

YOUTH VOICES FOR THE FUTURE

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC VALUE

Position Paper and Call to Action **no. 1/20**

By **Victoire de Marans**

With the help of Leah Black and Caesar Kaba Kogoziga



#PublicValueYouthVoices



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Our societies are facing multiple high scale challenges: the future of our economy is uncertain; scientific opinion is ringing the alarm about the worsening state of our planet, and mistrust is rising between people everywhere on the globe. The recent COVID-19 crisis and the latest news (such as [alarming temperatures in Siberia](#) or [sinking health care systems all over the world](#)) give multiple concrete examples of how the climate crisis, global mistrust and economic crisis affect us in our day-to-day lives.

However, in this context of rising insecurity and fear for the future, youth seem to refuse the worsening of these conditions: young people are becoming more vocal and more engaged in defending the causes they care about and raising awareness on the issues threatening the wellbeing of their communities. They are organizing world-wide protests and social media movements, gathering in associations, being innovative to find concrete solutions, and are overall willing to get involved. The message to older generations is quite clear: we need to do better; we need to take action now.

Yet the lack of concrete measures from the political and economic elites reinforces the crisis of distrust. Youth are left unappeased and frustrated. The actions taken to answer their concerns do not live up to their expectations. Moreover, the solutions proposed by the higher spheres of power are not sufficient to tackle the issues they are raising. These negative feelings and the overarching breach of dialogue between generations are leading to a new kind of activism. Fueled by mutual failure to understand each other and frustration from both sides, we can witness an escalation of violence in protests and a rise of extremism in discourses.

Young people are demanding to be heard. They want concrete and bold action to be taken now. They are aware that the issues we are all facing are of significant importance and need to be urgently tackled. They know how they will inflict unprecedented repercussions on the following decades, and even on future generations. Something has to be done to efficiently deal with the multiple crises threatening their future. The youth all over the world have ideas and solutions. They are driven by a willingness to do better and not to accept the status quo.

Your Public Value aims at giving young people the space they need to express their concerns and their needs, and to find solutions to these new global challenges. The project **Youth Public Value Voices** provides a space for action where the youth can co-create the future they want and reestablish the broken connection between generations. Such a space leaves room for them to develop their ideas to achieve universal wellbeing and common good around them. Young people are to be seen an asset, not as a challenge. We are aiming at filling the growing need for a new space for this potential to express itself and grow.

This Position Paper aims at highlighting the breach of dialogue between generations and the need to take immediate action to give young people a safe space to express themselves. Starting with Europe and Africa, such an objective also bridges and connects youth from the oldest and youngest continents. It encourages them to be innovative and co-create principles to establish the future they want.



A BREACH OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Since the beginning of protests and the rise of awareness on global matters, the political and economic elites have been trying to deal with the crises faced by our societies. The problems have been understood as such and some measures have been passed in many countries to try to solve them. Yet, these responses are not sufficient to tackle the economic, climate and distrust crises efficiently. The data we have gathered in our “youth voices” interviews, with young people from Europe and Africa, alongside the growing number of protesters in the streets tend to demonstrate the urgent need to act with a cross-cultural and inter-generational approach. Young people do not feel heard by these elites. Furthermore, they do not feel like their ideas have been acted upon by governments and the private sector.

As a consequence of these mellow measures and repeated attacks on their engagement, young people feel like their interests have been jeopardized. [A 2018 survey](#) conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that Americans under 30 are less confident in key institutions than their elders: they only show 34% confidence in business leaders compared to 50% for those above 30, and 34% feel confidence in elected officials compared to 38% for adults¹. This trend can also be observed in the [interviews conducted by Your Public Value](#) in Europe and Africa: a wide majority of interviewees state that they do not feel listened to and do not feel like their ideas have been acted upon by major political and economic players².

“How dare you? You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words”, 16 years-old activist Greta Thunberg told 60 world leaders [at the UN in 2019](#)³. This now

1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/06/young-americans-are-less-trusting-of-other-people-and-key-institutions-than-their-elders/>

2 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBcZnkzzGll9WpSUEuUazhg>

3 <https://www.dw.com/en/greta-thunberg-to-un-youve-stolen-my-childhood-with-your-empty-words/a-50550787>

world-famous phrase is a perfect reflection of the youth's feelings towards elite. Young people demand to be included; they are calling for concrete action - now. The political and economic measures adopted this past decade have not been enough to tackle dire economic downturns, a worsening climate crisis and the other issues faced by young people all over the world. The youth is suffering from the consequences of choices made by older generations without taking their opinions into account.

Yet, instead of stepping up the ambition of their measures to live up to the youth's expectations, the elites felt attacked by the rising demand to do better. [Alt-right politicians in the US](#) and the UK adopted the term "generation snowflake" in 2016 as a [politicized insult](#) against the engagement of youth⁴. This term aims at mocking the "hypersensitivity" of younger generations and their unwillingness to accept the current situation. This disdain for the causes they care about and their dissatisfaction with the decisions taken is creating a new generational stereotype. Young adults and teenagers are portrayed as less resilient, narcissist and even thin-skinned.



Mirroring the "generation snowflake" trend, millennials responded with the catchphrase "[OK Boomer](#)"⁵. Trending at the end of 2019, this hashtag [peaked in November](#) with up to 12k accounts posted it on social media every day⁶. It was even used by a young Green MP in the [halls of New-Zealand's Parliament](#)⁷. "OK Boomer" can be seen as a rallying cry for youth and a call on baby-boomers to take action to change the future. It reflects the frustration of being affected by the choices made by older generations without having any influence on these

4 <https://townhall.com/columnists/michellemalkin/2016/11/16/the-slacker-mandate-and-the-safety-pin-generation-n2246311> and <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/nov/28/snowflake-in-sult-disdain-young-people>

5 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/29/style/ok-boomer.html>

6 <https://towardsdatascience.com/ok-boomer-escalated-quickly-a-reddit-bigquery-report-34133b286d77?gi=a44454d85f90>

7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=OxJsPXrEqCI&feature=emb_logo

decisions. Youth are fed up, tired of being mocked for their willingness to act and to be bold. The risk is for them to give up on discussing and exchanging knowledge and ideas.

This war of nicknames and hashtags is a striking illustration of the troubled relationship between generations nowadays. The growing gap between generations and the breach of dialogue is not to be taken lightly. Through a strong mutual distrust, these generations are constructing their ideas and actions against one another instead of cooperating. However, changing the future and dealing with the multiple urging crises we are facing today cannot be done alone: only collective effort will bring the positive change we are all seeking. Therefore, there is an urgent need to take action in re-establishing dialogue and helping generations to understand each other and act as one body.

Inter-generational clashes and profound misunderstandings are the reason why we decided to focus on bridging generations. In order to foster an inter-generational working environment, we will implement a reciprocal mentorship phase between our experts and young people from Europe and Africa. This exchange will bring a transfer of ideas and a real dialogue where the relationship between generations has been broken. With such a system, the youth will actually educate the older generation. They will explain the issues they want to prioritize and how they want to tackle them. Through these exchanges they will seize the role they want to play. Reciprocal mentorship is a call on the youth to act and be proactive in the change they want to see in the world.

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC VALUE

Your Public Value aims at re-establishing trust and accountability in times of climate crisis, distrust and economic downturns. The most effective way to take positive action for the people and the planet being collective, we value dialogue, participation and co-creation as key elements. Indeed, collective intelligence is a way to find innovative concrete solutions to issues that elites and policymakers have been struggling to solve by themselves. Yet the breach between generations is a critical obstacle to inclusiveness and to the establishment of trust within our societies.

Youth bring more value to public value. In order for them to get the central place they deserve in the decision-making process and get empowered to develop the best of their capacities; young people need to:

- Be actively listened to
- Create networks of like-minded young people
- Share knowledge and create dialogue channels with experts and policymakers
- Co-create business solutions with public value
- Be involved in various leadership roles
- Influence societal, economic and environmental change

Another driving purpose of Your Public Value is to create principles for universal wellbeing and a common good. These principles will pave the way to shaping a future where young people are represented, and their interests are taken into consideration. Youth are resourceful and will propose a new viewpoint on solutions to address their challenges.

We also believe that such an objective can only be reached through the reestablishment of dialogue between generations and the empowerment of young people. Such a dialogue would benefit both sides: youth would enjoy the experience and guidance of mentors, and experienced leaders would gain a fresh point of view and new perspectives on modern stakes. The cooperation between generations would have a positive effect on societal, economic and environmental change.

Youth matters everywhere - but young people matter in different ways across continents. Your Public Value decided to start the Youth Public Value Voices project working with Europe and Africa. These continents differ dramatically in demographics: the median age in Europe is 42,6 years old, compared to 19,7 years old in Africa. Starting with a dialogue between the “oldest” and the “youngest” continents and highlighting the similarities and differences of its younger generations will create an interesting variety of opinions and ideas.

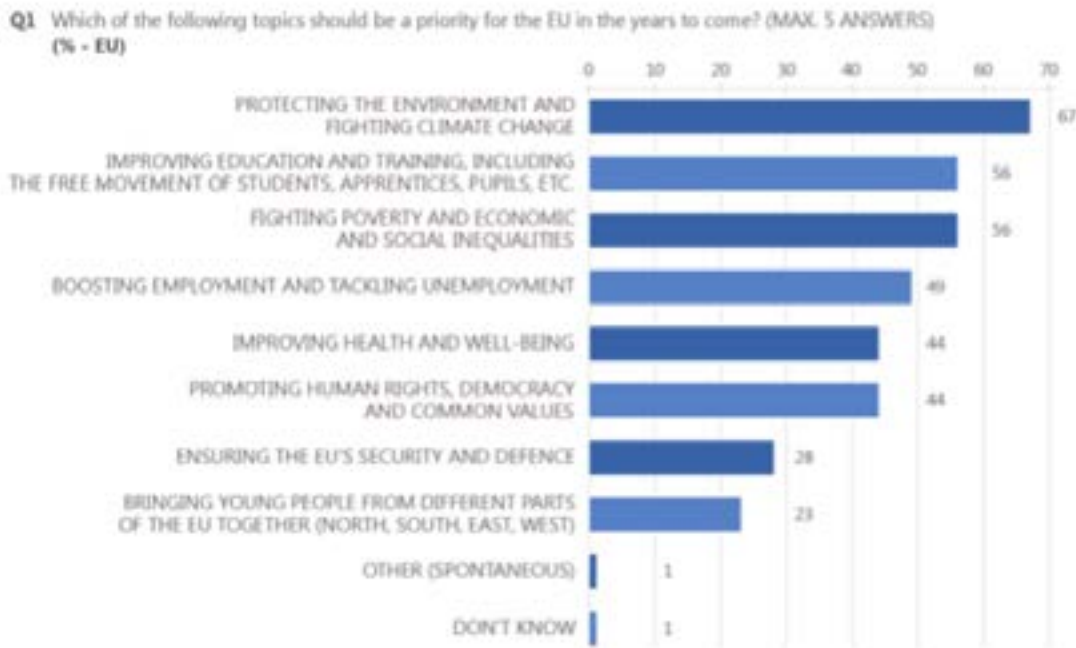


YOUTH MATTERS IN AFRICA AND EUROPE

As seen above, youth are taking to the streets and getting actively engaged everywhere around the globe. However, this engagement is influenced by the socio-economical context of different countries and different regions of the world. To enhance the empowerment of young people and integrate them into decision-making processes, it is crucial to understand the environment it is evolving in. Starting with Europe and Africa, we strive to identify and

understand what the key differences and similarities between youth on both continents are, starting with their level of engagement and concerns.

An important point to analyze is the different causes that matter to youth on both continents. Even though we understand “Europe” as a geographical entity that includes the UK, Norway and Switzerland for example, the data used in this paper was retrieved from youth



Base: all respondents (N=10,786)

Source: European Commission, 2019

documents issued by the European Commission. The graph below presents the topics that should be prioritized according to European youth.

To the issues presented in this youth survey we can also add the topics “Gender Equalities” and “Space and Participation” mentioned in the Youth 4 Europe [European Youth Goals](#) for 2019-2027⁸. Overall, we observe that European youth prioritize environment, employment issues and fighting poverty.

To understand the topics that matter to African youth, we are basing our analysis on the topics presented in the [African Youth Charter](#) of the African Union⁹:

- Employment
- Sustainable livelihoods
- Education
- Skills development
- Health youth participation
- National youth policy

8 <https://youthforeurope.eu/european-youth-goals-2019-2027/>

9 <https://au.int/fr/treaties/african-youth-charter>

These points are also present and reinforced in the four [key pillars for youth empowerment](#) presented by the African Union Commission in 2019¹⁰:

- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Education and skills development
- Health and well-being
- Rights, governance, and empowerment

From these documents, we can notice a high degree of similarity in the topics of importance to youth in both Africa and Europe. To illustrate this convergence of issues Caesar Kaba Kogoziga, one of Your Public Value's team members and a young [interviewee for the project](#), said: *"The main issues with the youth are not really different across the continents. An issue like unemployment, which so many young people are facing, is not unique to Africa, it is not unique to Europe: it is a young people issue. And something like that transfers costs, and even opportunities to get empowerment, even education, and opportunities to advance our skills"*¹¹.

After establishing the common points between the African and European youth, the following part will focus and explore their key differences.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONTINENTS

From the pillars cited above, we can establish that young people in Europe and Africa share similar concerns about their future. However, we noticed from our interviews that the European youth sometimes feel like young people in Africa are somewhat less engaged in active participation. In a [2017 Flash Eurobarometer](#), more than half of respondents (53%) were involved in groups or organizations¹². The same report shows an increase in political participation by +18 percentage points between 2014 and 2017. These elements attest to a high level of engagement from European youth. We researched whether the engagement of the Youth in Africa matched its European counterpart.

A first striking element in the research on the African youth participation is a lack of quality comprehensive data about the subject matter¹³. However, getting access to such data

10 https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/37828-doc-soayr_policy_brief_ok.pdf

11 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T4CI9GEMBO&t=14s>

12 <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/82294>

13 https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/37828-doc-soayr_policy_brief_ok.pdf



is vital to get a better understanding of their concerns, demands and overall situation. This absence of reliable information about young people is indeed enlightening as a concrete sign of that breach between the political spheres and the youth. It could also be seen as a sign of disinterest for this large section of the population.

In [an article](#) published in 2016 in the Journal of Socialomics, scholar Mengitsu MM researched the inclusion of the African youth in politics. His findings show that in Africa, the youth is extremely excluded from socio-economic and political spheres¹⁴. Though about [75% of the African population](#) is under 35 years old, only 31 countries out of 55 have a national youth policy¹⁵. Reports show that these difficulties to participate in the political life of Africa are leading to a strong [decline of civic engagement](#)¹⁶. There is an urge to establish an enabling and youth friendly environment to facilitate youth inclusion. The evident willingness of young people to take action just needs a proactive and inclusive attitude from policy makers to achieve meaningful and effective youth political participation.

The key difference between African and European youth is essentially one of environment: both are visible and vocal, yet younger Africans are given less room for political engagement. Building a bridge between both generations and empowering young people can only be achieved by creating an enabling environment for them. An analysis of the interviews we conducted allowed us to identify a certain degree of stereotypes from young Europeans towards their African counterparts. These preconceptions can be explained by an asymmetrical one-sided relationship between young people from Europe and Africa. Therefore, we do not simply need to establish a dialogue between generations, but also between youth of different continents. Everywhere on the planet youth should not be seen as a challenge, but rather as an asset.

PUBLIC VALUE RECOMMENDATIONS

Though youth around the globe develop in different environments, they face similar challenges: unemployment, health, climate crisis... These common points unite us and bring us together, not only between youth from different regions of the world, but also between generations. We want to start by living up to our own personal values, our communities' and then expanding them to the rest of the world to create a sense of unity. We believe that this is what public value is about and this is what we are co-creating: a community of like-minded people meeting, exchanging ideas, understanding each other, and overall working together to achieve common good.

Therefore, we recommend young people to:

- Be actively listened to
- Create networks of like-minded young people
- Share knowledge and create dialogue channels with experts and policymakers
- Co-create business solutions with public value
- Be involved in various leadership roles
- Influence societal, economic and environmental change

¹⁴ <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Quest-for-Youth-Inclusion-in-the-African-and-Mengistu/e0ad016972f726142ab5d55f5e2748a895594193>

¹⁵ https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/demographic_profile_rev_april_25.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.aidsaccountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/AIDS-Accountability-International-State-of-the-African-Youth-Report-2nd-Edition-Digital.pdf>

Furthermore, we encourage policy makers to foster such actions and engage actively to include youth in the decision-making process. They need to give a greater place to youth's concerns and demands and give them the space they need to shape their future.

Your Public Value commits to focusing a large part of its research on the needs and challenges of youth across the world, and on offering a platform for dialogue. We also commit resources to building a strong network of mentors, both young and senior experts interested in learning from each other. We finally commit to helping young people interested in relying on public value to become financially self-sufficient.

We call on policy-makers, responsible investors, experts in sustainability and young people interested in better understanding public value to enter into dialogue, share practices, and co-create business or initiatives for the good of their communities and the environment. We will regularly report on the trends and other developments expressed in our labs.





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