

Symposium: Global citizens addressing global challenges

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Discussion on citizenship, Part 2 of the Symposium, 20 November 2018 at UNESCO

Citizenship through the lens of today's world issues

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Profound reflection is needed to properly understand the importance of citizenship education in today's world. The world is undergoing changes giving rise to issues that significantly affect the notion of citizenship. We should thus ask ourselves about the different contexts and mechanisms that influence its meaning in order to redefine citizenship or, at least, to understand its various components.

The distinctive feature of today's world is that change is unfolding practically before our very eyes. Change is not new. It has always existed, accompanying evolution. However, save for certain watershed moments in history, change used to occur more slowly.

In recent decades, lightning-speed technological development has resulted in overwhelming and unsettling change that, although not the sole cause thereof, has led to major social transformations.

Other factors in this change include the climate crisis, which causes environmental problems that affect quality of life. Recurring economic crises also generate uncertainty. Mass unemployment aggravates life insecurity.

Despite the significant resources offered by development, throughout the world there are multiple deficiencies in healthcare and education services, and all these problems affect the lives of the women and men who suffer the consequences, thus hampering sustainable human development.

Crises, unemployment and lack of opportunities lead to instability, exacerbate conflicts, fan the flames of violence, precipitate population movements and threaten social cohesion and coexistence.

The mass migration of people results in significant and continuous contact between populations. Identities are perceived to be under threat, creating tensions and causing

people to become more inward-looking and withdrawn. In short, while the modern world makes progress possible, contact between different cultures exacerbates identity issues.

However, the process of globalization entails flexibility and an opening up of borders. It propagates a single economic model, one that is aggressive and destabilizing, which worsens economic and social inequalities and gives rise to job insecurity and social uncertainty.

Such concerns increase because globalization is perceived to impose a single cultural model upon the world, to the detriment of cultural identities. Multiculturalism is not always accepted by those who defend their cultural identity, even if, as stated by the sociologist Dominique Schnapper, "all societies are, by definition, multicultural".

Population movements, extensively covered by the media, are seen as relentless onslaughts. This breeds a feeling of invasion and of "cultural insecurity", as put by the sociologist Laurent Bouvet. In any country, while some people may feel like global citizens, others do not feel entirely at home. It thus behoves us to ensure that global citizenship education is tied in with education on globalization.

The concept of citizenship includes the notion of "city". The dictionary defines the adjective "citizen" as "a person who enjoys the right of citizenship; a member of a State, considered from the viewpoint of his or her duties and rights [...]";¹

Citizenship refers to the full recognition of an individual's status as a citizen. It has a legal aspect, since it concerns a person who belongs to a nation where he or she enjoys rights and is subject to duties.

The concept of citizenship includes several dimensions, including a philosophical and a psychosocial dimension.

Our changing world makes it necessary to build a global community based on the sharing of citizenship values. But which values should be shared? Tzvetan Todorov asked whether we could apply the same criteria to judge different actions rooted in different cultures. Norms and common values must be defined and taught through the educational systems and media of all countries around the world. The aim is to educate for a global citizenship linked to the awareness of a shared future and a common understanding of otherness. The Other, regardless of location in the world, must be understood to have similar values, to be a fellow citizen on whom any action has an impact and vice versa.

1 Le petit Larousse.

This means that the building of citizenship must involve reflection on difference, as it brings different groups and identities together around a common vision and a shared ideal. Building global citizenship therefore begins with the recognition of difference. Recognizing difference is the starting point for tolerance.

Education systems must instil common values through a culture of interculturality. Linguistic, cultural, and identity-based diversity can thus be advanced as a foundation for unity and understanding among peoples.

I had the opportunity to discuss this idea at a conference held in China in September 2018. The theme of the conference was the role of cultural diversity in building a global community with a shared future; special attention was paid to the protection of, access to, and promotion of language resources. In my speech, I sought to demonstrate the importance of integrating indigenous languages into the global community and of recognizing indigenous peoples as global citizens. This would help to further the mission of UNESCO to foster stability and peace.

By instilling a culture of interculturality and educating for diversity we can better manage conflicts stemming from the clash of languages, cultures and identities.

Global citizenship education should go hand in hand with reflection on globalization. This requires an educational approach to be better understood. We must also work to make it more equitable and less unequal, ensuring that everyone has access to quality education.

Such conditions would encourage the expression of cultural diversity and the construction of a global community centred on common citizenship values. In other words, to address the challenges of today's world, citizenship education should establish links between the various types of socialization involved in the social construction of the individual, to use the concepts expressed by the sociologist Bernard Lahire.

This is a long-term endeavour which requires "educational action and cultural mediation", in the words of the Pangée Network. Intercultural dialogue must be promoted through the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, access to quality education, in order to teach a culture of interculturality to all the world's students.

It would be necessary to establish a common base of knowledge, skills and culture of basic education and to extend it to all education systems. The objective would be to harmonize standards and criteria, to use common concepts to instil a shared culture. This approach is conducive to the awareness of a common destiny and to enhanced solidarity and mutual engagement among young people.

Harmonizing and unifying criteria do not entail the disregard of differences. On the contrary, they involve better recognition of specificities in order to ensure better interaction, develop diversity and build bridges between societies. This would be the most effective way of strengthening the culture of dialogue, tolerance and understanding among peoples.

Building a culture of global citizenship through Sustainable Development Goal 4 will encourage inclusive citizenship. The objective is, of course, to fulfil the mission of UNESCO and to build peace in the minds of men and women.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I now wish to mention the efforts undertaken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its Permanent Delegation to UNESCO to promote a culture of dialogue and peace.

For decades, Saudi Arabia has worked tirelessly to support dialogue among cultures and civilizations, through national and international centres. The country has established partnerships with UNESCO through its many centres and programmes, such as the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, which was founded in 2003 to combat extremism and terrorism.

Since 2011, the Centre has been working with UNESCO through the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Programme for a Culture of Peace and Dialogue. The Programme promotes dialogue, living together, intercultural understanding and non-violence, and seeks to spread the values of citizenship.

In conjunction with UNESCO, the Programme organized the Second International Conference on Youth Volunteering and Dialogue: Preventing Violent Extremism and Strengthening Social Inclusion, which took place from 25 to 27 September 2017.

In 2012, the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue was established in Vienna by Saudi Arabia in collaboration with Austria, Spain and the Holy See. The Centre seeks to foster dialogue and living together peacefully.

An annual Franco-Saudi forum for the dialogue of civilizations has been held in Riyadh and Paris since 2009.

A centre for deradicalization and a centre for moderation have also been established in Riyadh.

A regional centre for dialogue and peace is currently being established with UNESCO. It will be operating under the auspices of the Organization as a category 2 centre.

Within UNESCO, our Delegation proposes initiatives and promotes interaction between cultures and identities. We will continue our efforts to achieve the Organization's objectives, including the building of global citizenship.

Around the world, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre deploys considerable resources to assist refugees and displaced persons. The Centre strives to ensure the social and educational inclusion of Syrian refugees, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan, and of Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia is helping to restore living and housing conditions and health and education services in the wake of the destruction caused by conflicts and natural disasters. Fighting poverty and bolstering sustainable development are essential to strengthening the values of solidarity and building a global community and global citizenship.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, I would like to extend my wishes for the success of this symposium that is so necessary to the promotion of global citizenship. At UNESCO, in the interests of building peace, the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to UNESCO will continue to propose initiatives to foster intercultural contact, rapprochement among identities, and interaction among civilizations.

Thank you very much.

Professor Ibrahim Albalawi

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