a much clearer view on the issue by stating ‘I think that most of the Catalans favor independence because they do not feel identified with Spain culturally. However, nowadays many more Catalans favor independence due to the economic crisis as many Catalans consider that the economic distribution within Spain has a huge negative impact in and for Catalonia; Catalonia having the highest regional debt within Spain’. Advocates of Catalan independence claim that, due to the fact that Catalonia currently provides the rest of Spain with €16bn a year, this amount-equivalent to 8% of regional GDP- would not only relieve Catalonia of debt and deficit but also provide for greater investment and a better welfare state.

Following the 2012 rejection by the Spanish government of a Catalan government proposition to possess the same fiscal relationship as enjoyed by the Basque country and Navarra, as well as fuelled by the aggravation the financial and economic crises have perpetrated in Spain, Catalan Prime Minister Artur Mas publicly pledged for secession and announced his intention of conducting a referendum in order for the people of Catalonia to voice their opinions and declared ‘although we contribute much more to the Spanish treasury than most regions, we get disproportionately less in return. Catalonia ends up with considerably less per capita public expenditure than the average for all Spanish regions. Madrid has not honored its financial commitment to us under the revised autonomy statute, while the Catalan people are effectively being told that we are not partners but subjects. Nonetheless, this referendum would not result in Catalan independence immediately if the outcome results are positive, but it will be conducted, according to Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’.

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Minister Mas’ words, in the form of a consultation that would then have to be agreed upon by the Spanish central government. Unlike the Scottish case for a secession referendum, which receives the support of British Prime Minister David Cameron, the Spanish government has voiced its firm opposition to Mr Mas’ promise, and has warned the Catalan government that if it goes ahead with its secessionist tendencies, the government would allow the Constitutional Court to ban this alleged referendum in advance.

‘In legal terms this action would be a coup d’état; There is no right to self-determination and no right to secession allowed by the Spanish Constitution’ Spanish minister for foreign affairs José Manuel García-Margallo declared for The Guardian. In response, Mr Mas declared in a speech on Catalonia’s national day September 11, 2013, ‘my commitment with our pledge for September 11, 2013, “my commitment with our pledge for the Basque country and Navarra enjoy. As Anna explained, Spain’s justification for why it opposes Catalonia’s independence is flawed: because Spain as a nation would disappear. Catalonia’s desire is to be independent, not to fragment Spain. The Basque Country does not want independence from Spain because Catalonia is thriving for secession. Rather, it is because Basques are too a different national identity within Spain, and as such, feel they should have their own sovereign state to defend their unique culture’. If this attempt of cultural understanding fails, however, Cultural Diplomacy could be exercised by the Spanish government by allowing the Catalan population to democratically express their opinion in a regional consultation. Here it is
important to distinguish between the terms legal and legitimate. Although the referendum would not be legal, as it is prohibited by the Spanish Constitution, it would be legitimate or imperatively moral and ethically correct, to permit the population of a given nation to decide over their future, particularly if it involves self-determination. Yet, not only can Cultural Diplomacy be utilized prior to an alleged referendum, but after, and if, the secessionist consultation fails. In this case, not only would Catalonia be in need of moral support after a failed attempt for independence, but, also, it would be the Spanish government’s duty to socially, economically, politically and culturally reintegrate Catalonia within the Spanish state through cultural diplomatic channels so as to cooperate with Catalonia on what it desires rather than imposing its will over it. Lastly, Cultural Diplomacy could also be in use during a hypothetical progression to self-determination after a favorable result in a potential referendum.

Having explored the opinions of young individuals, Catalans as well as non-Catalans, about the current situation in Spain, this article concludes that Cultural Diplomacy may certainly be a viable solution for the Catalan question in a vast amount of ways, all of which provide for positive future prospects for the Catalan region.

Jennifer Velasco

A diverse global landscape, novel developments and continuously interacting cultures and nations are creating trends which are becoming increasingly difficult to follow, especially when we address issues diplomatically. Today’s youth, who are actively living and shaping these contemporary realities, are a vital component in any attempt to comprehend the phenomena of globalization and transcontinental relations.

The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD) was established in order to strengthen intercultural relations in order to promote global peace and stability, with the help of Cultural Diplomacy. A significantly increased emphasis has been put recently on Cultural Diplomacy, which is seen as a tool of fostering better understanding between nations, as well as solving conflicts.
is aware that this is not a one-way street and that changes should be positive not only for employees but for employers as well since that is the only way to guarantee a successful working environment.

As a tool of implementation, the OYED proposes the creation of a central database named EQYouth (European Qualified Youth). Through this central database, which will be connected with Ministries of Labor and Education in each of EU member states, access to reliable and verified employers will be facilitated. EQYouth would target entry-level graduates in the EU and would offer all open vacancies posted by the participating firms and organizations, previously verified by the relevant Ministries of the EU member states. To make application procedures quick and transparent, there would be a standardized online form as an initial filter, which would select candidates for the further steps. To be able to have an improved, easier and more effective overview, the database would be divided into different industries and sectors to make the search procedure more convenient for the applicants and the companies as well.

Accordingly, in each sector a council of human resources specialists would filter applications according to the needs of employers, thus providing companies with a skilled labor force with the qualities they desire and necessitate. With the additional intention of presenting our project as a tool to fight against all kinds of discrimination in the EU, each member state should have at least one delegate as a member of the council. As our policies support equality, the system will provide the same opportunities regardless of nationality, sex, race (ethnic origin), marital status or disability. Moreover, some personal information of the applicants would be hidden from the companies, for example first name (for example: A. Smith) and gender.

To emphasize the importance of networking, the EQYouth will also work as a social network for the applicants where they can share their experiences, allowing for better communication. In addition, there would be also a question and answer forum between companies and applicants. Once the applicant is hired, rules for both employers and employees would exist in order to prevent discrimination.

To ensure the smooth functioning of the EQYouth system it is necessary to operate in a single language. The OYED considers English to be the Lingua Franca, not out of disrespect to other EU languages, but due to the fact that it is the sole transnational language that is used both in the EU and worldwide. It is vital to establish English as the Lingua Franca to further cooperation and development outside the EU, allowing the connection between youth and labor markets within the EU to the BRIC countries and the ACP. As the company could be based in any EU member state, the local language has to be taken into consideration too and therefore the knowledge of the local language can be an additional employer requirement.

The OYED’s focus is not limited to youth unemployment. Through ICD channels and Cultural Diplomacy as a tool, the OYED is reviving already existing initiatives on global issues such as the UNODC
Youth Initiative on positive drug awareness and healthy lifestyles in schools and communities, the UNESCO Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education and Civil Engagement, Democratic Participation and Social Innovation and the UN Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education. With their proper implementation a better Europe could be achieved, resulting in long term youth development and a better future for all. However, the OYED will not limit its mode of operation to EU borders, but aims to re-initiate transnational initiatives such as the UNESCO SHS Strategy on African Youth (towards an enabling policy environment for Youth Development and Civic engagement in Africa).

The aim of OYED initiative is to insert a cultural dimension into already existing projects. Cultural Diplomacy should be the main tool for youth involvement in politics and tackling the existence of the so called lost generation. Through channels of Cultural Diplomacy, the youth can contribute fresh and new ideas not only within the EU but on a worldwide scale. With EQYouth, the OYED is trying to transcend the barriers between employers and employees, aimed at the 'lost generation', meaning the graduates with academic qualifications yet a lack of professional experience.

With a classification system, EQYouth is granting future employees access to tailored job opportunities, and is providing employers which a qualified labor force, thus lowering unemployment and increasing welfare within the EU. At the OYED, we consider the EU to be a multi-cultural melting pot and as such, the integration of cultural perspectives in both youth and global issues is vital. Through cultural and educational exchange, a process already started with EU programs like Erasmus, the OYED is trying to intensify and extend these patterns to the global level. Much as small countries are using Cultural Diplomacy as a tool to establish their positions next to leading world powers in conducting their external relations, the youth of today is also using Cultural Diplomacy in a similar way to appeal to big companies, enterprises and organizations as future employers.

There exists a necessity for a common working language within the EQYouth initiative in order to allow for better coordination, not only in the culturally diverse and borderless EU, but also in relations with the rest of the world. Misunderstandings, lack of communication and incorrect translations could be avoided by using one language; respectfully and in coordination with local languages.

The ICD sees Cultural Diplomacy as being committed to intercultural dialogue and Soft Power as tools through which to resolve both local and global issues. The integration of the younger generation into such initiatives is crucial for the success of Cultural Diplomacy and its sustainability in the future. It is for these reasons that the OYED, a culturally mixed coalition of multiple actors, has been established as an operational arm of Cultural Diplomacy.

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