

EUROPEAN STUDENTS’ REFLECTIONS*

Ingeborg Gruenwald (John Cabot University of Rome)

Leaving aside the economic side effects of COVID-19, one of the primary side effects that in my opinion is devastating is solitude. Having had family losses during the pandemic, I have come to understand what it means to spend the last few days of one’s life alone, not being able to spend time with your loved ones, completely dehumanising the person. In addition, as the times have been changing, my generation is preparing to enter the job world in debt due to increasingly expensive tuitions, which will have to be exhausted at a particular time in history where the job market has never been this specific and competitive. Leaving university scares me, because I know I will have to pursue a masters degree, and possibly a PhD or work twice as hard as my parents did in order to provide for my future family and kids, so they too will have the same opportunities I had.

Arabella Hirst (John Cabot University of Rome)

I think that if society would try to value the small business, the farmer, the artisan, the local restaurant, the nurse, the stay at home mother, the plumber, the bricklayer, the construction worker, the taxi driver etc. then success would have a different name, and capitalism could not convince us that we need huge homes, lavish vacations, gas guzzling cars, and many other objects. Then, only when we begin to value the “smaller people” would a greater sense of community be built. I think that community and connections are the key to improving upward mobility. If people made more relationships with people in their communities there would be more opportunity, friendship, and learning from one another.

Mirela Harizanova (American University in Bulgaria)

I am deeply disturbed by some trends I see in the world around me, and all of my concerns are intertwined with one another. For starters, I see a rising wave of extremism from all kinds of people, from all sides of the political, social, and whatever spectrum one can think of. Thomas Sowell, one of the most outstanding intellectuals of our time, says: “One of the most pathetic – and dangerous – signs of our times is the growing number of individuals and groups who believe that no one can possibly disagree with them for any honest reason.”

Claudette Kinds (University College Groningen)

Icarus’s danger did not only lie in flying too high to the sky, but also in flying too close to the sea. Danger is found in excess as well as the lack of, however, balance is key. In an age where terrorism is so prominent, radicalization of spirituality seems unavoidable. However, it seems a new danger shelters under not believing. The decline of physical spiritual environments where people can broadcast, leaves no other option but to turn to social media,

* Sent by email.

where disinformation and propaganda are dominating. This phenomenon then broadens the gap of consensus, resulting in most of the problems we face today.

Julia Jacukowicz (University College Groningen)

The majority that enjoys all sorts of rights and privileges still believes that their children, their families and their church needs to be protected against some made-up enemy. I guess what worries me about that is that it is all very human, and to some extent unavoidable. When you look closer and peel off all the layers of progress, including access to formal education, we're still very tribal. We need to belong; we need to feel safe. The constant flow of conflicting information – the many truths of the modern world – threatens our sense of stability. Yes, the news fatigue is very real. There is some comfort in letting someone else fight that battle for you and submitting to one of the truths uncritically. So I guess what worries about the modern world is how human it is (at least in some countries) to just accept the authority and somehow miss the fact that the emperor has no clothes.

Céline Paré (Amsterdam University College)

Meaningful youth participation in governance is widely accepted as crucial, at least in theory. United Nations General Assembly resolution 58/133 proclaims the “importance of the full and effective participation of youth and youth organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels”. Having said that, in practice, the lack of place made for youth in policy-making processes is plaguing societies worldwide. The individuals who take the decisions that will shape the next couple of years or decades are not the ones who will experience the repercussions.

At barely eighteen years old, I feel crushed by the weight of my generation's burdens. Global issues are interconnected: armed conflicts, environmental degradation, inequalities, authoritarianism, food and water scarcity... My generation will have to deal with these wicked problems. The previous generations will gradually fade away, and their legacy is going to be a concoction of social, political and economic tensions, structural human rights abuses, and laissez-faire



Amar van Duijneveldt



Ketevan Inasaridze



Julia Jacukowicz



Fiona Pantoga-Montoto



Krištof Sucha

attitudes. My generation will need to handle what has not been handled, while lacking the necessary tools.

László Negro (LCC International University)

I am a conservative citizen of EU. I find “progressive” views of Europe suffocating. If Europe fights for freedom for all, for freedom of speech for all, then why does this same Europe call individuals and indeed entire nations racist, homophobic, xenophobic, and so on? I am one of those Christians who will say that I disagree with modern “progressive” views; is there to be freedom for me or anyone like me? I never purposely offend anybody for believing in something different. Should I, should anyone, therefore turn a blind eye to modern plagues? Take for example narcotics and porn, which are in some sense no different. They are peddled to teenagers and in many cases children. Grown men profit from this commerce. Am I free to point this out?

Amar van Duijneveldt (Tilburg University)

To contribute to society, young people don't have to take traditional ways – they can become an online influencer and have their voice heard by millions, they can be a youtuber and make videos on issues they feel passionate about, they can be like Greta Thunberg, who still has regular meetings with the EU-top to address climate concerns, or Malala Yousafzai who changed the life of many girls seeking education.

Ketevan Inasaridze (LCC International University)

Some of us don't have the finances to awaken our potential. Some of us are told that we are wrong and our talents are not valid enough. Some of us are told “you are women you can't work” and some of us are told, “you are a boy, you can't dance ballet”. Some are told, “I put a roof over your head, you'll do how I say”. Our potential is being lost through all the expectations made up by the society that we have to fulfill. We give up on doing what makes us happy in order to make others happy or satisfied. We are scared to disappoint our families and our loved ones.

Fiona Pantoga-Montoto (Bard College Berlin)

The young generation simply echoes slogans (“flatten the curve,” “lower your carbon footprint,” “we are the ninety-nine percent”) without thoroughly understanding what they are repeating, praising, and advocating. This holds us back. There needs to be an awareness of this obstacle in order to move forward in our fullest potential.

Philip Cool (Amsterdam University College)

I feel that my generation is often dismissed as chronically discontent, as we aim for impossible standards of ‘political correctness’. Instead of valuing the unique perspective my generation brings to the table, society often rejects us for our argued lack of experience. We are urged to earn our stripes, instead of being included. Furthermore, much of the work experience students can access is highly competitive, and underpaid, if paid at all. This excludes students from lower class backgrounds even more, as they often can not afford to do work without getting paid. While this generation is not being offered a seat at the table, it has started building a new table entirely.

Tsimafei Misiukevich (European Humanities University)

The most important thing is not to be afraid of us. I often come across conservative or outdated traditions in my life path – be it the labor market, internships, or any international programs or initiatives. The older generation is worried about the lack of independence, incompetence, the inability of young people to make responsible decisions. They can demand a two-page list with the required qualifications from a young man – killing his will to do what he loves, forcing him to choose at least something to feed himself. They can neglect the spiritual and mental state, not understanding why they should give it any meaning – giving rise to doubt about the young mind’s belonging to this world.

Stivi Canka (LCC International University)

It is high time that youth become active political actors, and the above-mentioned policies will most certainly help them achieve that. I would like to contribute a quote by Kofi Annan, who once said, “Young people must be included from birth. A society that cut itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.”

Krištof Sucha (BISLA)

In my view, the issues that I am discontent about can be put under a larger rubric of “tampering with human nature”. Now, that is not to say that human nature is perfect by any means. But I feel like the current age is often very occupied with improving human flaws. The development of AI and the rapid acceleration of technologies is not only useless, but we as a society are doing it to even extend the comfort of our already too comfortable lives. Just take for instance, the development of something that at first was deemed as an innocent creative way to connect people such as Facebook, which turned into a cynical money-making machine that is slowly chipping away at Western democracies and their efficiency.