

The Innovative Social Skills of Youth in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

In the late 1960s, the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, who worked in the fields of culture and personality, published *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*,¹ in which she constructed a typology about how new and old generations interrelate. She coined the expression “postfigurative” or slow transformation to refer to a society in which young people learn not only about religion, but also local cultural aspects from adults; “configurative”, to refer to a society of moderate change, in which new and old generations learn from each other; and “prefigurative”, which is future-oriented or an accelerated transformation. Citing Mead, “it will be the child—and not the parent and grandparent—that represents what is to come.”

In its time, this study was provocative but no less interesting for that, and was very forward-looking. On the back cover of the first edition of Mead’s book, published by the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 1970, we read: “In 1968 a fifteen-year old boy wrote: ‘There is a mass confusion in the minds of my generation in trying to find a solution for ourselves and the world around us. We see the world as a huge rumble as it swiftly goes by with wars, poverty, prejudice, and the lack of understanding among people and nations. Then we stop and think: there must be a better way and we have to find it.’ He was expressing the thoughts of articulate youth the world over who comprise the post-World War II generation. Heirs to a legacy of war, prejudice, and economic and political injustice, their task is to rebuild a society convulsed by its sudden burst into the electronic age. Today, because the whole world is caught in the same electronically produced, intercommunicating network, youth have an experience that their elders never had.”

When she wrote *Culture and Commitment*, American culture was in crisis due to the changes in economics, technology and mentality taking place in the 1960s. At that time, youths showed a hitherto unseen activism, the result of several factors such as the emergence of a world community, the 20th-century scientific and medical revolution – which produced a great rise in the population – and radio and television broadcasts on a global scale. The concept of “generation gap” is merely a statement of egalitarian ideals, which should not be confused with the genuine changes in technology, population growth or pollution that already existed and have now only increased.

1. Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*, Garden City, NY, Natural History Press/Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970.

In her work, she recognises that prefigurative culture involves generational drawbacks, and the key to bypassing them is to find real communication. Is this possible? In my opinion, Mead's theory helps us as a reference for what has been happening in our countries, whether in the North or South, for two decades. The expansion of prefigurative culture is related to the fact of being born in an era with unprecedented communication and information technologies, in which we see the crisis of authority of governments who have been unable to meet the demands of the public and, even less so, those of a mass of youth with few future expectations.

The challenge facing young people is enormous in a complex society, as Edgar Morin has called it for decades: wars, migration, precariousness, artificial intelligence. . . . If pollution was already known about in the last century, it is difficult for negationists to deny it today. Thus, although the main analysts speak of the birth of a generation of citizen journalists and activist bloggers, we only need to look at the current practices to see that youth, and particularly the youngest, wish to go further. This has been the motivation for describing here some of the skills possessed by today's youths in the Euro-Mediterranean region, as well as their fears and difficulties, because diversity is not only a theoretical characteristic of globalisation but also of the neighbourhoods, the companies and the people we regularly interact with.

I suppose that, today, Margaret Mead would have added a few nuances related to using communication so that it is effective in a period in which it seems that we are overinformed. But, as the fifteen-year-old said in the 1960s, there is a great confusion caused by the proliferation of wars with weapons that are far more sophisticated than before. Medicine has made great advances, but we have also suffered ultraliberalism in health and the Covid-19 pandemic. We are at a stage when, despite the existing social gaps, the youngest – even children, as the anthropologist predicted – master the new technologies and fight more forcefully against climate change in a world that constantly produces a large amount of waste that endangers the habitability of our planet.

The dossier we present here brings together some of the skills and best practices being applied by youth in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is divided into three sections: Creativity, Values and Self-Esteem; Social and Environmental Entrepreneurship and New Technologies; and Multilevel and Civil Society to Empower Youth. This issue, number 35 of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, also includes interviews with two creative young women: the Palestinian environmental activist Abeer Butmeh and the award-winning Lebanese filmmaker Sarah Francis, as well as the stories by the three winners of the 2022 literary contest "A Sea of Words". It also features the usual Cultural Overview section.

Perhaps the structure of the dossier is somewhat random because many of the authors share a general methodology, although it is later applied to differentiated interests or events. Some youths prefer to explore the reasons why they have decided to create an association based on their personal experiences, while others show how they work with their partners and/or why it is so necessary for civil society and local and international authorities to cooperate regularly. For this reason, we have considered it appropriate to feature some projects developed by youths from different countries in which they show their innovative skills, and through which they manage to be more efficient. When we

speak of innovation, we are not only referring to everything related to communication technologies but also to ethical values, entrepreneurship, and the attempt to change mentalities. Although today our world is so diverse, and we all hope that Margaret Mead's dream is fulfilled in terms of what we can learn from each other and the key role of interculturalism, the truth is that the mentalities are still far from this harmonious vision. In many countries we might say that there is a backwards tendency, although young people are the spearheads and are not afraid of fighting and coming together to improve the world and make it more just and intercultural. In this respect, we have sought to give a voice to youths whose methodology, applied to their projects with the appropriate adaptations, can be reproduced in several geographical fields.

Creativity, Values and Self-Esteem

It is not easy to promote positive values if they cannot be expressed in an emotional way that becomes rational in order to perceive what is unseen, although it may hurt or not be understood. Art is a tool that, as revealed by some of the projects featured here, helps us recognise and create spaces of inclusion, as well as giving a meaning to what had been disregarded.

The project "Antigone 2.0 Mediterranean" is a story of educational and theatre innovation based on an idea by the teacher Miroslav Minić that emerged during the literature classes at the secondary school in Danilovgrad, a city in Montenegro. It is also a story about the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly Foundation, which resulted in a youth project that managed to connect several shores, five countries, around ten schools, and teachers and students from all over the Mediterranean basin. Over seventy students and their teachers wrote texts inspired by the Sophocles classic and created their Antigones in plays from Podgorica and Valencia to Oran, Rabat, Asilah, Nador and Beirut. The result is the documentary *Antigone 2.0 Méditerranée*, screened in different festivals in the region and that pays witness to this teaching innovation initiative.

Philippe Ternes challenges us: if we want to participate in some way in the future that awaits us, we must first try to imagine it. To do so, the Our Common Future association proposes a letter where Jenny, the sender, explains what the world around her is like, which is very different from ours. According to the performance of humankind as a whole and the evolution of global challenges, individual learning objectives are constantly adapted. In addition, individuals learn much faster because they can instantly immerse themselves in any kind of environment and live a myriad of experiences every day. Ternes' article is an invitation to reflect on the world of the future and our part in it.

Music is an ideal language to take stock of the expression of emotions, the traditions of peoples, social movements, culture and cultures, and the order and rupture of the established systems. In this article, the Arabists Pilar Garrido and Pedro Rojo bring us closer to current Arab music, a field in which young artists manage to empower other youths faced with resistance and the expression of new values, not only in Arabic but also in

their native languages. Providing a list of young artists from all Arab countries would be an endless endeavour, but the authors introduce us to some of them and give us a taste of the diverse musical styles, performers, meanings and successes of these youths, especially women, who encourage us to get to know a sound world that is unknown for many.

Lithuania is one of the European countries with the worst conditions for LGTBIQ+ people, who are subjected daily to a range of hardships, discrimination and deprivation of fundamental rights that affect their mental health. As Austėja Lukminaitė, from the Tolerant Youth Association, states, in recent years several initiatives have emerged in the country that address problems such as depression and lack of self-esteem of the youngest LGTBIQ+ people using art therapies. In their project, art is a tool that improves their perception of themselves and creates safe spaces where they can share experiences, feel accepted and find their own place in the community.

It is undeniable that Euro-Mediterranean youths have emerged as dynamic agents of transformation in a world where the role of young people in driving innovation and social progress is crucial. Marvin Mendy, Head of International Cooperation in the Marseille-based association Les Têtes de l'Art, tells us in his article that at the forefront of this movement stands the Mediterranean Youth Council (MYC), a platform that brings together over 30 active participants representing 14 countries, working across five thematic areas: Economy, Education and Entrepreneurship; Society and Interculturality; Digitalisation, Gender and Discrimination; and Environment and Climate.

Innovating from the margins, doing something new and unexpected, involves proposing something valuable, different from other things that have already been provided, which often means that the fresh proposals – particularly if they come from people with limited resources – are not understood and appreciated by society. However, innovating from the margins can also be an opportunity to exploit a margin of action to do something different with a positive impact on society. Fatima Ezzamouri, Project Manager of the Asociación Sobre Los Márgenes and member of the Spanish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation, tells us that innovating from the margins is necessary because, in this way, people with fewer resources can break down the stereotypes that are often applied to them and speak out, becoming the drivers of social change.

In the same vein, the young university students Hind Rzigui and Safiya Kerchaoui have created the antiracist project G-CHIME for the social inclusion of Muslim women and against gendered Islamophobia. In recent years, with the rise of the extreme right and increased migration, discrimination against the groups and minorities that make up European societies has grown. In Spain, as in many other Western countries, the social inclusion of diversity is far from a reality and, therefore, several youth associations have been forced to take the initiative to slowly address the needs of the community given the inadequate measures provided by the institutions. With their work, they endeavour to palliate the lack of institutional resources to make this country a more inclusive place that recognises its own diversity.

Taking as a motto Albert Einstein's quotation "It is easier to disintegrate an atom than a prejudice", Amal Khadiri and Liana Maria Ionita refer, based on their own experiences, to how

difficult it is to fight against prejudices rooted in our society. Most migration stories start in a small boat, but reality shows that cars and roads are much more frequent. Thus, the authors provide two examples: the first begins on a road in North Africa; the second, in Eastern Europe. Two cardinal points, two girls, two cultures, two different routes and a single destination. Telling these two stories involves describing a journey and the acceptance of uprooting and nostalgia.

Currently, there are many voices and views concerning youths which, in a rather paternalistic way, are superimposed on the voices and views of young people themselves. This means that they experience many difficulties when participating in diverse spaces and processes of social and community life, mainly in terms of decision-making and putting words into actions. María Arroyo tells us how the Asociación Juvenil Talasa was founded through a group of young people with the aim of reflecting their voices and ideas in international projects and in non-formal education opportunities from the grassroots. Thus, since 2021, the association has managed to generate synergies to export them to all those interested in continuing to create and learn.

Social and Environmental Entrepreneurship and New Technologies

We have explained above how the youngest are often active agents of social change. Here, we would like to mention the Children and Youth Pavilion at COP27 and describe how young people came together to inspire the world in 2022. In his enthusiastic article Saad Uakkas, medical doctor and Programme Manager and Logistics Coordinator of the Children and Youth Pavilion at COP27, provides an example to follow. The 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP27 and held in November 2022 in Egypt, witnessed an unusual event: children and young people had a leading role thanks to the space given to them, a pavilion organised and led by them, where, over 10 days, a series of events took place around the issues of concern to them: water, energy, adaptation, health and indigenous communities, among others. It was a unique and inspiring moment in which children and young people enjoyed their own platform where they could speak out and interact with each other and with the political leaders present at COP27. The pavilion achieved a series of milestones ranging from the union between young people and the strengthening of links with their peers and adults to the creation of a space to develop their skills, reflect, and exchange and defend their points of view in an inspiring environment.

If we talk about entrepreneurship, there is no doubt that, to prevent young people from leaving rural areas, they must have planned resources. The area of Vardousia, in Greece, which is very mountainous and rural, has suffered from serious depopulation for many years, as well as numerous lacks in essential services. Philip Duzdabanian, researcher in Sustainable Development for Ecosystems and Environmental Change at the University of Utrecht, shows us how rural tourism, promoted through projects such as Dorida, can meet the needs of the population when it comes to choosing places for leisure, as well as how to make these depopulated places a permanent residence for young people seeking

employment and affordable housing. In 2022, the NGO Ecogenia carried out the Dorida project – whose second phase will begin in 2023 –, a programme to implement sustainable rural tourism in a remote area of central Greece, between Alpochori and Zoriano.

Doctoral theses have been written showing that rural tourism is a way for women to acquire autonomy, and they are the ones who make sure that these projects are sustainable. For example, Malika Aït Nasser, a doctor at the Ait Melloul University in Agadir, gives us examples focused on the Moroccan region of Guelmin. The main focus of her research is a global analysis of the mechanisms that characterise rural tourism and rural women's autonomy projects by demonstrating the existence of their reciprocity in constructing local development. The abundance of tourist resources in the provincial rural world and the embryonic nature of the tourism sector show the responsibility of local actors in their ability to take advantage of the support for state programmes and policies and thus stimulate local development of a human and social nature. The dynamics of the actors in the creation of socially-committed economic projects in the rural world and the support of women explain the quality of some very good results in the cooperatives introduced in the tourist circuits. The promotion of local products and the support of women's associations are essential in the projects.

The young Moroccan Chadi Tounzi, from the National School of Management and Commerce at Hassan I University, explores the benefits of switching to renewable energy through cryptocurrency. The energy requirements of cryptomining, i.e., the process of generating cryptocurrencies, have come under increasing scrutiny due to the significant environmental impact of traditional energy sources. Thus, a growing number of cryptomining operations are exploring the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind and hydroelectric power, to run their operations. Sustainability and respect for the environment can be very profitable, especially as the cost of solar and wind energy continues to fall.

Hajar Al Hawari, a Catalan of Moroccan origin with a Master's Degree in Access to the Legal Profession at the Barcelona School of Management (BSM – UPF), works in the legal department of the Fundació Eurecat and argues in her article that the younger generations are the first to see the negative components of the technologisation of our societies and, therefore, those same generations must take a step back to consider what technology should bring us, not only from the perspective of utility and comfort, or the so-called hard impact, but from the focus of the community of values, norms and principles that make up a society, or what some call the soft impact of technology, a variable not valued by the scientific community in recent times. This second dimension is increasingly apparent in sectors such as the social media, whose ever more sophisticated algorithms are capable of dictating the emotional state of users based on the information they present on their screens.

Multilevel Governance: Institutions and Civil Society to Empower Youth

The Anna Lindh Foundation, created in 2005 as a network of networks and with more than three thousand organisations in forty-three countries, includes among its main objectives

working for young people in Europe and in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. In his article, the young Alessandro Lamonica, doctor and current coordinator of the ALF in Brussels, explains the project of the Mediterranean Youth in Action programme to promote change through the implementation of policies prepared by the Foundation. Although in recent years the European Union and its partners have developed various policies and initiatives to promote and enable the participation of young people, the Anna Lindh Foundation is preparing the Mediterranean Youth in Action programme, whose objective is to empower, engage and connect youths in the Euro-Mediterranean region and increase their participation in political decision-making processes. The young representatives of the programme will have the possibility of joining policy-makers and making decisions in relevant national and international forums to develop leadership skills and influence public policies. The programme will bring together a constellation of initiatives whose potential to influence the region's cultural, social, economic and political landscape is enormous, as is the responsibility to make it happen together.

Màriam Lutfi Royo, from the Directorate General of Foreign Action at the Government of Catalonia, focuses on a pressing problem by acting on a specific area in a multilevel project. Today, one of the main demographic trends in the Mediterranean region reflects a clear decrease in the young population on the northern shore, compared to a notable increase on the southern shore. It is, therefore, necessary to open spheres of joint cooperation that enable us to ensure the wellbeing of young Mediterranean citizens. It is in this framework where the Shababuna project was created, which embraces a wide range of actors and aims to strengthen the skills of the regional and local authorities, as well as the civil society organizations in the Moroccan region of L'Oriental to raise awareness and better inform its youths about the risks of and alternatives to irregular migration. In this meeting space of multiple actors, young people can play a more active role in defining their own future.

However, within the framework of migration, projects that influence not only youths but also their families are also needed. In this case, young people are the agents of change: thus, they promote intercultural and inclusive education for migrant families, as explained by the social and cultural anthropologist Mariana Rico Montaña based on the successful AFEX project. The participation of youths as facilitators, student volunteers and internship university students has allowed the creation of a multilingual, multilevel and intergenerational environment, thereby contributing to the intercultural and inclusive education of migrant families. In addition, the participation of young people with their families has had a formative and personal development value that has made them committed citizens capable of transforming their environment.

Let's change the geographical focus to explore a country that has been and is a generator of migration, Turkey. Necdet Saglam, Co-Head of the Turkish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation, argues that in recent years this country has experienced a significant boom in its entrepreneurial and business activity and, more specifically, in the so-called social entrepreneurship, in which many young people have been interested, driven by a range of initiatives, programmes and funds launched by the government. These young people, many of them

social entrepreneurs, assume business leadership from an innovative perspective that aims to cover a social need that the system cannot reach. To do so, they invent and adapt their own resources and tools, often with the help of universities, which, in recent years, have also made an effort to meet the demand of young people and help them find development opportunities. Thus, youth entrepreneurship is a very promising and advantageous self-employment option in Turkey, which young people take advantage of without hesitation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has not only affected our physical health and wellbeing, but has also resulted in a breakdown of communication and dialogue between different cultures and communities. With travel restrictions and closed borders, the pandemic has made it difficult for people from different parts of the world to connect and engage with each other. This has led to a sense of isolation and disconnection, particularly among young people. In this context, Thamer Hadded, a Tunisian civil society activist, explains that the third Euro-Arab Youth Forum, held in Sousse, Tunisia, in 2021 and organised by We Love Sousse, was a unique opportunity for young people from across the Mediterranean to come together, share their experiences, and discuss the importance of intercultural dialogue in the post-Covid-19 world. These are necessary experiences that require the joint participation of civil society and institutions.

Undoubtedly, the article by the Youth Delegate of Hungary to the United Nations, Margit Offenbächer Csenge, is a very hopeful hymn of young people for diversity and equality. According to the author, today's youths, who make up 16% of the world's population, are seeing how governments and institutions are increasingly trying to include them in their programmes and agendas, which is bringing about unprecedented change. In this youth initiative in an increasingly connected and global world, diversity undoubtedly plays an essential role in the development and growth of young people as a fundamental pillar of society. Thanks to their early exposure to new technologies, they are aware of this diversity and must convert it from the outset into a basic tool for learning about and understanding the world. This, in turn, can give them a set of very important skills when it comes to facing the social, cultural and economic challenges that await them in the best conditions. In this respect, it should be noted that the number of young people who decide to adopt leadership roles in politics, business, non-governmental organizations and other sectors is increasing. They all break barriers and stereotypes to make their voices heard and fight for the causes they believe in.

In this issue we also present some outstanding names and surnames such as Abeer Butmeh, a brave Palestinian woman from the city of Nablus, an environmental activist and current coordinator of the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network, comprising 14 organisations working for the environment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Network has been a member of the international organisation Friends of the Earth since 2008 and is undertaking different political advocacy and protest campaigns with the aim of influencing environmental policies and Palestinian public opinion. Interviewed by the also young journalist Ibrahim Rifi, Abeer Butmeh argues: "There is no climate justice without gender justice."

Young Arab women directors are making their mark in the world film panorama with documentaries tackling subjects ranging from personal experiences and feelings to depicting love stories. As Sergi Doladé, director of the International Association of Independent Producers of the Mediterranean (APIMED), says, there is a new generation of Arab women filmmakers worthy of admiration and praise, constantly striving to perfect their craft and take Arab narratives to global heights. And in that, they have succeeded. Time after time, Arab women directors are making history, and they are doing so with apt portrayals of what Middle Eastern and North African societies are really like, defying the cultural stereotypes that for decades were perpetuated by Hollywood. Sergi Doladé interviews one of the leading emerging Arab women filmmakers, Sarah Francis, who grew up and studied in Beirut. Since 2005 she has been working as a freelance director for many production companies and has participated in several workshops and labs. Her first feature documentary film *Birds of September* (2013) premiered in the CPH:DOX Festival main competition and was screened in various international festivals. The film was recognised with several awards in France, South Korea, Ireland and Morocco. Her work also includes short films such as *Nawal's Rituals* produced in 2014. In 2020, her second feature film *As Above, So Below* premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival and was very well received internationally. The same year, she reconnected with painting, a practice she had been exploring sporadically and privately over the years.

This dossier dedicated to “The Innovative Social Skills of Euro-Mediterranean Youth” closes with a long-standing but no less innovative project: the contest for young Euro-Mediterranean writers aged between 18 and 30 “A Sea of Words”. Organised since 2008 by the IEMed in collaboration with the national networks of the Anna Lindh Foundation, it is a programme that, in addition to encouraging young people to express themselves freely in their narratives, creates spaces for intercultural encounters between a minimum of ten selected writers in order to promote exchanges of experiences and ideas among peers, identify shared values in the region and overcome the stereotypes that divide us. Thus, its objective is to provide young people with tools that allow them to play a prominent role in the societies of the future and actively promote the values of diversity and coexistence in the Euro-Mediterranean region. In this issue we present the three winning stories of the 15th edition corresponding to 2022 with the motto “Youths in the Forefront of Gender Equality”.

The twenty projects that appear in this issue are obviously not the only ones or the best, because there are thousands of projects and best practices in the Euro-Mediterranean region, but they are sufficiently representative of the needs and multiple transformative actions carried out by young people that can be applied to other fields. In these projects, the need to create safe spaces where young people can express and empower themselves is clear. It is also essential to point out the importance of civil society as a creative element and grouper of skills within formal and informal education, and the need for local, regional, state or international institutions to be involved in projects so that they are sustainable. Only in this way will we achieve the desired change in mentality, which is so necessary to attain the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

I started by quoting a work published in the last century by the anthropologist Margaret Mead and I would like to end with a quote from the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi, a poet, traveller and Andalusian wiseman from the 12th century: “Between the known and the unknown there is an intermediate stage called *barzakh*. The *barzakh* is the space of mutation, that is, the space of images and representations.” What, then, is imagination for a Sufi master like Ibn Arabi?, asks the poet and essayist Adonis in one of his latest works, to which Ibn Arabi responds by saying that “in the beginning there is absolute imagination, called cloud (*ama*) and considered the universal presence and the unifying degree. This image receives the images of beings and imagines what does not yet exist.”

Maria-Àngels Roque

Editor-in-Chief of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*