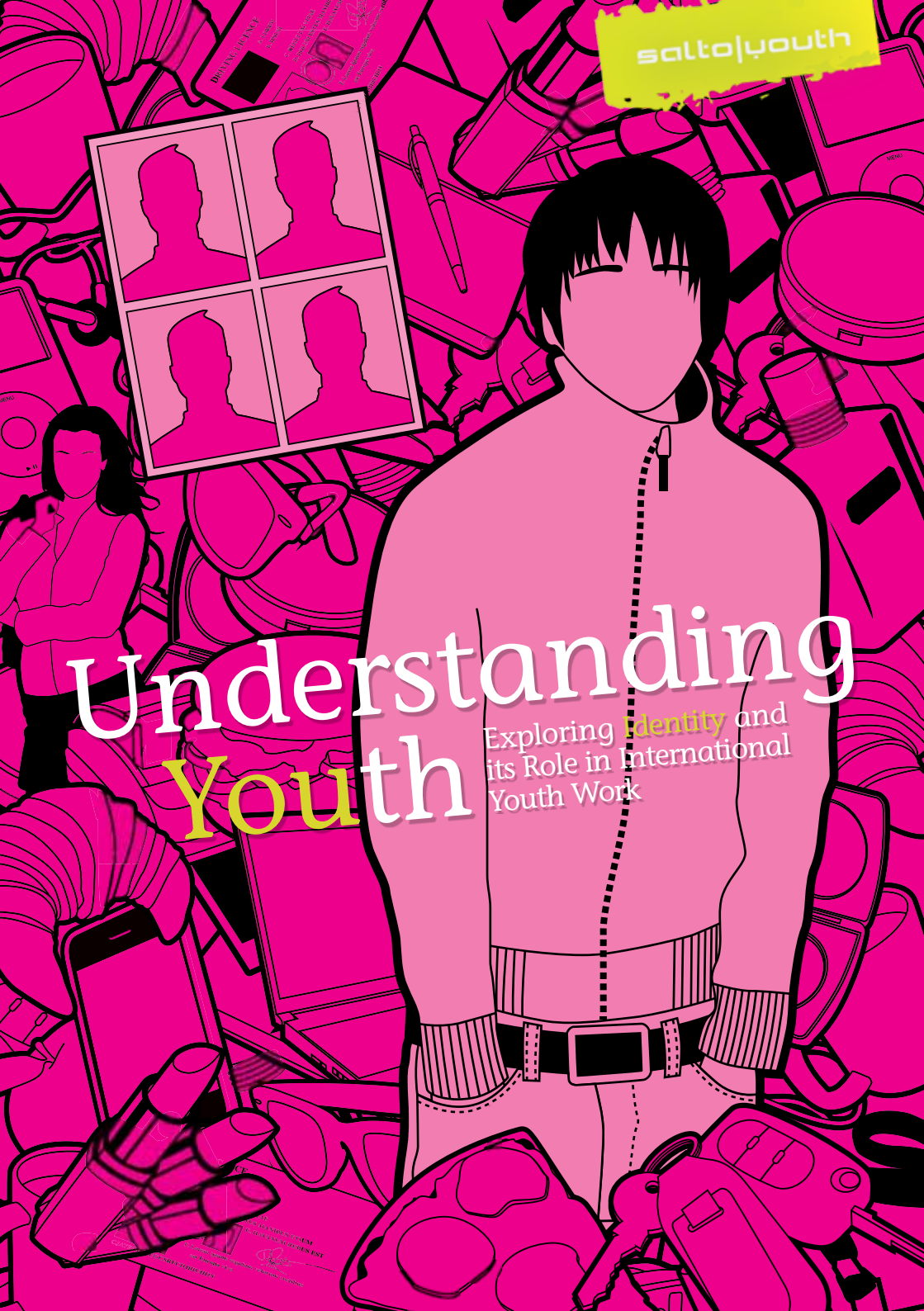


Understanding Youth

Exploring **Identity** and its Role in International Youth Work



SALTO SALTO-YOUTH Cultural Diversity Resource Centre

SALTO stands for 'Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities'.

SALTO-YOUTH is a network of 8 resource centres working on European priority areas within the youth field supporting the European Commission's 'Youth in Action' Programme.

The SALTO-YOUTH Cultural Diversity Resource Centre is based at the UK National Agency, in the British Council offices in London. We provide support, information and training courses on Cultural Diversity issues relevant to different countries and regions in and around Europe. We also provide a website with tools, methods, materials and links which workers and organisations can access.

All publications and tools are freely downloadable on our website:

www.salto-youth.net/diversity



Youth in Action Programme

The Youth in Action Programme (2007 – 2013) is funded by the European Commission and provides young people and youth workers with a variety of opportunities for non-formal learning with a European dimension. Its general objectives are:

- Promotion and development of young people's active citizenship
- Solidarity and social cohesion
- Development and promotion of quality support systems
- European-wide cooperation

The programme supports projects such as Youth Exchanges, Youth Initiatives, Youth Democracy Projects, the European Voluntary Service, trainings, networking activities and much more!

For further information visit the website of the European Commission:

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm



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EXTRA : Personal Companion 'Discover Yourself'

INTRODUCTION

Who am I? What is my identity and personal culture? What do I like or dislike? When do I feel good, when do I feel bad? How do I cope with things?



When looking at cultural diversity, we reflect on topics such as tolerance, living together, how to fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia. But first, we should all take a step back and challenge ourselves. Intercultural learning is about looking at the other, the different and the diverse, but we can only really see the other, when we first look at the self.

Who am I? What is my identity and personal culture? What do I like or not like? When do I feel good, when do I feel bad? How do I cope with things?

It is essential for a person to be aware about themselves in order to learn from others, other personal cultures and not only nationalities. Who are they? And how can we interact and share?

For many years, [SALTO-YOUTH Cultural Diversity Resource Centre](#) has placed the topic of 'identity' at the heart of its trainings as an essential step towards intercultural learning. We think it is important to further support the exploration of the topic 'identity', and its role in international youth work.

The authors of this publication have gathered and digested for you many theories, models, methods, and real life stories from young people and youth workers. This has been done in order to create a tool specifically adapted to the needs of youth workers and anybody working with young people.

This publication contains:

- theories and models to explore the notion of 'identity'
- methods and tools to be used in youth activities
- personal insights from young people and youth workers involved in the Youth in Action Programme
- a personal companion for your own self-reflection

We hope this booklet will be a useful resource and an inspiration for international youth work practice.

[SALTO-YOUTH Cultural Diversity Resource Centre](#)

About the Methods and Activities

There are many methods facilitating a reflection on personal identity. The attached companion to this publication is one of them and we encourage you to try it out!



Everytime you see this image it signifies that you have a Method to use in your workshop



Find the companion to this publication tucked in the inside cover of this booklet

A method is a tool; it is a means, not an end. Do not use these methods for the sake of using them. Use them to help you reach your educational objectives or as a way to help your group to look at issues that matter to them from different perspectives.

It goes without saying that a method explained in a book is never exactly the same as a method facilitated with a group. You will always have to adapt to the young people you are working with, the size of the group, the

level of previous reflections and the following steps in your programme. This is also the reason why we do not mention any timing; the time you will need depends too much on your particular situation.

We try to present the methods in a comparable format, but we regard the content more important than the format.

As it is impossible to fit into this publication all the methods that (to our knowledge) are connected to the notion of identity, we propose to present here a few, hoping to stimulate your curiosity to search for more or to develop your own.

Talking about identity in any of its forms, (identity development, identity crisis, conflicting interests, future developments and plans, etc.), can be a sensitive topic. Make sure you know your group and that the participants are comfortable with each other before you ask them to expose or share their reflections with others. To analyse the way we have become who we are and where we want to go, can bring up traumatic experiences, particularly with groups that have experienced hardship, discrimination or violence. Allow everyone to move at their own pace, allow them to keep their reflections to themselves, and give them space to decide to not take part.

Identity is a fascinating topic for international youth work. We encourage you to be creative and develop ways that suit your group to reflect, share, discuss and debate how their environment has impacted them and how they impact their environment.

Enjoy!

1 WHY-DENTITY Identity in International Youth Work

What do I learn about identity through my youth projects? What do I learn about myself and others? And why does it even matter?



1.1 - Mapping Identity Related Issues in the Youth in Action Programme

Participating in an international youth event can be very exciting. We can meet other cultures, experience diversity and develop projects together with people from different backgrounds. This can provoke – at times consciously and at other times unconsciously – young people to ask themselves: What connects me with, and what distinguishes me from others? What is my role in a group? What shapes my identity? Who am I?

The activities of the *Youth in Action* Programme help young people to deal with these questions. Various projects provide the opportunity for young people to live and work together in diverse communities. Throughout the processes taking place during those projects young people are given the chance to discover and develop their own identity through their interaction with others.

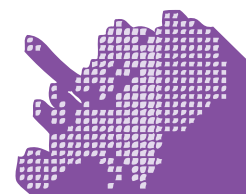
International and/or intercultural encounters are often spaces for ‘crisis’ of identity. When people from such a variety of nationalities and cultures come together, different values and lifestyles clash and raise questions about differences and similarities. By facing those questions and dealing with possible answers, the ‘crisis’ has the chance to grow and further develop the individuals identity through the educational processes that take place.

The experience of the *Youth in Action* Programme very often touches issues related to identity, the most common ones being:

- the development of young people’s self-esteem
- the development of young people’s sense of belonging
- critical reflection on shared and diverse values in Europe



The activities of the Youth in Action Programme help young people to deal with a lot of questions about identity



- the promotion of the value of diversity amongst different groups, countries and cultures
- critical reflection on related controversial issues, including ethnicity, cultural and national identities, as well as minority/majority relations
- the understanding of multiple identities, beliefs, cultures, traditions and histories of the people in Europe and the recognition that these have shaped and continue to shape life on our continent
- the promotion of human rights and raising awareness of how to challenge racism and discrimination
- participation in building a European identity through the active participation of young people
- dealing with phenomena such as migration, economic inequality, conflicts, and media that structurally influence and at times constrain personal and group identities

Looking at these issues makes it obvious that identity is important and so it often appears as a topic in *Youth in Action* Programme projects. Even if the young people might not always be aware of it, identity, either their personal one or group identities, play a crucial role in most of the projects.

The following series of questions is what we will explore in this publication:

- What the notion of identity in the area of youth work implies?
- How young people can identify issues related to identity?
- Why it can be very fruitful for youth workers as well as for the young people to learn more about their own and other people's identity?



Identity often appears as a topic in Youth in Action Programme projects



Luca Sparnacci

Training Course on European Citizenship

During the European Citizenship Training Course we found a lot of issues and results about differences in identity and their importance for a sense of belonging and correlated respect. The topic of identity is important for youth because that is the time when they grow and radicalize their sense of belonging. It is necessary to try to know your own limits and to confront yourself with others in order to change or confirm them. It is important to have a good perception of yourself. This is part of your self evaluation and knowing your own capacities. ■



Simona Fisichella

European Voluntary Service in Belfast

During the EVS you are constantly in touch with people from very different cultures. The best use you can do of your EVS is to share your own cultural identity with the others and get to know and understand as many different realities as possible. As people will make questions about your origins, you start thinking about your own culture, country, history and some aspects of your personality that you never thought were influenced by your cultural identity. On the other hand, you learn so much about other countries (both near and far away).

The cultural dialogue is always really intense among the people doing an EVS and it involves the local community as well. It was a very positive surprise seeing how positive the atmosphere is when people from 20 different countries, 4 different religions and so many other differences come together. It was very enriching and stimulating when we were having dinner together (squeezed on 3 small sofas with never enough glasses available). Our motto was: "If it works in this living room, it should work out there as well!" ■





Alena Felcmanova

German-Czech Youth Forum (www.dtjf.de)

I am part of the “German-Czech Youth Forum”, a group of 40 young people from Germany and the Czech Republic who get involved in a better cooperation between the people from those two countries.

Within several working groups we develop and coach different projects over two years according to topics such as Europe, culture, migration, integration, education etc. Most of the people involved are bilingual. I think identity and language respectively linguistic concepts always go together. When I speak in another language than my mother tongue, I just can't be myself a 100 per cent. There is this kind of identity barrier. You feel it the most when it comes to jokes. You don't understand all jokes people make and you can't translate all your own jokes into other languages with the same effect. When I came to Germany a couple of years ago I was quite frustrated at the beginning especially because my jokes didn't work and I couldn't understand theirs.

I also have the impression I don't care that much what I say in a foreign language, it doesn't touch me that much. The connection is missing. For instance swear words don't touch me that much, because I don't feel them.

You can even notice this language barrier during international seminars. Everyone speaks English, for most of them a foreign language, in order to communicate. But how good can this communication ever really be? Is it not only some sort of image we make up ourselves instead of what the person really wanted to say?

“
I think identity
and language
always go
together
”



Catherine Illingworth

EIL UK, National Youth Meeting: “Increase the Peace – Changing Minds”

During this project there were a couple of introduction events, a three days residential, four afternoon sessions and a final event.

The main theme of identity was chosen for this project as it is an integral part of being respected as a person. It is especially important to young people as they are growing up, discovering themselves and making choices. Focusing on identity encourages them to look at their lives and the lives of those from other cultures.

This project specifically targeted young people from different backgrounds and cultures including Mixed Race, Afro Caribbean, White and Asian, who worked together throughout the project. This was aimed at breaking down barriers and encouraging communication, providing a safe and positive environment for discussion.

They were all British and all live in the same town, but they were still people who normally never meet each other. The UK is a very multicultural place and we wanted the young people to meet people from different cultural backgrounds in a positive way in order to understand them better. The best that we hoped for was that they would accept each other and talk to each other. And that did happen. It did break down barriers between the young people and by the end they were chatting together and they became friends on Facebook. I think we gave them the opportunity to start to change their opinions. The biggest thing that they realized was that other young people are not so different from themselves.

David Arribas

“Come Together” Seminar in Berlin

I think one very important aspect of your identity is where you live. I have got to know a lot of people that migrated from eastern countries to the West. For me it was different, I migrated from Spain to Turkey. Therefore I even feel like a “minority within the minority” when I speak to other migrants.

I am now working with Roma children in “Sulukule Volunteers Association” and I’ve learned a lot about ethnic differences. While I was in Spain in never felt the need to understand Roma people.

I had to go to another country to feel like a minority myself in order to be open and interested in understanding others. Now I’ve lived in Turkey for 12 years.



Terry Mattinson

International Encounter “Creating an Experience – Expect the Unexpected”, Youth Exchange in Preston, Lancashire

Our organisation “Youth aloud Youth Group”, based in Preston, Lancashire organised an international encounter with a partner group from Malta, “Zak Mosta Youth Group.” This as well as other international experiences has shown me that international encounters help young people to develop both socially and personally in a global world. I think they should have a full part in the organising process so that it can be a positive informal educational learning experience for them at all levels. This might be a risk but I am sure that everyone learns by making some mistakes and by reflecting on experience.

I have learned in my international experience that you must work in an experimental way at times with young people. All those international encounters have enabled me to develop a global experience of cultures, diversity and communities in our local, national and global worlds.



“
International encounters help young people to develop both socially and personally
”

1.2 - Educational Challenges

As we can see from these experiences, the identity related issues emerging from the Youth in Action Programme experiences are quite diverse and complex. Consequently, the educational challenges associated with the topic are many. Based on existing practices, we would like to underline the positive and motivating meaning of ‘challenge’ as an opportunity.

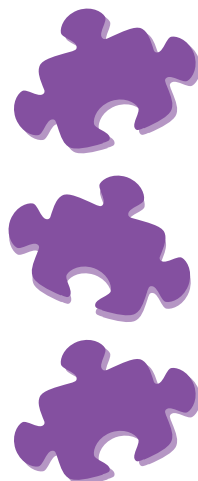
Dealing with identity is, even if it is not always obvious, an excellent learning opportunity that is engaging and motivating for participants. The three main educational challenges identified by us when working with or around identity in international youth work are:

1. Broadly touching the topic versus specific work
2. Here and now versus the long term
3. The individual versus the group

Broadly touching the topic versus specific work

Dealing with the notion of identity either specifically or transversally (as part of other topics) is an educational challenge with certain particularities.

Working on identity can be misunderstood as a selfish issue when regarded as ‘people looking at themselves’. It is therefore not so common that trainers and youth workers work specifically on it or that it is a significant part of the official programme of an activity. Instead, informal evenings, personal talks or corridor conversations are very often the spaces participants use to ‘digest’ the experience and challenges related to identity that have been raised during the official activities.



But the need to work specifically on the topic of identity is there. In activities concerning intercultural learning, citizenship or the professional development of youth workers and trainers, identity discussions slowly but surely take a growing role. This is not only as little side issues but as an important focal point in itself. With this however arises the need to have relevant conceptual frames, and specific and adequate methods, as well as the necessary competences to deal with the topic effectively

Here and now versus long term

To have a balance between concentrating on the current processes during the activity and aiming for sustainability, is an educational challenge for the trainers and facilitators of youth activities. During the last years one could observe in many training courses and seminars a stronger link between the preparation, the actual implementation, and the follow-up of the activities. The evaluations of *Youth in Action* Programme activities show that there has been a remarkable improvement in the preparation and follow-up actions.

When talking with participants the follow-up is always stressed as being important, but the most relevant experiences still take place in the ‘here and now’ of the activity.

The challenge of achieving a satisfactory balance between the ‘here and now’ and the long term process has a particular connotation when dealing with identity. This is because the experiences during the activities themselves often happen to have an influence on the long term development of peoples’ identity.



Dealing with identity is an excellent learning opportunity that is engaging and motivating for participants



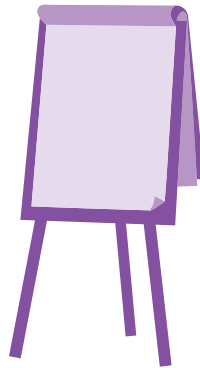
The – at times very strong – personal experiences taking place in the *Youth in Action* Programme activities provoke identity related issues to often appear ‘suddenly’ and have a strong impact on peoples’ reflection about their identity. It is not uncommon during the evaluation of an international youth activity to hear people expressing feelings like “Now I have a clearer vision of what direction I want to take in life” or “I thought I knew who I am and what I want to do in my life, but now I feel confused and need to reflect about what I experienced here.”

There is no doubt about the value of those findings. But even if they are very relevant and of a key importance, the identity shaping of individuals – as we will see – is an ongoing process and does not only happen in one certain moment.

In relation to identity, it is an educational challenge to explore not only the ‘here and now’ but to provide participants with strategies and tools which can help them to accompany their identity development in the future.

The individual versus the group

The national and international activities of the Youth in Action Programme happen in groups. These groups develop dynamic processes that distinguish them from a random collection of individuals. The processes include the development of norms, roles, and relations that produce the need to belong to or distance oneself from the group, and so influence the behaviour of the individuals in the group. The permanent synergies between those group dynamics and the individuals are one of the richest experiences in terms of identity.



Identity, however, has a personal and a group dimension, which are very closely related and cannot be understood without each other. In a setting that has a focus on the group, such as the activities of the Youth in Action Programme, it becomes an educational challenge to also provide for space and methodological guidance to reflect on personal aspects of identity.

A group should not only be a source of learning about often-touched topics such as teamwork or inter-cultural learning but it also needs to be about identity itself. The personal and group dimension of every activity is a unique source of learning as well as a unique source for the developing of identities. This opportunity can be used to better understand the group and personal dimensions of identity development in general.

The following parts of this publication will examine these three challenges through a combination of theoretical thoughts, experiences and stories of practitioners. The publication will also share some practical methods to address identity related issues in international youth work.

2 I-DENTITY Identity and Me

What makes me who I am?
Who do I want to be? Can I have
more than one identity? Will I
become someone else when I get
older? And why is it important
what others think about me?



Lance Coulton, Youth Exchange with the “Step by Step Programme” by UNA Exchange

My first Youth in Action project was in Belgium on a youth exchange through the Step by Step programme supported by UNA Exchange. This project was the first time I was able to explore my identity out of my home town which is a very narrow minded area of South Wales. My confidence grew and I was able to express how I truly felt through the support and guidance from the youth worker who accompanied myself on the exchange. Since coming back home to Wales I have been able to keep this identity, my new confidence and grow and grow. I am now able to be more honest with myself and my friends to be the person I want to be. Without this much needed support I am not sure that I would have been able to personally develop to the level I have!



Flavia Giovanelli-Marie, European Voluntary Service in France

During my European Voluntary Service I learned to place myself comfortably within a new context and get to know my own personality better. I learned to overcome possible stereotypes or prior judgements about things, people and situations. I experienced some rather interethnic/intercultural environments where you can pick up some aspects of other cultures/identities easily and make them yours too (if you like them). I would say my identity became richer, fuller thanks to those international experiences...and it continues to grow richer day by day as I “absorb” what I like around me.



Sofia Ribeiro
“rede ex aequo” LGBT association in Portugal

After a bad breakup with a bisexual boyfriend, I started going to the meetings of “rede ex aequo”, an LGBT association in Portugal for young people from 16 to 30.

I never had felt so good with a group of people other than my closest friends, when I was asked to help coordinating the group. I thought ‘I am heterosexual - how am I supposed to know how they feel?’ Today I surely know that it was one of the best decisions of my life to do it.

This experience changed my vision of life completely: now I am much more tolerant towards the situations that appear in my everyday life. It took me out of my comfort zone, and showed me the horrors that some of these young people face. Not only I changed, but also my closest friends now have a completely different perspective of what tolerance and identity is all about. It is true that your sexual orientation is a part of your identity, but it is nothing you should be discriminated for.

Today I continue spreading the word, to make people think and discuss, to tell this story over and over, without being afraid of what they would think about me. Every mind I change is an accomplished challenge.

The most rewarding thing is to meet people again that I haven’t seen for a while and knowing that somehow I helped them to fit in and feel good with themselves. There are no such words to express how happy that makes me.



“
I now have
a different
perspective of
what tolerance
and identity is
all about
”

Sevcan Selamet
European Citizenship Training Course

During this training course I have met people who changed my feeling about my identity. Before the course, I only thought that I am Turkish, I am a girl and stop. But actually my mum was born in Serbia, my mum describes herself as an Albanian, my father was born in Macedonia and I have so many relatives living in Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia. These nationalities include so many cultures and identities even if they seem similar. This means I questioned what my own identity is. Do I feel close to them?

I have also asked myself what “European identity” is. Does the European identity match with me? At the end of the course, I could give a better answer to these questions. Now I know I have so many identities. I share so many things with the other participants. And I think, even when the European Union includes so many identities, there is also one European identity for so many people as well.



2.1 - Unfolding Yourself: The Layers of Identity

Being unique and comparing our selves to others

One thing is for sure, we all have an identity. But it is not easy to find a common definition for what this identity actually is. In another SALTO publication it is stated that ‘Identity is what [...] distinguishes us from others AND makes us the same as others.’¹ This is a good starting point that we would like to explain a bit further.



This definition puts a strong emphasis on ‘others’ suggesting that we cannot know much about our own identity without seeing it in contrast to other people around us. We develop our own identity by comparing ourselves to others.

Through this comparison we learn who we want to be similar to and who we want to distance ourselves from. The development of identity can hence be seen to take two roads:

- On one side we look at ourselves in contrast to others and define what makes us unique, where we differ from other individuals, where we are special. This is the personal meaning of identity.
- On the other side we are ‘social animals’ and need to relate ourselves to others and identify with groups, opinions and things we have in common with them. This is the social meaning of identity.

Personal identity consists of all the unique characteristics that a person is either consciously aware of, or knows unconsciously. It means all the things that distinguish us as an individual from other individuals. This can be our finger prints, our voice, our drawing talent, our dancing skills, the way we talk, our behaviour, our personal principles and values, the things we like or do not like, our physical characteristics etc.

“
Identity is what distinguishes us from others AND makes us the same as others
”

Our uniqueness emerges not necessarily from the uniqueness of every single aspect but from the unique combination of all of them together.² This individual combination of characteristics forms the basis for our own self-respect and for our own understanding of who we are.³ We are not always conscious of all these aspects of ourselves, but they are important to us because they make up who we are. They are a powerful motive for action and can trigger deep emotions, especially when they are being attacked.

Social identity means the part of our identity that we shape through identifying with or differentiating from, certain social groups. A ‘social group’ in this regard means at least two people who interact with each other, accept certain rules as members of the group and share a common identity. It is therefore more than a simple collection of individuals, such as people waiting at a bus stop. The members of a social group mostly share common interests or values. Those interests could be, the aim of a dancing group to learn Salsa, or, the duty of the fire brigade to extinguish a fire, but it does not make a difference to both groups being social.

Personal and social identities are not in contradiction; they are interdependent. Individuals together make the collective and the collective has an influence on the individual.

Unfolding different layers

Given the fact that every individual’s identity involves both personal and social sides, it is not completely adequate to use the word ‘identity’ as if it was just one consistent, never changing entity. Still in the daily

“
We are not always conscious of all aspects of ourselves
”



1. SALTO-YOUTH. (2006): ID Booklet, Ideas for Inclusion and Diversity. <http://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-1050/IDbooklet.pdf> p.13 | 2 Schneider, J. (2001): Deutsch sein, Das Eigene, das Fremde und die Vergangenheit im Selbstbild des vereinten Deutschlands. Campus Verlag, Frankfurt. | 3 Fearon, J, D. (1999): What is identity (as we now use the word)? Stanford University. <http://www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf>

language that we use to describe our world it is only natural to simplify the complex concept of identity. This is not a problem as long as we do not forget that each person's identity consists of many layers and many different aspects. We are never defined by just one aspect but rather a compilation of several layers of belonging as well as identification to and differentiation from others. Which of those layers is the most important is up to the individual and can change depending on the situation.

As we change the context in which we find ourselves, different aspects of our identity become more or less important. One person can be a woman, a student, a mother, a music lover, a badminton player, a Bulgarian and a feminist. When being at a concert with other music lovers, the fact that she also enjoys badminton a lot will not be so relevant in that moment. In that context this specific layer of her identity (loving music) is the one that unites her with others, that gives purpose to being there and that is being stimulated by the surrounding.

Also, different aspects of one person's identity can create conflict for that individual. For instance when being a parent and a student or professional at the same time is hard to balance, or when religious beliefs and rules are incompatible with romantic feelings for a certain person.

However, identities are not fixed, they change. Even if a person will stay a parent forever, the implication of what that means will fundamentally differ from the first year of parenthood to the day grandchildren are born. The identity of a student will at one point change to the identity of a professional and the passion for badminton might one day be replaced by a bigger passion for mini golf.

Developing and exploring one's identity is an ongoing process of identifying with and differing from others. Nevertheless, continuity is important to our

understanding of who we are. We do not change our identity every day, for example; being a vegetarian cook one day and a butcher the next! But when sharp cuts do happen, for instance the realisation of a different sexual orientation, sudden unemployment, the birth of a child, religious epiphanies etc., they are stressful and force us to re-assess our identities and come up with a new answer to 'who am I?'

Developing an identity is not a thing that just happens to us. We play an active role and are not simply a product of our social environment or our genes.

At this point we touch the frequently discussed 'nature versus nurture' question. Are we who we are because we were born like this? Or are we who we are because of the influence our surroundings and our education has had on us? The answer is probably: both. Genes account for a lot and probably even more than we like is beyond our control. But the social environment also plays an enormous role in shaping our values and preferences in life.

Still, beyond genetic and social influences, we have the ability to reflect on ourselves and shape our identity consciously.

The diversity iceberg model

The metaphor of the iceberg is very popular in describing what is directly visible and possible to experience in another person and what 'lies below the water line' and is thus invisible yet so much bigger than the 'tip of the iceberg'. It is helpful also when looking at identity in terms of how the invisibility of most of what makes us is affecting personal interaction.

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Developing and
exploring one's
identity is an
ongoing process

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Identities are
not fixed,
they change

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A lot of what we know about ourselves and many of the layers of our identity that are particularly meaningful to us cannot be seen immediately by others. Some aspects might be visible in some situations, (to stick with the iceberg example you can imagine waves that sometimes cover certain parts of the iceberg and sometimes show them), but the majority of what makes us who we are is invisible and requires a lot of time, effort, and patience from another person to discover. Thus, the way others perceive us can never be an accurate picture of who we really are, but only what they are actually able to experience.

Of course the identity of a person is much more dynamic and fluid than an iceberg can ever be. The image of the iceberg will not explain how we are as a whole, but it is useful to look at the relationship between the visible and invisible aspects of who we are.

The circle of self perception and outsider perception

We develop our identity independently but we rely on the impressions of our surrounding world and see ourselves through the eyes of others. How we perceive ourselves is a combination of our own self-reflection and how we think others see and judge us.

How others see us matters to us because whether they like or dislike who we are and what we do, has a direct impact on how easy or difficult it is for us to be that way. This does not mean that we are only looking for positive feedback and acceptance. Being disliked by certain groups can mean a bigger acceptance in our own peer group, (i.e. if we are a member of a political party and members of the opposition party dislike us for our persuasive debating skills).

The others are like a mirror to us in which we can see ourselves. Do they laugh because they like our jokes? Do they turn away because they do not like us? Do they smile at us because they do like us? Do they frown at what we said? We take this information and this feedback and use it to adjust the way we act.⁴

The way we see ourselves, how we want people to see us and how we imagine them to see us, intermingle and constantly develop us in becoming ourselves and hence create a sense of our identity. This leads to a circle of self perception and outsiders' perception that could be illustrated as follows on the next page.

“
The others are like a mirror to us in which we can see ourselves
”

4. Boyd, D. (2002): Faceted ID/entity: Managing Representation in a Digital World. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Brown University. p.53 <http://smg.media.mit.edu/people/danah/thesis/danahThesis.pdf>

Being

Having an identity includes conscious and unconscious aspects. Our feelings about our self are not our whole identity but definitely a big part of it. We do not choose our feelings or take them on actively. They are the part of us that is not always easy to articulate in language. We might not know about every experience that has influenced us, but they form a big part of who we are.

Besides that we have an image of who we are in our head, or more specifically, who we think we are. It is important to self-reflect in order to discover personal values, principals, preferences, what we find important, what we like, what we do not like, and where our talents and weaknesses lie. In other words, we do all this in order to know ourselves.



Interpreting

No matter if we are told directly by others or not, we have an assumption about how others perceive us. That our assumptions do not necessarily reflect the truth is obvious, but they still have a big impact on how we feel about our self.

Presenting

We present our self to others the way we want to be. We do that through our everyday interactions, the way we speak and dress, through our words and our actions. We portray ourselves similarly to those with whom we want to share an identity and differently from those with whom we do not. We use 'symbols', (such as flags, dress codes, style, etc.), to show affiliations and delineations and hence make sense of our self in relation to the world we live in.



Being Perceived

Other individuals, as well as members of our own or other groups, perceive us differently than we perceive ourselves. On very rare occasions they share their impressions about us but most of the time we have to make our own assumptions about what they think.

2.2 - Identity Development

Identity is not static. It is not just something that we develop until a certain moment and that then remains unchangeable. Neither is it something hidden and fixed that we stumble across at a certain point. Identity is changing and developing in all the phases of our life.

Identity stages in one lifetime

A bit more than 60 years ago, a psychoanalyst named Erik Erikson was very interested in how identity works and how it develops over the course of a lifetime in people. He postulated later that every person goes through several stages in their life and that it is very important to complete a stage in order to get into the next one.

Erik Erikson's identity stages within one lifetime: ^{5,6}

Hope	Trust vs. Mistrust <i>Infants, 0 to 1 year</i>
Will	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt <i>Toddlers, 2 to 3 years</i>
Purpose	Initiative vs. Guilt <i>Pre-school, 4 to 6 years</i>
Competence	Industry vs. Inferiority <i>Childhood, 7 to 12 years</i>
Fidelity	Identity vs. Role Confusion <i>Adolescents, 13 to 19 years</i>
Love	Intimacy vs. Isolation <i>Young Adults, 20 to 34 years</i>
Care	Generativity vs. Stagnation <i>Middle Adulthood, 35 to 65 years</i>
Wisdom	Ego Integrity vs. Despair <i>Seniors, 65 years onwards ⁷</i>

Everytime you see this stack of books, it indicates that this is a theory section



Erik Erikson's identity stages

5. Erikson, E. H. (1964): Insight and Responsibility. Norton, New York. | 6. Erikson, E. H. (1968): Identity: Youth and Crisis. Norton, New York. | 7. Wikipedia. Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erikson%27s_stages_of_psychosocial_development

According to Erikson, in the period of transition between childhood and adulthood, young people have to make a lot of decisions about themselves and the role they want to play in the adult world. They may experiment with a variety of behaviours and versions of themselves that can be both harmonic and conflict oriented. One young person can rebel against authorities or be a dynamic student, they can be obsessed with sports or love collecting Manga figures. The question of sexual identity can occupy the energy of a young man or woman. They may have strong emotions and beliefs connected to one political view for a time and then after a short while change. They can have an intense friendship with certain of their peers for short or long periods and then in a moment those friendships are gone – for a while or for good!

Being young = constant crisis?

Erikson is credited with coining the term ‘Identity Crisis’. Each stage that came before and that follows has its own ‘crisis’, but even more so for a young person, for this stage marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Throughout infancy and childhood an individual develops many identities, but in the stage of adolescence one develops a new need for identity.⁸ According to Erikson, this turning point in human development seems to be the reconciliation between ‘the person one has come to be’ and ‘the person society expects one to become’.

What is unique about the stage of adolescence is that it is a special sort of synthesis of earlier stages and a special sort of anticipation of later ones. Youth has a certain unique quality in a person’s life, it is a bridge between childhood and adulthood. Youth is a time of radical change: the body changes through puberty, the mind develops through the search of one’s own aims and goals, the awareness of the roles society offers for later life get sharper, etc.

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Youth has a certain unique quality in a person’s life

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Adolescents especially feel the need to build up boundaries for themselves whilst being asked to make serious commitments. The problem of adolescence is one of role confusion very often accompanied by a reluctance to commit, something that may even haunt a person into their mature years. Given the right conditions – Erikson believes this to be having enough space and time to freely experiment and explore – an emotionally deep and firm sense of identity can emerge.

Intimacy versus Isolation

The ‘Intimacy vs. Isolation’ conflict is, according to Erikson, emphasized around the age of 20 to 34. In this stage, the most important events are love relationships. Intimacy refers to one’s ability to relate to another human being on a deep, personal level. An individual who has not developed a sense of identity usually will fear a committed relationship and may retreat into isolation. Once people have established their identities, they are ready to make long-term commitments to others. They become capable of forming mutually intimate relationships, (e.g. through close friendships, relationships or marriage), and willingly making the sacrifices and compromises that such relationships require. True intimacy requires personal commitment: giving and sharing with an individual without asking what will be received in return. If people cannot form these intimate relationships a sense of isolation may result.

Choices and commitments

Shortly after Erik Eriksson’s groundbreaking work on identity and psychosocial development in the 1960’s, the Canadian developmental psychologist James Marcia refined and extended Eriksson’s notion of identity crisis.⁹

8. Wright, J. E. (1982): Erikson, Identity & Religion. Seabury Press, New York. p.73 | 9. www.Learning-Theories.Com Identity Status Theory (Marcia). <http://www.learning-theories.com/identity-status-theory-marcia.html>

Marcia pointed out that the adolescent and youth stage, consists neither of identity resolution nor of identity confusion. It rather defines the degree to which one has explored and committed to a certain identity in a variety of life domains including work, religion, relationships, gender roles, and so on. Marcia's theory of identity achievement argues that two distinct parts form an identity: 'crisis' and 'commitment'. He defined a crisis as a time of confusion where old values or choices are being re-examined. A crisis leads to commitment, to a new role or value.



James Marcia's 'identity status'

Instead of the eight stages of Erikson divided in age ranges, Marcia proposed an 'identity status' (not chronologically) of identity development:¹⁰

Identity Diffusion: the status in which the person does not have the sense of having a choice. He or she has not yet made, (nor is attempting/willing to make), a commitment.

Identity Foreclosure: the status in which the person seems willing to commit to some relevant roles, values or goals for the future. People in this stage have not experienced an identity crisis. They tend to conform to the expectations of others regarding their future, (e.g. allowing a parent to determine a career direction). As such, these individuals have not yet explored a range of options.

Identity Moratorium: the status in which the person is currently in a crisis, exploring various commitments and is ready to make choices, but has not made a commitment to these choices yet.

Identity Achievement: the status in which a person has gone through an identity crisis and has made a commitment to a sense of identity, (i.e. certain role or value), that he or she has chosen.

Marcia's statuses, (see theory box), are not stages of a sequential process. The core idea is that our sense of identity is determined largely by the choices and commitments we make regarding certain personal and social traits. We shape our identity through the choices we make and the commitments linked to those choices.

Identity involves the adoption of a sexual orientation, a set of values and ideals and a professional direction. Marcia states that a well-developed identity gives us a sense of our strengths, weaknesses and individual uniqueness. People with a less well-developed identity are not able to define their personal strengths and weaknesses and do not have a well-articulated sense of self.

Both Erikson and Marcia formulated their thoughts on identity development in a specific context, (North America), and a specific time, (the 1960s). This has to be taken into consideration when evaluating the usefulness of these approaches in today's reality.

What we can learn from Erikson and Marcia is that identity formation has many components. Lineal and chronological phases, however, neither can fully explain the complex development of identity in our post-modern societies.

'Crisis' and 'tensions' as opportunities

Crisis and tensions might have some negative connotations in terms of difficulties, but understood as periods or situations when we re-evaluate our principles and choices, they are big opportunities for growing and further development.

The tensions between the individual and the group, between trust and mistrust, between autonomy and doubt, are ever present in intercultural encounters. There is a big learning potential in their individual and group exploration.



Crisis are big opportunities for growing and further development



10. Marcia, J. E. (1966): Development and Validation of Ego Identity Status. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 3, pp. 551-558

2.3 - 21st Century Lifestyle

The buffet of life's choices

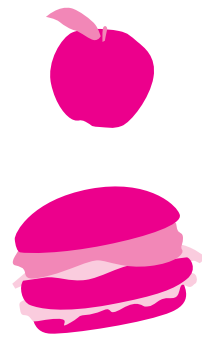
Living today is a lot different to living only a century or even a few decades ago. In many ways it is a lot easier, but in others it is much more complicated.

Somehow it is a little bit like standing in front of a wonderful buffet with delicious food on it and being overwhelmed by the amount of choices. We know we cannot stomach everything and that mixing some of the dishes would give us a painful bellyache. We have to make a choice about what we will put on our plate and will have to live with the fact that there are many dishes that we will not try.

At the same time, for many young people, today's life is more like being locked out of the room with the amazing buffet. They can see all the dishes from a distance but know that whatever they do, they will never get to make those choices, simply because they do not have access.

Neither of those situations is particularly pleasant. The first one is a 'luxury problem' of having too many possibilities that requires our self-reflection and patience. The second one is a political problem of inequality and social injustice that needs to be addressed by policy makers as well as the civil society.

When we look at the first situation – a situation which many of us find ourselves in – we notice that we have a vast richness of possible role models, life-choices and styles when it comes to who we are, (constantly becoming), and who we want to be. At least theoretically we can become everything and anything we want to be.



We have a vast richness of possible life-choices when it comes to who we are and who we want to be



The British sociologist Anthony Giddens was looking intensely at the problem of information overflow and necessary choices that can be both liberating (becoming who we want to be) and troubling (causing emotional stress and requiring a constant analysis of risks and opportunities). According to Giddens “a person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interactions with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self.”¹¹ Constructing this narrative means making sense out of our different belongings and identifications and putting those together to make up a coherent picture of ourselves. To maintain a ‘story about ourselves’ that makes sense is more difficult when the elements that we use are plentiful and constantly changing.



Anthony Giddens
- The problem of
information overflow

Detraditionalisation, pluralisation and individualisation

Sociologists tell us that in almost all societies around Europe and the world we can see tendencies of de-traditionalisation, (taking distance from traditions in order to try out new things), pluralisation, (meaning that plenty of different ways and views are possible), and individualisation.¹² As there are so many choices and so many possibilities we are not anymore told who we are when we are born. We have to figure this out for ourselves.

11. Giddens, A. (1991): Modernity and Self-Identity, HYPERLINK "http://www.amazon.com/Modernity-Self-Identity-Self-Society-Modern/dp/0804719446/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1286468186&sr=8-1" Self and Society in the Late Modern Age. Stanford University Press, Stanford. p.54 | 12. Straub, J. (2004): Identität.In: Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften. Grundlagen und Schlüsselbegriffe. Stuttgart, Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler

In the middle-ages, social roles in society and classes were solid and only very rarely did individuals move from one class to another. When we look at most industrial and post-industrial societies today, we can still observe quite stable class systems where the rich remain rich and the poor remain poor over generations. This stability or stagnation within the class system provides frames and guidance for those within them.

However, nowadays it is, (more than ever), possible to break out of those boundaries. But breaking out of one's social group will always involve stress and conflict as well as the possible end of important relationships.

The struggles that a professor's daughter who wants to become a carpenter might face are equally as difficult as those of a truck driver's son who wants to make a living out of writing poems.

Information: a new dividing line

Information about different kinds of life-styles is available everywhere. And it is this information that forms the foundation for our life-choices. However, a theoretically universal accessibility does not mean that this accessibility exists in praxis as well. Buzzwords like 'digital divide' and 'computer literacy' come to mind when speaking about the more subtle barriers that stop individuals from reaching self-fulfilment. It is, however, only superficially about the obvious questions such as: Who has a good internet connection and a computer at their disposal? What websites are used to obtain news? What blogs read, what forums attended, which RSS feeds subscribed to?

Just as we do not become smart and informed by entering a bookshop, we do not become curious about the multitude of ways to realise ourselves just because the information is 'only a few clicks away'. Limited access

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Information
about different
kinds of life-
styles is available
everywhere
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is predominantly a cultural, social and educational obstacle that has to be overcome in order for everyone to be able to benefit from the available information at our disposal. Even those who have access to the Internet and use it intensively tend to inform themselves about similar things to what they already know, connect with similar people and frequent similar national or local news sites to the ones they watch on TV. It is only a small minority that actually makes use of the diversity of the available information on the Internet.¹³

Biting off more than we can chew: information overflow

International mobility like voluntary services, youth exchanges, studying abroad or taking an internship in another country add to the fact that we are not bound by our geographical borders. We can incorporate international elements in our understanding of our self. One does not even have to travel to face intercultural situations that can broaden the horizon. A chat with the new neighbour might be enough to step into a different cultural sphere. At the same time as this is exciting and stimulating it also highlights the 'buffet stress', meaning an information overflow out of which we have to choose.

Do we want to be a Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, agnostic or an atheist? Are we a socialist, liberal, conservative or not interested in politics? Do we want to play football or rather join a fitness club? Do we prefer Hip Hop or Rock music? Do we drink wine or beer or no alcohol at all? There are probably communities in our area with members from all different denominations and convictions that would be happy to include us. We have the freedom to choose, but there are few people out there helping us to make the best choice. This is a paradox, as we are constantly surrounded and included in different groups. But the fact that we are

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We have the
freedom to
choose, but it is
difficult to make
the best choice
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13. Zuckerman, E. (2010): Listening to Global Voices. http://www.ted.com/talks/ethan_zuckerman.html

influenced by so many groups does not mean that they help us in becoming a complete human being or reaching coherence between all our different belongings.

Loving or hating it: Change

The world around us is constantly changing. This means that we are also changing with it. Identity is a process; we are 'doing identity'.¹⁴ Identity means change, and change we have come to realise is never comfortable. While easily being glorified, change is stressful. We are putting ourselves in situations where we do not know how things work, who to trust or how to behave. And only by navigating through these experiences, by making mistakes and correcting them, by succeeding and failing, do we figure out what we want and what we do not want.

Young people are in 'transition' just as anyone else

Young people find themselves in transition, in the process of identity development and in a constant questioning about how to present themselves. Just as anyone else. The process of gaining skills for life does not finish at a certain age, for most people the personal and professional status changes several times in life. There is not an exact time span in which we find ourselves and then continue with life. Young people are the 'present' and not as some people might think 'the future'. They are neither 'incomplete' nor an 'immature' version of adults. They are developing and getting to know more about their identity just as we all are.

Flexible from cradle to grave

The buffet has expanded. We have more choices than ever with regards to relationships, professions, life-styles, places where we want to live etc. We can take them, taste them and decide if we like them or not.

But the nature of the buffet has also changed. It has become less stable and the competition has become bigger. While we are still proudly holding the paper confirming our 'Master Degree in XY', this specialisation might not be needed in the workplace anymore and we have to re-orientate ourselves. What was an option yesterday might not any longer be available. We are expected to be flexible, mobile and able to adjust to different circumstances quickly and enthusiastically. That is also a new challenge for today's life: To be flexible enough to accept sudden changes in life and be able to pick up something new quickly whilst still keeping a certain level of security that we all long for.¹⁵

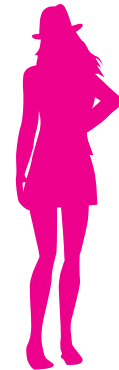


The process of
gaining skills
for life does
not finish at a
certain age



14. Michael, M. (1996): Constructing Identities, the social, the nonhuman and change. Sage Publishing, London. | 15. Sennett, R. (1998): The Corrosion of Character, the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism. Norton, New York.

2.4 - “View my profile” – Online Presentation of self in social network sites



Kirill Onishchenko World of Unlimited Opportunities

In 2005 we had a very interesting project called “World of unlimited opportunities”. Thanks to this project its participants (children from low-income families and students) were able not only to learn how to use computers and the Internet in order to communicate with each other and their friends and relatives from all over the world. They also were able to explore main principles of global and European identity and to understand that our world doesn’t end within the borders of our home town. It is much wider and, even if you cannot go abroad, you can still establish relations with interesting people from different countries via the Internet.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the way we present ourselves and how others see us forms crucial parts of our identity. The internet offers us an unprecedented broadness of information for different life choices. Since online social network sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and others, have become more and more prevalent within our societies, this self-presentation has gained a new dimension.

Social network sites are based around profiles of individuals. The networks can only exist as long as there are members presenting themselves and creating content. People who want to participate have to set up a profile in order to be part of it. One can refer to this as an ‘online-identity’.

Connecting people worldwide

These sites can be seen as a response to people’s need to connect not only locally but in a more wide-ranging way. As mentioned in the previous chapter, possibilities to travel and to get to know people from other countries have increased tremendously over the last decades. Those with access to the ‘buffet’ can participate in exchange programmes, study and work abroad, and travel faster and easier than any generation before.

Since the creation of Facebook in 2004 it has accumulated over 400 million active users.¹⁶ For millions of people the use of social network sites influences their daily routine. It provides new opportunities to communicate, collect friends online and allows for the publishing of information about ourselves.

Social network sites provide a way to connect and keep in contact with people worldwide especially to maintain friendships that have started offline. Most members do not use social network sites to establish new relations with complete strangers but rather to keep in touch with people they already know.

This does not only include friends from school or university, but also the Czech girl from the last training course in Slovakia, that Norwegian guy who we shared the room with in a youth hostel in Spain or the Italian couple who we met on our InterRail trip.

Participating in an online social network has become a crucial element of staying socially connected and being part of a local, national, international or virtual community.



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Social network sites provide a way to connect and keep in contact with people worldwide
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16. Quinn, J. (2010): Perceptions of Identity in Social Networking: Controlling your online presence. <http://networkconference.netstudies.org/2010/04/perceptions-of-identity-in-social-networking-controlling-your-online-presence>

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who am I amongst us all?

The process of presenting ourselves online is very similar to offline: we compare ourselves to others, (i.e. look at existing profiles of friends), create our own profile and receive feedback on it from others.¹⁷

In the early days of the internet, online identities were mainly created in chat rooms or online games. The anonymity in those games gave and still gives people the freedom to experiment with different identity roles or to try out hidden aspects of their own identity.¹⁸

Unlike those role-playing games where members are encouraged to create completely invented new identities, users of social network sites generally prefer to reflect themselves online just as they are.

We are very likely to know our online friends offline and can hardly present ourselves as a successful winner of the latest city marathon if everyone knows that we stumble across our own feet in our attempt to catch the school bus. We feel accountable for what we say online and hence tend to be rather honest about our online identity.

We mirror our own personality online by creating a profile consisting of text, photos, videos, lists of friends, favourite films or other preferences as well as public showing of groups, fan pages, and causes we support. If we become fan of 'Britney Spears' it says something different than if we become a fan of 'Radiohead'. Joining a group like 'I love cooking' reveals personal preferences, by our writing style we show something of ourselves. The background style of our profile that we can set up in MySpace is representative of our taste. Even the choice of information we give leads to conclusions about our character.

'Getting to know' someone online seems fairly easy because we present a lot of information on our profile that would normally take a while to be discovered in conversations.



We mirror our own personality by creating an online profile



However, other non-verbal information that we display in a face-to-face interaction is lacking online, which limits, of course, how much you really 'get to know' someone.

Contrary to offline, creating our online identity gives us the opportunity to consciously decide how we want to be seen and what our online identity should consist of. Some sites such as MySpace or LinkedIn are even explicitly designed to promote ones self online in order to be seen by potential supporters or employers.

Impression management

Given those 'new' and 'easy' opportunities to present ourselves online, we are very likely to take advantage of them. We try to present ourselves at what we think is our best, and construct our online identity the way we wish to be seen.¹⁹ We stress our strengths and cover our weaknesses. We try to sound witty in our comments, upload pictures in which we look good and collect friends even if we cannot remember who that person actually is. We try to manage the impression others get from us. We do the same in offline interactions, e.g. when we dress up for a job interview. But online we can control our presentation more easily as we do not have to deal with, the wind that destroys our hair just before we enter the office, or the train we miss that causes us to be late, and so create a poor first impression.

The Canadian born sociologist Erving Goffman compares in his book, 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' from 1959, the presentations of actors in their roles to that of individuals in their daily lives. He states that in both cases people try to control the performance of the self in order to set the impressions others get. This is what he calls 'impression management'.



Erving Goffman
- The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

17. Boyd, D. (2007): Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. p.10. In: Buckingham, D. (ed.). (2007): MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media. MIT Press, Cambridge. | 18. Turkle. (1994): Cited in: Quinn, J. op. cit. | 19. Quinn, J. op. cit.

On the one side we do have more explicit control over our online identities and can choose what information to give out, but on the other side it is also easier to be misunderstood or exploited.

Today a trend to publicise the private life has come up, e.g. reality shows on TV etc. This can cause difficulties for the protection of the private life. Uploading a picture online is not the same as sticking it into a photo-album at home, even though both serve the purpose of sharing pictures with those who are interested. The difference is in accessibility. While the paper-photo album can only be viewed by those invited to visit our home, pictures that have been uploaded to online platforms can also be viewed by a more or less anonymous public that would not have the same access to our living rooms. Many people are aware of this and choose carefully what they upload. However there are also many who are not so conscious of the consequences of their widely public written and visual information and how much it influences their offline identity as well. Examples of this include; potential employers checking Facebook profiles before hiring someone or corporations using the data to profit at the expense of users by addressing them with concrete advertisements.

In this regard it is also important to consider the impressions others might produce of us, e.g. by uploading pictures of us and ‘tagging’ them. It can cause problems if the photos online are at odds to the identity that someone wants to project.²⁰ The same happens offline when someone tells a private story about us publicly that we would like to keep private. However, on social network sites we should be even more alert to keeping control over what information about us is being portrayed, because the online public life is different to the offline environment that most of us have been socialised to.



Today a trend to publicise the private life has come up



The American social-media researcher Danah Boyd states four properties of online public life that real public life does not have:

1. Persistence (any comment persists)
2. Searchability (it is possible to search for likeminded people because of the identity they have established)
3. Exact copyability (public expressions can easily be copy pasted)
4. Invisible audiences (while we can most times see our audiences in real life, we cannot on the internet)



Dana Boyd - four properties of online public life

The problem of audience

In order to present ourselves properly, we should understand which audience we are facing.²¹ The audience we face online is different from the one offline. When interacting in real life we are most of the time aware of who our audience is. We adapt our self presentation depending on the context of the given surroundings, whether that be a Saturday night at a friend’s house or a job interview on Monday morning.

On the Internet in comparison, we suddenly bring together people from all different areas of our life. The ‘Ex’ meets the new boy/girlfriend, mother meets boss, party acquaintances and closest friends are in the same category, a truly curious assembly. The fact that most profiles can also be seen by the general public can also cause a problem: How can we be simultaneously cool and funny to our friends, and acceptable to parents, distant acquaintances or future employers?

When we face situations where such diverse audiences meet, we are given two choices: we either try to present a face that

20. Quinn, J. op. cit. | 21. Boyd, D. (2002): op. cit. p.14

is universally acceptable or we risk giving out information that might be inappropriate for some audiences.²²

Keeping those different audiences in mind, it is certainly more difficult to present our identity in all its variety online than offline. Instead of risking giving the wrong information to the wrong people, we might tend to simplify ourselves in order to please everyone at the same time. This ‘simplified’ version of ourselves is not a fake version, it is just a ‘compacted’ version of our identity that is less complex when presented to a broad audience.

Another possibility is the use of several online profiles on different social websites in order to address different audiences: one for our friends, one for business, one for promoting our band and another one for connecting with like-minded cooks.

This ‘problem of audience’ exemplifies that what we face is a new dilemma. The current and coming generations will have to find satisfactory ways of dealing with the problem of audience. How we do this is up to us.

Controlling identity, online as well as offline

However important our social platforms are to us, as soon as we have created a profile, we need to be aware about what this implies and how we can maintain control over it. We should reflect on our self-presentation and manage the impressions we construct, only then will we be able to have power over our interactions online and the information we give out.²³

Just as we would not let our whole office know that we would rather be unemployed than stay in that job, we should probably not post comments like that on our publicly accessible profile on Facebook. We need to actively control the information we provide about us online as much as we control what we disclose offline.

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We need to control the information we provide about us online as well as offline
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2.5. - Implications for Our Youth Work

The environment of anyone participating in a non-formal education activity has to be taken into consideration when planning the programme and selecting appropriate methodological guidelines for interaction and reflection. Young people participating in international exchange programmes and seminars in 2010 are very different to those who participated in such activities in 2000, which in turn means that facilitators, educators and trainers have to adapt to different needs.²⁴

On the one hand, social realities which are not so deeply connected to geographical boundaries anymore are more complex and multi-dimensional. On the other hand, the tools to develop solutions and address problems in local communities or in Europe have become easier to handle, cheaper and more accessible. To realise a good idea has become significantly easier; to mobilise a community to act, however, is said by some practitioners, to have become more difficult.

Identifying with, for example, a youth organisation can be an important and safe space for young people to develop their identity among people who can stabilise them and provide a social framework in which ‘identity crisis’ can be overcome. Youth organisations also provide a good training ground for helping others to overcome a crisis, transform conflicts, receive and give feedback, and many other competences needed to deal with other groups in the future and with many other identity crises to come.

A youth exchange or a European Voluntary Service can be a powerful experience. It can provoke questions and the potential answers, can even change the course

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A youth organisation can be an important space for young people to develop their own identity
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22. Boyd, D. (2002): op. cit. p.28 | 23. Boyd, D. (2002): op. cit. p.61 | 24. Karsten, A. (2008): Made to be broken? <http://www.nonformality.org/2008/02/made-to-be-broken>

of a life. But a one-off event can only be as good as the local preparation and follow up of the activity. Young people who received powerful impulses during an international event will need further support upon arrival at home in order to pursue the path they have chosen to continue going.

2.6. Methods and Activities

The methods we present in this part can fit into three groups:

1. Who am I?

Method: 'Identity Molecule', 'Twenty Answers'

These two methods are examples that can be used to help participants reflect on themselves and their inherent complexity.

2. Where do I want to go? Who do I want to become?

Method: 'Goals and Desires'

This is an example for a method that can foster reflections and discussions on the participants' future and how they can ground their future development into their current identity to ensure a coherent development.

3. Reflecting and learning from the process of development.

Method: 'Process oriented methods'

This group of methodological suggestions looks at different ways to stimulate reflections on the process-orientation of identity development.



These methods help reflecting on personal identity

Identity Molecule

Rationale

This exercise provides participants with an opportunity to explore their own personal and cultural identities and to understand the role identity plays in how people perceive the world.

Note: It's recommended that participants engage in a discussion about the different aspects that make up identity prior to this activity.

Requirements

Space: Room for chairs in a circle

Time: 45 - 60 minutes

Participants: Middle school student to adult/maximum 40

Directions

1. Explain the rationale for this activity.
2. Distribute a copy of the Identity Molecule Worksheet to each person. Instruct participants to write their names in the center circle. Tell them that they will be writing five groups with which they identify in the five outside circles. Reassure people that you are looking for quick responses and that their choices might be different on another day.
3. Model your own response. In modeling, avoid the following: hobbies, personality traits, family relationships. These identifiers are frequently included in participant responses, and it will be helpful in promoting an understanding of identity if facilitators model the activity using a variety of cultural identifiers instead. A well-balanced story-telling style will draw the best results from the group.



Materials
Identity Molecule Worksheet,
one for each participant, pens or pencils

*N.B.
This method has been supplied by the ADL and is here cited without any changes.*

4. Allow a few minutes for participants to complete their worksheets.

Note: If asked, be flexible in allowing participants to add or delete circles.

5. When participants have completed this task, ask them to select one category that is a primary source of identification for them and to draw a circle around it.

Note: Using the term primary instead of most important prevents situations in which participants feel they are being asked to choose whether their children, partners or career are more important to them.

6. Explain to participants that you will now conduct a stand-up activity.

Note: A variation of this process appears at the end of the activity.

7. Tell participants that you will read a list of categories, and that, after each category is read, they are invited to briefly stand if the category is represented in one of their five circles. Ask participants to remain standing if the category is the one they circled as a primary source of identification.

8. Before beginning the stand-ups, provide the following important caution to the group:

The Stand-ups are an invitation to stand and openly declare your membership in particular groups. It is each person's choice whether or not to stand for a given category. Remember that there are some identifiers that may be central to who someone is, but that a person may not feel safe or comfortable disclosing in a large group setting. The purpose of this exercise is to build understanding of personal and group identity, and not to out people or make anyone feel uncomfortable.

9. Read the following categories, one at a time, allowing time for participants to stand. Encourage people to look around the room while the stand-ups are taking place. Remember to tell those people who have remained standing to sit down before reading the next category on the list.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| a. age | k. language |
| b. ethnic or national origin | l. political belief |
| c. gender | m. friend |
| d. race | n. neighborhood or geography |
| e. religion | o. volunteer activity |
| f. sexual orientation | p. health, fitness, diet, etc. |
| g. profession | q. college, school, or alumni affiliation |
| h. socioeconomic class | r. music or other arts |
| i. hobby/pastime/ activity you enjoy | s. ask if anyone has another group not covered in this list that he or she would like to see called, and elicit all responses. |
| j. family | |
| k. language | |
| l. political belief | |
| m. friend | |

10. After the stand-ups, ask participants to find someone they don't know (or do not know well) and discuss the positive and negative aspects of being connected to the identifier each has selected as primary. Tell participants that each member of the pair will have about 3 minutes to talk. After 3 minutes, announce you should change roles, if you haven't already.

11. Reconvene the whole group and lead a discussion, using some or all of the questions below.

Discussion questions

- a. What is the role of identity in addressing prejudice?
- b. During the stand-ups, how did it feel to stand when you were part of a large group?
- c. How did it feel to stand when you were alone or almost alone?
- d. Did anyone notice any interesting patterns during the stand-ups? For example, were only women left standing in the gender category? Were People of Color the only ones left standing for race?
- e. Were there categories that no one stood for? Why do you think that happened?
- f. Can you think of situations when students might feel that they are standing alone?
- g. What might a person do to help someone in that situation feel like they are not alone?



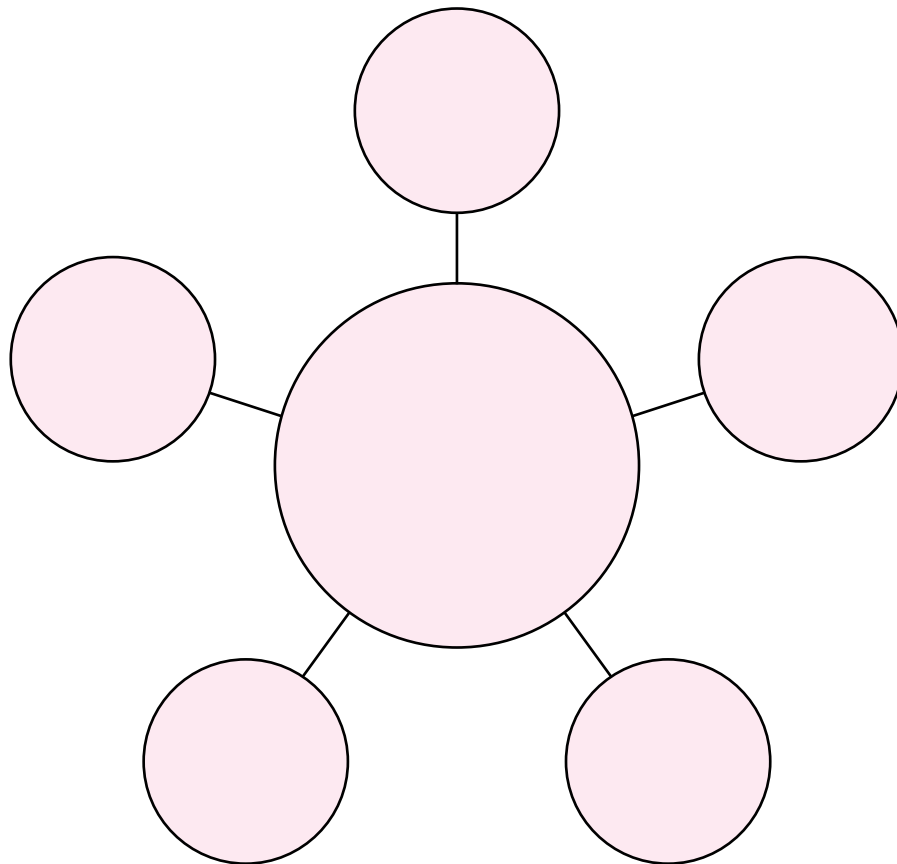
You can photocopy and enlarge the Worksheet for this method on the following page to use with your group

Source: © 2008 Anti-Defamation League, www.adl.org/education. All rights reserved. Adapted with permission from publisher.

Identity Molecule Worksheet

Directions

1. Write your name in the center circle.
2. In the outer circles, write the name of five groups with which you identify.



For Sharing

Choose one group (a primary identity for you) and answer the following questions:

1. Share a time when you have felt very proud to be a member of that group.
2. Share a painful experience resulting from membership in that group.

Twenty Answers

This exercise encourages participants to reflect on themselves and how they would describe themselves. It introduces different categories of information that one might use.

Step by Step:

1. Ask participants to take an empty sheet of paper and write the question 'Who am I?' on the top of it. Below they should write all the numbers starting from 1 up to 20.
2. Allow some time for participants to find 20 answers to the question 'Who am I?' They should not worry about logic or importance of the numbering. Also tell participants that they will not be asked to share their list with anyone if they do not want to.
3. Once all participants are finished with their list, ask them to indicate with symbols or colours four different categories of answers:
 - a. Physical description, (I'm tall, I have blue eyes, etc.)
 - b. Social roles, (I'm a student, a husband, a member of a football team, etc.)
 - c. Personal Traits, (I'm impulsive, I'm patient, I'm loud, etc.)
 - d. Abstract, existential statements, (I'm a child of the universe, I'm human, I'm alive, etc.).

Debriefing

During the debriefing it is important to go through the three different stages of reflection, generalisation and application.



This methods encourages participants to reflect on themselves

Materials
Sheets of paper,
Pens, Flip
Chart, Markers.

Reflection

Was it difficult to find 20 answers? Why?

What did you first think of?

How many of your answers referred to long-term and how many to short-term traits about yourself?

Did you use one category of answers more than others? Why?

Would your best friend come up with the same 20 answers about you? Why?

Would your parents? Why?

Are you surprised about the categorisations you use the most to describe yourself?

Would you rather focus on other layers of yourself?

Generalisation

When meeting new people, what do we show them first?

Is it important to have a very differentiated picture of yourself? Why?

What can we learn from this?

Application

In what way is this relevant to your life?

How far can a differentiated picture of yourself be an aid to you, how far can it be an obstacle?

Adaptations

If it is possible, repeat this activity after a year or so and see if the categories that the participants used have changed.

Source:
Based on the Twenty Statement Test by M.H. Kuhn and T.S. McPartland (1954): An empirical investigation of self-attitudes. American Sociological Review, 19(1), pp.68-76. Adapted for this publication by the authors.

Goals and Desires

In this activity the participants are asked to reflect on their goals and desires in life and how different aspects of their identity can be an obstacle or an aid in achieving those.

Step by Step

1. Conduct a brainstorming with the participants on different goals or desires they might have in life. They should be broad enough so that different people could agree on them, but specific enough to be meaningful, (i.e. inner peace, independence, connection with family, academic achievement, connection with other people, work-life balance, successful career, living in balance with nature, etc.).
2. Give the handout to each participant. They can now select a maximum of 5 goals that they feel apply to them and their lives. If the ones that came up during the brainstorm do not apply to them, the participants are free to add a meaningful goal for themselves personally. Once they have selected five, they should mark on the paper where they are at the moment in terms of achieving each goal and the current date. They should also write a date indicating when they would like to have achieved each goal.
3. Conduct a second brainstorming on aspects of personalities that can be both an obstacle and an aid in achieving those life goals. (i.e. age, religion, social status, family, ethnicity, ability, economic status, gender, etc.).
4. Now ask the participants to add to each goal those aspects of their identity that can help them in achieving this goal and those aspects that can be an obstacle, (possibly in different colours).



This methods raises awareness about personal goals and desires in life

Materials
Handouts, Flip Chart, Markers, Pens.

5. Following this, the participants should sit in smaller group with up to 5 members and discuss some of the following questions:

- a. Was it difficult to select 5 goals? Would you have preferred more or less?
- b. Are some goals contradicting each other? (i.e. independence and connection to family). How do you deal with those contradictions? How do you plan to balance them?
- c. Are some aspects of your identity both an obstacle and an aid for different goals? What does this mean for you?
- d. Do you have similar goals in your group? Do they mean the same for you?

Adaptations

Reflecting on one's life goals can be very difficult. You can adapt this to a concrete time-period, (i.e. your EVS, the next half year, etc.). If it is possible for you and your group, come back to the maps after six months and revisit them to evaluate how everyone is doing in reaching their goals or if they have changed.



You can photocopy and enlarge the Worksheet for this method on the opposite page to use with your group

Goals and Desires Worksheet

The worksheet consists of five large, light pink arrows pointing to the right, arranged vertically. Each arrow is intended for participants to write their goals and desires. The arrows are outlined in black and have a soft pink fill.

Source
Based on 'Google Self Maps' and Inter-sectionality by Stephen McKay and Lynne Tammi: SALTO Publication E.M.Power, 2008.
Adapted by the authors.

Process oriented methods

The metaphor of a *River* can help people to reflect on their experience during a certain period of life. This method stimulates participants to use their creativity when looking at their identity in terms of choices and commitments.

Each participant receives the picture of a river drawn on a large piece of paper. The beginning and the end of the river should be marked on the paper. There need to be papers of different colours, scissors, glue, pencils and markers available. Participants are asked to work individually on giving expression creatively to their choices and commitments during a certain period of life and/or in relation to a certain dimension of their identity, (job, family, role in society...). They should place the results of their creative efforts onto whichever part of the river they consider appropriate.

A spiral can also be used to visualise biographical events in the past and visions for the future. Participants should draw a spiral on a piece of paper in front of them. The centre point of the spiral is the past and the point of opening of the spiral is the present. Along this circular timeline participants should put events, people, ideas, and moments that were significant for them. For example: reflecting on involvement with Human Rights, the path to having become a youth worker, the path to being involved in street art, etc. At the opening of the spiral participants can place arrows that point forward. On these arrows they should write things they wish to happen in the future and for which their participation in the event where they do this, (i.e. training course, youth exchange, EVS, etc.), is meaningful.

Another process-oriented method is called *Boats on the Sea*. This activity can help participants to take stock of what has been done and what still lies ahead of them. Participants are invited to use their creativity by evaluating through the use of metaphoric symbols: the sea, boats, sea creatures, islands, other ships, etc. Prepare a large drawing of a sea with two harbours, one on the top and one on the bottom, in advance. The sea



These methods stimulate reflections on the process-orientation of identity development.

between the two harbours stands for the period of time between two moments of life. For example, this could be the beginning and the end of studies, the life of a certain job, the period of a social commitment or project, etc. Ask participants to design their own boats and to put these boats somewhere in between the two harbours or describe how the journey was between those harbours. Within the sea, islands or rocks or other symbols can be drawn. Participants are free to add anything they feel helps them to clarify the position of their boat in this metaphor. This method can be used in many different ways. You can give participants different kinds of boats representing different elements of their lives.

A useful metaphor for looking towards the future is that of the *Train with different wagons*. Each wagon represents a different dimension of life that participants should reflect on; work, family, friendship... Participants are asked to write down ideas related to each of these elements for future actions in the appropriate wagon.

And of course you can develop and adapt all these methods using the idea of a trip or a journey to represent a process of choices and commitments, a process of identity development. When using these kinds of methods, it is useful to create a nice and relaxing atmosphere. This can help to make people feel comfortable and to reflect more effectively. This can be done using some background music.

Quite often these methods are used in the youth field for evaluation and in relation to the 'professional identity': me as a youth worker, as a trainer, as a social worker, as a learner. These are generally used as individual or personal methods. With an adequate level of mutual trust in the group, the sharing with others can be extremely enriching. Using the same metaphor, (river, boats, journey...), and using the same visualisation can help a lot in the sharing and for gaining mutual understanding.

Source:
These methods are well known and have been developed over the years in different activities with different variations. Versions of them can be found in Training for Trainers of the Council of Europe, (2003 and 2004), and in the T-Kit on Evaluation, (CoE and European Commission 2007). Adapted for this publication by the authors.

3 WE-DENTITY Identity & Groups

What connects me with, and what distinguishes me from others?
What are our differences and similarities? Where do I belong?
And what is my role in groups?



**Ryan Haynes, National Youth Initiative
on the LGBT community, London**

Our project was all about identity and discovering identity. It affected everyone involved as we looked at the cross-section of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transsexual and Questioning) and not just one sexuality or gender.

We set up a podcast radio for the LGBT community and within that we were looking at four different types of identity. At first the approach seemed quite simple, because we were working with LGBT organisations who had identified themselves as LGBT. In our radio program we had a live audience and involved them in discussions. Of us whom were presenting; one of us was a black gay, one of us was gay, one of us was a straight girl and one was a lesbian. We also had two trans people on the team that wanted to be represented, so we ended up having a full spectrum of LGBT. But if one of us was making a comment, it wasn't representing the whole LGBT group. You kind of represent your own group within the LGBT community.

We focused on youth in order to train them and create media programs. What we identified when we started to interview a lot of people, especially in London, was that they weren't pure LGBT organisations. LGBT has grown a lot over the last 15 years and changed. At the beginning it was just gay and lesbians, then they added gay, lesbians and bi, then also transgender and now they were adding QQI, queer, questioning or intersex. There are so many different identities. You can be a man who sleeps with men. You can be bisexual, you can be trans, you can be gay. You can be a female who believes that she's a male.



“
There are so many different identities
”

So now we suddenly had to reconsider who we were talking to and how you're approaching them. It was really interesting to identify who we were and who they were. We've come across trans people who were very feminine but they wanted to be regarded as a male. Same when we came across someone who looked like a male, acted like a man, but wanted to be regarded as a female.

We had to make sure that we were pretty representative; we had people from all the different groups involved, heterosexual people as well. That brought some interesting debates and discussions amongst us. It was never a complete agreement, which was interesting in itself because you often surround yourself by like-minded people and therefore you might have a debate with someone you never really had a full discussion on certain things with. We always wanted to continue learning. We caught ourselves in hot water a few times purely because what we were exploring is incredibly new.

For instance the LGBT community identifies itself differently to the gay community. We had to approach both very differently. These organisations don't want to be categorised but at the same time they categorise. It is a lot about the search for individuality and uniqueness and some come up with random terms to become that person, they make up their own identity based on that, individually or as a collective. They've formed their own identities. They are therefore pushing themselves further and further into the edge of society because they want to be unique and distinctive. They all continue to find their corner. These groups change constantly, often there is no consistent message that they are sending out. Groups are often too busy with dealing with themselves and not being able to deal with everything around.

“
It was really
interesting to
identify who we
were and who
they were
”

Actually there cannot be a defined definition of their identity. It is so fluid that it doesn't even exist. That is where the discussion ends. But when you think about it, I am a man, I am 27 years old, I own a house, I am Single. How fluid is that? In a few years time I will probably still be a man, may still have my own house, I may not be Single any more. Things can change. People don't discover themselves at the age of 16, 17 and then it stops, it is a process throughout all your life.

3.1. Identity and Groups

Let's start off with two principle thoughts about groups.

1. Groups are inevitable and we can't live without them
2. Groups don't exist

Now, the two statements are contradicting each other, but hopefully by the end of this chapter they will make sense.

Don't worry, you're not alone

If we look at ourselves and at our own lives we can probably identify a large number of groups that we are a member of. These could include; our circle of friends, family, a sports club, the community of people that enjoy the same music as we do, a religious community, or youth organisation, (local, regional, national or global), etc. Every person in the world is a member of different groups. Human beings are social, we are herd animals in a way, and we need groups to feel complete. We are who we are because of the things that we like and the things we do not like, and because of our values and interests and all the details that define us. To know that there are also other people that like what we like and dislike what we dislike is a good feeling. It means that our values are shared by other people, that we have something in common. It feels good to know that other people share our values because it gives us a sense of legitimacy.

Formal and informal groups

There are many different types of groups but they basically all fit into a continuum between the extremes of formal and informal.²⁵ Most groups, are neither extremely formal nor extremely informal but somewhere between the two.



Human beings
are herd animals



A formal group is a group that defines its members: For example, a chemistry class at university or joining the army. If you join the army, they will not change according to your likings. Rather the other way around, you will have to adapt to how things are done in the army. The same goes for the chemistry class. The content of the course will not change because you are there and it will be roughly the same when you have already passed it and move on to the next semester.

An informal group on the contrary is defined by its members, for example your group of friends or a local theatre group. If you are with your friends there might be certain things that they would not do if you were not there. If you move to another city, your circle of friends will not be the same anymore because you are missing.

A voluntarily theatre group can only do plays that correspond with the skills of its members. And if the best singer in your local choir decides to play rugby instead, the quality of the next performance will likely be different.

Voluntary or involuntary membership

Another way to look at groups is whether your membership in them is voluntary or not. You cannot decide who your mother and father are or what colour of eyes or skin you have. You cannot decide where you were born. You cannot decide which sexual orientation you have.

You can leave some groups that you become a member of voluntarily, like your gender or the belonging to a religious community. However, leaving them means a huge effort and a radical change of life, so people often decide not to leave these groups even if they do not fully identify with them.

25. Rogers, A. (2004): Looking Again at Non-Formal and Informal Education – Towards a New Paradigm. HYPERLINK "http://www.infed.org/biblio/non_formal_paradigm.htm"www.infed.org/biblio/non_formal_paradigm.htm

Power relations between groups

Groups are important to us and they serve us well by giving us physical and emotional security. But groups can also be a source of conflict. People tend to have the instinct of wanting the groups that they are a member of to be better than other groups, (to affirm that they have made a good choice).²⁶ A way for us to do this is to downgrade other groups.

For instance, an enthusiast of the Microsoft operating system Windows might find that Linux and Apple users are generally quite nice but clearly mislead in their technological choices. Members of both other groups will certainly find many reasons why their choice is in fact the only reasonable one and superior to the others. Those, however, who are not particularly enthusiastic about their operating system, might not care what they have, as long as it works.

This goes to show that it is not so much the group that we are in, but how important this group is to us, that determines our behaviour.

Psychological experiments show that even completely arbitrarily put together groups form a sense of superiority over a group they might be in competition with in the shortest amount of time.²⁷ This obviously requires some sort of homogenisation of the group, “We are right because we are members of this group”,²⁸ as well as the other group, “They are wrong, because they are members of the other group”. This ‘us’ against ‘them’ thinking has been the source of many conflicts in the world and continues to fuel many more.

It is an interesting experience to simulate such power relations in educational exercises in order to provoke discussions on group dynamics, conflicts, etc.

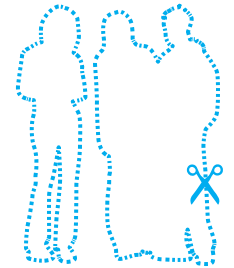
Formal groups have a tendency to strategically address the human need for belonging and offer their group,

for example the nation, to be a source of identification because their strength depends on the level of identification that their members have.

No groups without us

Groups as such do not exist, at least not without individuals that declare themselves to them. A group only becomes a group when there are people who find meaning and a source of identification in their shared interests.

Groups are made up of individuals – they do not exist independently. What is often being referred to as ‘collective identity’, are attributes that individuals give to the group. Just like the personal identity, a collective identity is a process of negotiation, development, change and discourse. If there are no individuals that communicate with each other, that talk about what a group means to them and what is special about this group, then there is no group. Groups come into existence and also stop existing because they serve, (or stop serving), a need for people. Informal groups generally have a much shorter life-span than formal groups because they are closely related to the immediate needs of the individuals. They change as quickly as the needs of those that carry them. Formal groups are far more persistent, but because of their more abstract nature they are also further away from the actual immediate needs of particular individuals. While your group of friends might fall apart after you have finished school and decided to go abroad, the army will still last even if you decide to step out after a few months.



This us against them thinking has been the source of many conflicts”



26. Weller, C. (1999): Kollektive Identitäten in der internationalen Politik. In: Reese-Schäfer, W. (Ed.). (1999): Identität und Interesse. Der Diskurs der Identitätsforschung. | 27. Sherif et. al. (1988): The Robbers Cave Experiment, Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation. Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut. | 28. Tajfel, H. (Ed.). (1978): Differentiation between Social Groups. Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. Academic Press, London.

Benedict Anderson, professor of International Studies at the American Cornell University, published his main work 'Imagined Communities' in 1983. In this book he gives the definition for the group, called nation: "I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."²⁹



Benedict Anderson's 'Imagined Communities'

Any group that is too big for every person in that group to know everyone else, is basically an "imagined community".³⁰ Originally referring to nations, this term can also be used for other groups that are 'imagined'. No fan of a big football club knows all the other fans of it, but they suffer and celebrate together, united in their community. They are communities that exist theoretically and through discourse, but not mediated through meetings and common experiences. Because they are imagined, both by their members and 'outsiders', they become much more easily a projection surface for stereotypes. We might be gay, Muslim or black and find that this fact will not say anything about us, about who and how we are. Yet it is due to this one fact that we might face discrimination because attributes of a community and the connected associations are projected onto us.

The membership of an individual to such large groups is a very shaky ground for making assumptions about this person's values or preferences in life. What we can say about groups (and their culture) is only what we can say about the group, not about the individual people in it. We are simply too complex to be reduced to one group that we are a part of.

3.2. Identity and Stereotypes

Simona Fisichella European Voluntary Service in Belfast

During my EVS placement I've never seen big problems caused by the cultural diversity, just a real interest in other people's stories and identities. Of course the shared moments raised many questions about other identities. I have learned a lot, not only about the people I was living with but also about my own roots.

Stereotypes are not always something to avoid, it depends on how you use them. If there is enough confidence between the members of a group, stereotypes can be a funny way to make notice some aspects of the personality or to underline the similarities between really (apparently) different cultures.

Lots of times we used to joke about our German flatmate as she was always late – which is not typically German at all. Or the "fake" Italian one: blonde with blue eyes that can't cook anything apart from scrambled eggs and hamburgers.



Stereotypes are not always something to avoid



Agnes Sieberth European Voluntary Service in Luxembourg

I was in Luxembourg for one year via a European Voluntary Service. Coming from Austria I was used to the "south-eastern-worker" cliché as a typical immigrant. In Luxembourg immigrants mainly come from Portugal. Portuguese people weren't afflicted with any kind of stereotype for me – but for people from Luxembourg they of course had this typical image of an immigrant worker. Since then my view →



29. Anderson, B. (1983): Imagined Communities, Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism. In: Ashcroft et al. (Ed.). (2006): The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. Routledge, USA. p.124. | 30. Anderson, B. op. cit.

on foreign workers became very different – prejudices got less. Not knowing as a youngster about many cultural differences, leads to prejudices or stereotypes. For me, knowing your own definition of identity is a start for a multicultural society where people understand each other better beyond stereotypes. ■

There are stereotypes about every group: about professions, religious groups, sexual orientations, skin colour, nationalities, regions, age or even about people who like Japanese movies, smoke expensive cigars or read women’s magazines. We all have stereotypes. They are a part of life, of our way of thinking and they are necessary for us to survive. It is not necessarily bad to have stereotypes.

The term ‘stereotype’ comes from Greek ‘stereós’ (meaning firm, hard) and derives from printing. It was used for the first time in the 18th century by the French letterpress printer Firmin Didot who used it to describe the cast form of a printing plate.³¹ With this printing plate you could produce as many copies of the same writing or picture as you wanted and impress the same meaning on different sheets or materials. A stereotype, as we understand the word nowadays, does more or less the same, it is a fixed image in our mind that we keep on pressing onto different people and things. The meaning itself can be positive or negative.



Firmin Didot and the origin of the word ‘stereotype’

Within this multitude of stereotypes, clearly not all of them are negative, some of them might actually be quite nice such as the stereotype about Spanish people having a good sense for rhythm or people with glasses being intelligent.

But that does not make them any more true or new. Stereotypes are in fact never telling anything new.

They are a sort of ‘common sense’ of a society that is being transferred over generations.³² Their content does not surprise us, it is well known.

So if we cannot rely on them what do we actually need stereotypes for?

‘Pictures in our head’

As already mentioned about the ‘imagined communities’ above, we can never really perceive the world or the groups in them as a whole. We can never know every single person in this world, probably cannot travel to every single country within one lifetime, cannot taste every single food, smell every single flower or touch every single stone. The world itself is just too big for us to capture all of it, we can only firsthand experience a tiny portion of it.

As we cannot perceive it with our physical senses but still have the need to understand the world we are living in, we need to imagine it in our minds. We reconstruct it on a simpler model and thereby create “pictures in our head”³³ or in other words, stereotype it.

In 1922 the American writer and political commentator Walter Lippman (1889 – 1974) wrote his book ‘Public Opinion’. In this book he states that people must inevitably use stereotypes to describe their complex reality due to their limited ability to perceive the world as a whole. He says: “Our stereotyped world is not necessarily the world we would like it to be. It is simply the kind of world we expect it to be.”

We reconstruct the world on a simpler model



Walter Lippman - ‘Public Opinion’

31. Grzybek, P. (1999): Kulturelle Stereotype und Stereotyp. In: Koch, W.A. [Ed.]: Natürlichkeit der Sprache und der Kultur. Bochumer Beiträge zur Semiotik, Band 18. Bochum: Brockmeyer. pp.300-327 | 32. Imhof. In: Hahn, H. H. (2002): Stereotyp, Identität und Geschichte. Die Funktion von Stereotypen in gesellschaftlichen Diskursen. Peter Lang, Frankfurt. p.63 | 33. Lippmann, W. (2007): Public Opinion. NuVision Publications

People construct a so called ‘pseudo-environment’ that reflects their subjective mental image of the world including their stereotypes. To a degree this individual ‘pseudo-environment’ is not entirely true but fictional. Hence, people perceive things in their own ‘pseudo-environment’, but their actions happen in the ‘real world’.

In other words, the two main functions that stereotypes fulfil are to:

Arrange the world

Without categorising we would be confused by the overwhelming amount of information we get and the diversity of people we meet. Stereotypes make the world simple and manageable. They help us to handle the complexity of life. We do not need to gather all possible information when we meet someone, we can just build up an image of new people by a few pieces of information and in succession predict their future behaviour. This also helps us to know how we should behave towards this person.

We construct stereotypes about others out of previous experiences, stories we are told by friends and family, images we see in films, TV-shows or advertisements or common opinions of the culture we live in. Once the stereotype is developed, we use it when we face new situations. Our stereotypes act like a filter of what we see and how we see it and therefore distort our perception of the world.³⁴

We are told about the world and create images about it before we even see and experience it ourselves. We define it, even before we have seen it. These preconceptions form a big part of how we finally perceive the world. Stereotypes are almost like a pair of glasses that define

the ‘colour’ in which we see things. When we are confronted with completely new things, we place the focus on aspects that are familiar or elements that confirm our stereotypes. If the German participant in the seminar is always the first one to arrive in the morning we might think ‘Of course he’s punctual, he’s German.’ and probably tend to ignore that his Spanish colleague is on time as well.



We can never really take off those glasses. What is important to remember, is that what we experience is always a result of our limited perceptions, our imagination and our stereotypes. It is therefore a good idea to not make decisions based solely on how we see the world, but to stop and think about how much this actually has to do with reality.

Arrange ourselves in the world

We not only arrange the world around us, but also ourselves in that world and within groups. In order to create stereotypes about a group we have to see this group in comparison to our own. This process also works through stereotyping.

Two kinds of stereotypes

There are two kinds of stereotypes, or two directions of stereotyping:

1. ‘hetero-stereotypes’ (about another group)
2. ‘auto-stereotypes’ (about our own group)

Auto- and hetero-stereotypes depend on each other. Every hetero-stereotype someone has about another, actually tells something about the stereotypes they have about themselves.

“
Stereotypes make
the world
simple and
manageable
”

34. Lippmann, W. op. cit. p.89

If a group of Norwegians think that Italians are loud and direct it probably means that they consider themselves as being more quiet and cautious. The actual information the stereotype gives is not that Italians are loud, but that the Norwegians consider themselves calmer in comparison. So in the end, stereotypes have three levels of information:

The 'hidden' information

- *Its claim for truth:* Stereotypes pretend to give true information about a certain group
- *Its claim for information:* Stereotypes pretend to give factual information about a certain group
- *The 'hidden' information:* Effectively stereotypes give information about the perception of the one stereotyping

If we do not want to be fooled by a stereotype's obvious claim for truth or information, it is important to be attentive, to 'read' its 'hidden' information and what it actually says about the person voicing it.

Still, when someone states a stereotype, it does not mean that this is the person's opinion. Stereotypes are constructed by collectives, they are not an opinion developed by one single person. A certain group has to believe in a stereotype in order to make it exist. Stereotypes are passed on through socialisation, they are part of what a collective thinks and not what individuals come up with on their own.³⁵

The danger of stereotypes is that, shared by so many people, they can be mistaken as facts and then used as the basis for action. They can turn into prejudices. This can happen on a collective basis as well as on an individual one. If a stereotype grows into being a prejudice, it is no longer only a positive or negative image about someone else, it is mixing with personal emotions. And when these emotions lead to action, discrimination is born.



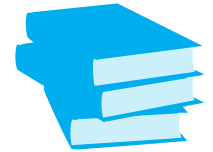
The danger of stereotypes is that they can be mistaken as facts



Stereotypes = processing information about characteristics of people, and sorting them into different general 'boxes' inside your head.

Prejudice = stereotype + emotion (negative or positive)

Discrimination = stereotype + emotion - action
(An action is taken according to the feeling related to the characteristics, this again could be positive or negative.)³⁶



Stereotypes
Prejudices
Discrimination

Stereotypes form the basis for negative as well as positive discrimination, i.e. a quota of women for leadership positions in public administration. Discrimination never refers to a person but rather to the categories this person fits into and the stereotypes associated with them. Of course, the person that experiences the discrimination will not care much about this, as the consequences will be felt very strongly.

Questioning stereotypes

That is why stereotypes have such a bad connotation and why they are such a delicate subject that we tend to avoid bringing up directly. They can be offensive, and it would be difficult to find a person that likes to be put into a group of generalized (negative) association, especially without even being known by the one announcing them.

The impact of stereotypes on our behaviour and our actions is bigger the less aware we are about the fact that they are actually stereotypes and not facts. It is important to accept their existence and be curious about where they are coming from. Which story have we heard? Which pictures have we seen? What experience have we had? What has helped develop the stereotypes we have? Only when we recognize the influence our stereotypes have on our perception of the world are we able to see through them.

35. Imhof. In: Hahn, H. H. op. cit. p.63 | 36. SALTO-YOUTH. Diverse Concepts, Diverse Practices. Exploring Quality in Cultural Diversity Training. SALTO Publication. p.24

3.3 - Identity development of individuals in groups

Being willing to overcome our stereotypes is especially important when we meet people from diverse backgrounds during international youth work activities. The limitation of space, the time shared with each other, and the emotional intensity of such activities allow us to get to know ‘strangers’ more quickly and deeply than it would normally be possible in an every-day-life situation.

Most of the educational youth activities, (seminars, study visits, youth exchanges, training courses, work camps...), take place in groups. These groups might have existed before or have a certain common background but on most occasions they are ‘created’ for the purpose of the educational activity.

The diversity of a group and/or the fact of working together in a ‘new group’ are part of the inherent challenge of any international youth activity, and one of the biggest learning opportunities for participants.

This is the reason why the group’s context is not the only place where learning and personal development takes place. Beyond this there is also the groups’ dynamic, the power relationships in the group, the stereotypes, the different senses of belonging, and the majority-minority relations, etc. that serve as the ‘content’ of the learning itself.

Using groups not just as the context but also as a source of learning in educational youth activities, allows that those group experiences and reflections will draw some lessons for our groups, our behaviour and involvement with them in our life outside of the activity. The youth work sector has developed very much in this direction and there are many tools, methods and practices for group learning.

In relation to identity it is very often true that in the ‘group oriented’ learning, the particular interests of participants are not visible, their particular background, contexts and circumstances are not sufficiently considered in the educational processes. The methods oriented to the personal reflection are not sufficiently articulated and often considered boring or a waste of time. Even the so called ‘free time’ is supposed to be spent with the group. Once a trainer said to a participant who was alone calmly reading the newspaper “What are you doing? Go talk to people! You can read the newspaper at home.”

If this happens, if there are too few methods, time and spaces for the personal reflection and ‘digestion’ of the group experiences, international youth activities become exciting but artificial. They are disconnected from the real concerns of individuals and their daily lives. This makes it very difficult to put the necessary attention to the personal development of the participants. It also makes it difficult to develop the multiplication in the other contexts of the processes as well as the results of the international youth activities.

When – as we have seen – identity development implies personal choices and commitments, when the groups’ dynamic, power relationships, stereotypes, different senses of belonging, and majority-minority relations are relevant sources of learning, how much space and opportunities do we provide for it in the middle of our group oriented activities?

Within the existing educational methods there is a need for personal space, choices and commitments for identity development, not in spite of the group but within, through and towards the group. That is probably the reason why in the last year’s, methods like diaries, meditations, self assessment, self and mutual exploration exercises, and personal development plans, etc. have



Youth activities should provide time and space for identity development



taken a growing importance in international youth activities.

Exploring identity has become more important as a topic for itself. It is not 'selfish' to look at yourself and concentrate on who you are. On the contrary, it is useful and necessary for your own self confidence and that, in the end, also makes up how comfortable you feel in groups.

3.4. - Methods and Activities

The methods in this chapter have a stronger focus on the 'individual – group relation'. To what extent are individuals defined by the groups they belong to, what do those belongings mean, etc.?

The first method, 'Identity Pyramid', is looking particularly at the cultural element of belonging to different groups. How values are learned and communicated, what structures exist in different groups, sanctions and definitions of 'normality', etc.

The second method, 'Power Flower', has a stronger focus on the social roles and attributes given to groups that one is voluntarily or involuntarily a member of. It looks at the distribution of power and what this means for the individual in a group environment.



These methods help reflecting on group belongings of individuals.

Identity Pyramid

This method stimulates a process of self-reflection and sharing on the diversity of belongings each individual has and how this is manifested in their lives and in different situations in their reality. It can help to visualise the multitude of belongings that each individual has and to reflect on the relations between those belongings and identify structures, patterns, and challenges.

Step by Step:

1. Ask the participants to individually draw on a piece of paper a triangle pointing downwards, filling the paper as much as possible.
2. Now ask the participants to write all the groups that they belong to and/or identify with into this triangle – according to the size of the group: the biggest groups on the top, where the triangle is wide; the smallest on the bottom, where the triangle is narrow. They can also draw lines between the groups, so that the triangle now looks like it has many different layers.
3. Once the participants have individually brainstormed on the multitude of groups they belong to, ask them to attach to each group a little box on the remaining space on their paper, (or if they drew the triangle on an A4 sheet of paper, you can give them an A3 sheet of paper to glue their triangle on, to increase the space that they have). Here they note down the values that are important in this group and other specificities such as dress-codes, gender roles, how abnormal behaviour is sanctioned, etc.
4. The facilitator now asks the participants to examine their triangle:
 - Are there memberships in groups that are conflicting?



This method stimulates a process of self-reflection about different belongings

Materials
A4 sheets of paper (optionally also A3 sheets),
Markers, Pencils,
Flip Chart.

- Is there a central theme?
- Which of these groups have they consciously chosen to join?
- Which groups are particularly important for them in defining who they are?
- Etc.

5. Participants should now gather in groups of 3 or 4 to share their triangles with each other and particularly point out whether they have identified a recurrent theme or conflicts that they were or were not aware of before. As a group the participants should see what they have in common and how similarly or differently important certain memberships are for them.

Debriefing

During the debriefing it is important to go through the three different stages of reflection, generalisation and application.

Reflection

- Was it difficult to identify the groups that you belong to?
- How did you know the values of the groups, who told you, where did you learn them?
- How many of your groups have you always been a part of? How many are more recent?

Generalisation

- Did you discover anything new?
- In comparing your triangle with others, was there anything that struck you?

Application

- What does this mean for you?
- How can you apply what you have learned in this activity in your daily life?

Adaptations

If you do this activity in the beginning of your seminar /exchange it can be a good way for participants to get to know each other. If this is the case you might want to make it less deep in order to have a lower threshold for participants to open up to each other and share about themselves.

If you do this activity towards the end of an intensive and possibly conflictual experience, you can ask participants to identify in their triangle which of their values was playing a dominant role in a conflict. They should then explore where this value comes from and how this is enhanced by other values, coming from different group belongings.

Source:

This method was developed by Bastian Küntzel in 2004. However, there might have been similar methods and similar approaches developed before that, which are not known to the authors of this publication.

Power Flower

This activity is for encouraging and guiding participants to reflect on their identity and how belonging to different groups can mean privileges for them or disadvantages. Through individual reflections, discussions in small groups and in plenary, participants will map out and compare different categories of diversity and what they can do to use their own power and privileges to empower those who are disadvantaged. They should be enabled to discuss power distributions and how these are connected to memberships in different groups and to start a process of dealing responsibly and constructively with their own power and privileges.

Step by Step:

Distribute the flower handout and ask the participants to find a quiet spot for themselves in the room. The centre of the flower is filled with a number of categories. Each category has an inner (small) and outer (large) petal coming out of it with a connecting statement in each. The participants should select and mark either the small or the big petal for each category, according to which group they feel they belong to.

At a first glance the small petals can be perceived as privileged groups and the large as disadvantaged groups. However, it is up to the participants to decide which group they belong to and what this means in their daily life. Only then should they decide for themselves whether or not this means a privilege or disadvantage to them.

Make sure the participants understand that they do this exercise only for themselves. They will not be asked to share it with anyone, if they prefer not to. If you want, you can play soft music in the background.



This method stimulates a process of self-reflection about different belongings

Materials
Worksheet of the power-flower for each participant,
Pens.

Once everyone is finished, split the bigger group into small groups of up to 6 people. Ask each group to discuss the following questions:

- Was it difficult to decide which petals to select?
- What are the privileges that are associated with the inner groups? What are the disadvantages that are associated with the outer groups? Are there also disadvantages associated with the inner groups? Are there privileges associated with the outer groups?

Which of these groups did you join out of your own wish? Which of them are you part of without your active engagement?

- How is your balance between inner and outer petals? How do you feel about that?
- How does it feel to be part of the 'inner-petal' groups? How does it feel to be part of the 'outer-petal' groups?

Following the small groups, ask everyone to join back in the bigger group for a debriefing.

Debriefing

During the debriefing it is important to go through the three different stages of reflection, generalisation and application. Be aware, however, that the participants have just spent a good amount of time in small groups already reflecting on the exercise. Do not necessarily repeat what they have discussed already but add new dimensions of reflection.

Reflection

- How do you feel?
- Was it easy to decide where you belong to regarding an inner-petal or to an outer-petal?
- Was there any striking point from your discussions in the small group that you would like to share with the rest of us?

Generalisation

- Do all these belongings mean the same to you?
- When are they important and when not?
- Do you think there are situations in which there is a switch; a privilege becomes a disadvantage or the other way around? Can you come up with examples?
- Do you think in your society, all these belongings and categories have the same importance? Which are more or which are less important where you come from?
- Can the belonging to one group cause belonging to other groups as well? Can you give an example?
- How can you be empowered, if you are a part of a disadvantaged group?

Application

- Looking at your privileges, what can you do with them?
- How can you use the power that you have to empower those that are disadvantaged?
- How can you turn your disadvantages into a resource?

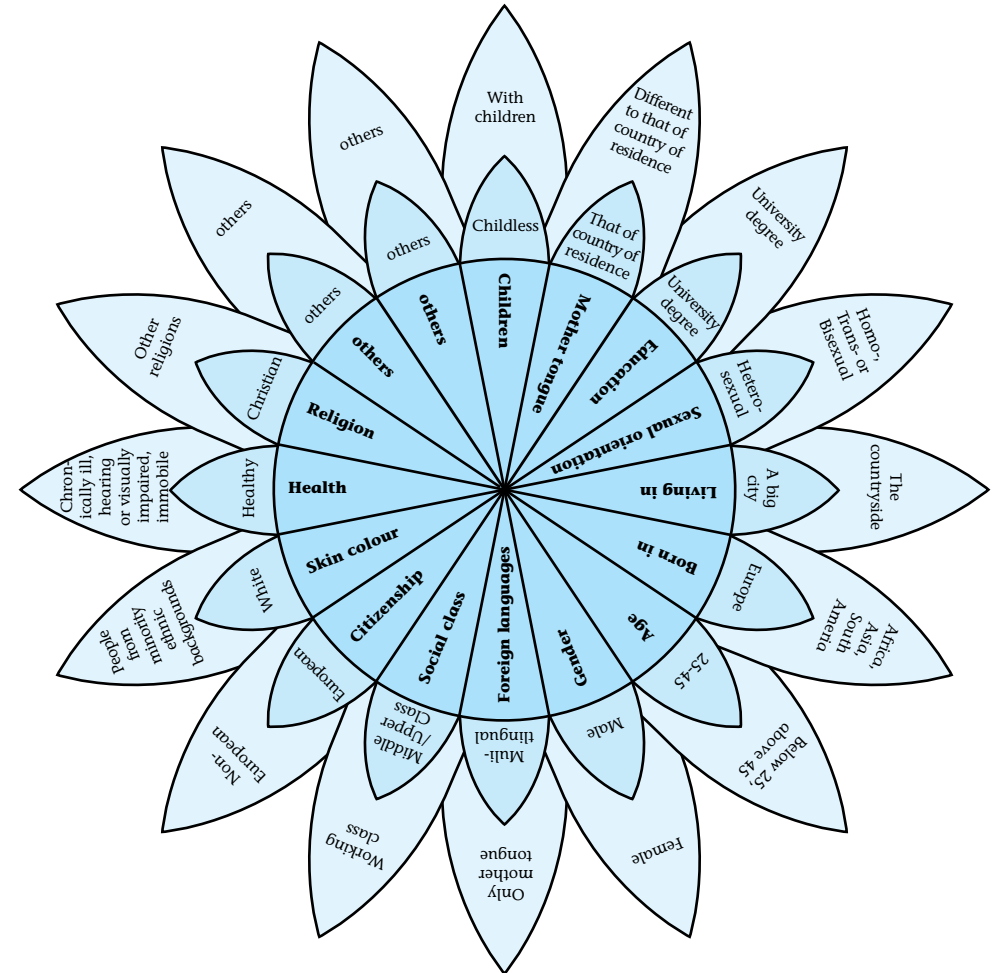
Adaptations

The facilitator can draw a power-flower on a flip-chart, but not mark the inner and outer leaves. Before the individual reflection, the group can discuss and decide what privilege and what disadvantage means for each category.



You can photocopy and enlarge the Worksheet for this method on the opposite page to use with your group

Power Flower Worksheet



Source:
© Based on
'Power-Flower' by
Anti-Bias Werkstatt:
www.anti-bias-werkstatt.de

Adapted by the authors
for a European
target group.

CONCLUSION

We hope you have enjoyed reading this publication and that it assists you in your youth work and encourages you to explore the topic of identity a bit further yourself...



With this publication we aimed to contribute in facilitating reflections and discussions on identity in international youth work. We hope that you find this a practical guide concerning the topic of identity that not only concentrates on the group but also on the individual, a guide that takes identity in both regards seriously. We believe that questions of identity lie at the core of many problems and solutions that we face today in Europe and beyond. We want to encourage you to not only deal with it as a side topic in youth activities but as an issue that every one of us has to reflect on deeply in our work and in our lives.

We hope this publication has not only provided a lot of information for you, but also encourages you to explore the topic of identity a bit further yourself. The testimonials might have reminded you of your own similar experiences in the field and made you realize the importance of the notion of identity in all sorts of projects. The methods provided could hopefully serve as a 'stepping stone' for you in order to create new methods or search for similar activities.

Learning more about identity will not lead to definite answers, it will most likely lead you to new questions, but it will always be exciting and reveal new things to you about yourself and others. What those findings in the end mean to your life and who you are, is up to you to decide!

If you want to learn more on the topic please have a look at our Resources and Links!

We also encourage you to try the **Personal Companion 'Discover Yourself'** if you want to reflect on your own identity individually!

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Download these and other SALTO booklets for free at:

www.salto-youth.net/rc/cultural-diversity/publications-of-cultural-diversity

If you are looking for youth work and training methods about Identity and Cultural Diversity, browse through the SALTO Toolbox for Training at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Toolbox

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The topic of cultural identity and especially stereotypes about different identities has been a recurrent theme in Katharina's life and writing. After finishing her studies on theatre, cultural studies and languages, Katharina enjoyed coming to London and learning more about the plenitude of cultural differences between England and Austria.

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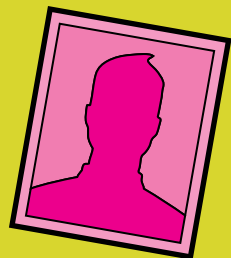
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Understanding Youth

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