

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT - NOT TOO YOUNG TO REMEMBER

CONTEXT & ORIGIN

More than ever, there is a need for young people to remember the past and be critical of multiple conflicting narratives about it, in order to be empowered as active European citizens. Young people today grow up in a world of globalization, increasing individualism and post-modernism where there are decreasing common reference points. As a consequence, there is a growing importance of the intangible values of heritage and memory on personal and collective identity formation. At the same time, the challenges the EU faces in dealing with external conflicts on the European periphery (e.g. Ukraine, Syria) as well as internal ones (e.g. Euro-scepticism, refugee crises) are deeply intertwined both with the past and with the common European values and identity.

Remembrance is the ongoing process of remembering, forgetting and creating narratives about the past. It is at the crossroads between history, citizenship, heritage and human rights, and for young people it represents an opportunity to learn about and be critical of the bigger picture issues related to past and current events, develop competences needed to be active citizens and expand their sense of European identity.

However, there are challenges to remembrance. In some formal education contexts, a victory/defeat paradigm remains present and national, often presenting a single perspective and narrow narrative. Political actors construct narratives about the past which serve their purposes and the sources of information which shape memory and remembrance have increased dramatically (e.g. media, social media, etc.). More than ever, it is thus important for young people to learn to be critical and to have an intercultural approach to remembrance.

As an organisation born in the aftermath of the second World War, embracing the ideals of intercultural understanding and respect to create more peaceful and just world, Youth For Understanding is a very natural actor in processes related to helping young people learn from the past in intercultural settings in order to become active global citizens. For the last 60 years, YFU organisations in over 50 countries around the world have organised year long youth exchanges with 15 to 18 year olds with the belief that such experiences have a profound influence on young people, developing deep connections and understanding between different peoples in the world.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The aim of “Not Too Young to Remember” is to organize a youth exchange for a group of young 15-18 year olds from different countries that will develop their sense of European identity and active citizenship through critical and intercultural remembrance activities.

The specific objectives of the project will be to:

— through workshops and visits to monuments and museums, provide a space for exchange and discovery on the topics of identity, power, culture and heritage;

- move physically and through time from WWI and WWII monuments to a discussion on media and conflict in the 21st century to develop their knowledge and critical sense of underlying issues that connect past conflicts to today's challenges;
- explore the topic of European identity and how it intersects with notions of culture and heritage;
- use non-formal education (especially experiential learning methods) to learn from each other and challenge different perspective (and national approaches) to remembrance; and
- explore the role of media and other informational channels in the process of remembrance and the way current events are portrayed.

PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND & NEEDS

Participants will be young people, aged 15 to 18 years old, living in different European countries and coming from different backgrounds. From a young age, individuals are exposed to the consequences of history, but they are often poorly equipped to make connections between historical events and today's challenges and conflicts. They are also exposed to multiple and conflicting stories and narratives about the past and its bearing on the present day. There is a need for young people to develop intercultural competences and a critical approach to remembrance and current narratives around conflict to prosper and be empowered to be active citizens in our increasingly interconnected world. There is also a need for a learning process which includes understanding our common, multifaceted European history and the conflicts which sadly marked its past. Teenagers need to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to fulfill their potential as active citizens, independent thinkers, and global players.

The group of participants in this exchange will be composed of both YFU Programme Participants and of their peers (other students, of the same age). YFU Programme Participants are secondary school students who participate in a long-term exchange programme (normally one year) in another country, during which they attend the local school and they live in a volunteer host family. Peers of those YFU Programme Participants (i.e. classmates and of the same age group) also be participants in the youth exchange. While the first subgroup has already experienced mobility, the second subgroup may be experiencing mobility for the first time. For the subgroup of their peers, this exchange would represent a great opportunity to expand horizons, and get out of their comfort zone. Even if with different backgrounds and perspectives, all participants share common needs and will gain through this exchange stronger awareness on the importance of remembrance to prevent and contrast conflicts, discrimination, and inaction. In addition to this, YFU programme participants will have the opportunity to reflect upon their role within their communities and within their groups of peers, as awareness raisers and actors for change.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

KNOWLEDGE

Participants will develop understanding of:

- European values and human rights

- greater societal issues the led to and were consequences of the first and second World Wars and links to today's conflict
- the different factors and influencing sources on remembrance processes and perceptions of today's conflicts (e.g. media, government, school, social media)
- different narratives and perspectives on past conflicts

SKILLS

By taking part in a diverse range of activities, participants will directly and/or indirectly gain skills to:

- be able to analyze and interpret historical facts for themselves
- be critical of narratives about past and current conflicts
- recognize use and abuses of history

ATTITUDES/BEHAVIOURS

We expect participants to develop:

- increased sense of European identity and sense of belong in relation to European values
- increase their motivation to become active citizens
- increased curiosity in the Other
- increased sense of agency and empowerment
- increased their skepticism of their own stereotypes and messages about "strangeness" and the Other, promoted for example by the media

These learning outcomes will be verified during the final written evaluation with the participants, where they will assess the degree to which they have reached those learning outcomes. There will also be debriefing sessions at the end of each day, called "Reflection Groups" that will help the facilitators monitor the development of the learning outcomes outlined above, thus enabling them to make small adaptations to the programme to best meet the participants' learning needs.

ACTIVITIES

The 5-day programme will combine field-visits, workshops, team-building activities, reflections in sub-groups, and other non-formal methods (especially experiential learning methods) that suit the needs of the learners. All educational activities will be highly interactive and will place the learners at the core of the process, so as to stimulate critical thinking and ability to see situations from different perspectives. Peer-learning will play an important role in the youth exchange. Through these diverse range of activities and interactions with people of different backgrounds, participants will develop crucial competences to challenge different (and national) perspective to remembrance. These newly reinforced competences, combined with an inspiring out-of-box experience, will empower participants to become active citizens and take responsibilities vis-à-vis today's challenges.

The youth exchange will take place in the Île-de-France, more specifically in the area of Paris and Val d'Oise. Participants will be lodged in the Val d'Oise, with field visits at WWI landmarks and museums foreseen in both Paris and different sites in the Val d'Oise area.

Visits are one of the educational tools used in this project, in view of combining knowledge and experience. Participants will visit the “Fort de Corneilles-en-Parisis” who played a role in both World Wars and represents a good example of war architecture. Constructed between 1874 and 1877, during the First World War the fort was equipped with anti-aircraft guns to counter raids against Paris. During the German occupation in the 40’s the fort was used by the German occupiers as an ammunition depot for the German navy.

Another visit is foreseen to the “Musée Territoire 14-18”, developed around the former front line, which cut the territory in two parts, between September 1914 to March 1917: in the North the German occupation, in the South the French front, and in between the trench warfare and the "No man's land. The visit to this open-air museum will allow participants to understand several aspects of this conflict and the way it shaped a landscape and changed the lives of an entire population.

Finally, participants will visit the most important war memorials in Paris, from the most well-known to those that can offer a different perspective on conflicts (like monuments erected in honor of soldiers from African French colonies).

The visits themselves will be carried out under the guidance and with the educational support of experienced touristic guides and history experts, debriefed using non-formal education methods provided by the YFU Group Leaders. Methods will build upon the the work of the Council of Europe which has a collection of non-formal education methods on the topic of remembrance in its new version of Compass (Repères). Interactive theatre methods are also envisaged to be used. We also anticipate that at least one of the YFU facilitator will have a professional background in history.

There will be a meeting with a war journalist, who will share the experience of living (and telling) a conflict from a unique perspective and will discuss with participants on the role of media in portraying conflicts and influence public opinion.

Workshops, led by Group Leaders, will explore the following topics: identity, power, culture and heritage. Not only participants will gain a better understanding of past conflicts and they way they have contributed to the creation of a European identity, but they will also be able to challenge preconceived notions and paradigms of remembrance, often spread by mainstream communication.

Other activities will be rather aimed to team-building, experience sharing, and reflection on current global challenges. Movies, games and other entertaining activities will be organised too.

PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP IN SCHOOLS

As mentioned in the participant preparation section, participants will be asked to contact their history teachers before leaving for the youth exchange to determine if they would be able to make some kind of presentation in school on what they learned during the youth exchange, or create some other type of project. This will then expand the impact of the content (especially in terms of awareness of the issues explored within the youth exchange) to the classmates and schoolmates of all of the project's' participants.