



STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

2024, JULY 27th
AYUDH Europe e.V.



VOICES FOR TOMORROW



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



CONTENTS



**AYUDH EUROPE,
A YOUTH-LED
MOVEMENT**
PAGE 4

**EXPLAINING THE
PROCESS**
PAGE 8

REFERRING TO
PAGE 15

**STATEMENT ON
EXPERIENTIAL
LEARNING**
PAGE 17

CALLS FOR ACTION
PAGE 25

LITERATURE
PAGE 27



AYUDH EUROPE, A YOUTH-LED MOVEMENT



AYUDH EUROPE, A YOUTH-LED MOVEMENT

AYUDH is an international youth movement that seeks to empower young people to make social and political change, for more inclusive and peaceful societies. AYUDH aims to facilitate young people's self-development, inner transformation and collective action, and develop compassionate leaders with a sense of tolerance, solidarity and global responsibility. AYUDH was founded and inspired by renowned spiritual and humanitarian leader Amma (Mata Amritanandamayi).

Originally a grass-roots and non-formal youth movement, AYUDH Europe e.V. was established as an association by German law in 2017. Its official purpose is *the promotion of a European community of young people, who strive to cultivate in themselves the universal values of love, compassion, tolerance, unity in diversity and respect, inspired by Amma and thereby wish to commit themselves for the good of their fellow women and men and the environment.*



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AYUDH EUROPE, A YOUTH-LED MOVEMENT

Focus is placed on:

- Individual development and acquisition of key competencies for the development of mindfulness, leadership qualities, creativity, social and ecological responsibility
- Promoting active citizenship of youth both nationally and internationally for socially relevant topics, which youth consider urgent (e.g., human rights, sustainability, gender equality, pluralism, intercultural and interreligious solidarity)

AYUDH's 20th European Youth Summit – Voices for Tomorrow – was co-funded by the European Union and the UNESCO Chair on Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development. The European Union has co-funded AYUDH's youth exchanges, European Voluntary Service and initiatives since 2007. More than 10,000 young Europeans have directly benefited from the programs that AYUDH Europe has carried out with this support.

AYUDH Europe's projects have received several commendations in the past years, such as 3 'Good Practice Example' by the Erasmus+ network and the 'Inclusion and Diversity' prize from SALTO Participation & Information.



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Transforming Education Through Experiential Learning

UNESCO awarded the prestigious UNESCO Chair on Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation and Development to Amrita University in 2020. Renewed for a second term in 2024, the chair has been at the forefront of shaping a sustainable future through hands-on, community-driven education. By integrating experiential learning into higher education and research, UNESCO Chair empower students, researchers, and global communities to co-create innovative solutions for real-world challenges.

Experiential Approach

These programs immerse students and professionals in rural communities, allowing them to engage directly with social, economic, and environmental challenges. Through interdisciplinary collaborations, field projects, and technology-driven interventions, we bridge the gap between knowledge and action.

Flagship Programs & Impact

- **Live-in-Labs®:** A hands-on, multi-disciplinary program where students and faculty work alongside communities to co-develop sustainable solutions. With over 400 projects across 600 villages, this initiative has impacted more than 1 million beneficiaries.
- **E4Life PhD Program:** Fully funded scholarships for doctoral research in sustainability, enrolling students from 20 nations and supporting impactful research on climate resilience, water security, and energy sustainability.
- **Community Covid Resilience Resource Centers:** Digital learning hubs established across 14 states in India, serving as a bridge between academic knowledge and rural wisdom, impacting over 100,000 beneficiaries.
- **Mera Gaav Hamara Jal:** A national initiative fostering community-led water resource management, leveraging geospatial technologies and grassroots involvement.

UNESCO CHAIR ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Global Collaborations & Partnerships

The work thrives on partnerships. Collaborating with over 80 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and 55+ UNESCO Chairs, brings together academia, industry, governments, and communities to drive sustainable development.

- **International Research Collaborations:** Joint research centres established with institutions such as the Delft University of Technology, University of Missouri, and Politecnico Milano, focusing on climate risk modelling, geospatial analysis, and water sustainability.
- **Cross-border Knowledge Exchange:** Through symposiums, policy dialogues, and student-faculty exchanges, we have engaged 10,000+ global participants in co-learning experiences.
- **Civil 20 India 2023 & UNESCO Initiatives:** As an active participant in global policy discussions, UNESCO Chair has engaged with 700+ organizations across 54 countries to advocate for sustainability-driven policies.

Join UNESCO Chair in Shaping the Future

UNESCO Chair invites universities, research institutions, NGOs, policymakers, and industry leaders to collaborate in advancing experiential learning for a more sustainable and resilient world. Whether through joint research, community projects, or knowledge-sharing initiatives, your expertise and engagement can drive meaningful change.

For collaborations, reach out to us at:



el4sid-unescochair@amrita.edu



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EXPLAINING THE PROCESS



EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

2013 - 2014 Contributing to policy making: During the 2013 summit, participants wanted to strengthen AYUDH's contribution to policy making. The 2014 summit therefore concluded with a visit to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where our youth debated the European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, as well as several parliament members.

2016 European Youth Summit - AYUDH's Youth Declaration: AYUDH's contribution to policy making was formalized in 2016 with the collectively written "Youth Declaration on engaging youth in building peaceful and inclusive societies". This declaration proposed a global outlook on our societies, and identified four priorities: Education, Culture, Nature and Health. It was received in person by Mrs Anne Brasseur, former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and Mrs Martine Reicherts, Director-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education was voted as next year's theme.

2017 European Youth Summit - Statement on education: In 2017, AYUDH Europe was the first civil society organization to independently host a UNESCO MGIEP Talking Across Generations on Education (TAGE) event. TAGE is an effective and unique intergenerational dialogue forum which mainstreams the collective voice of youth for inclusion in policy and decision-making at the highest levels. For four weeks prior to the summit, a moderated dialogue took place on social media, which was concluded at AYUDH's 13th annual European Youth Summit "Educate. Cultivate. Participate.", with 250 youth activists from across Europe.



EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

2018 European Youth Summit – Statement on Mental Health: In 2018, AYUDH Europe responded to the widely expressed need by its members to address the topic of mental health and well-being. This statement from 250 youth and a mixed panel of junior and senior experts was officially released at the German National Agency launch event of the ‘European Solidarity Corps’ in Berlin on October 19th, 2018. Its specific policy recommendations build on earlier AYUDH statements as well as the overall 2016 Youth Declaration.

2019 European Youth Summit – Statement on Cultural Diversity: AYUDH Europe celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2019 when our young members chose for ‘Celebrating Diversity’. Our fruitful collaboration with UNESCO MGIEP led us to arrange a new TAGe session that engaged all participants, as the concluding event of AYUDH’s 15th annual European Youth Summit.

2020 European Youth Project – Statement on the Environment: AYUDH Europe’s 2020 youth project coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. The AYUDH community took the opportunity to engage and connect digitally with people around the globe during the harsh period of the lockdown. Through a series of workshops and an Online Panel on the Environment, hosting several prominent young figures from the fields of youth activism and policy making, the topic of Environmental Sustainability was discussed and explored in depth by our youth community.

2024 European Youth Summit – Statement on Experiential Learning: This year’s summit evolved around the participant-chosen topic of experiential learning. For this purpose, we established a special partnership with the UNESCO Chair on Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development. Besides engaging in numerous experiential learning activities throughout the summit, participants engaged with an interactive panel of junior and senior experts. In-depth personal discussions afterwards in break-out groups resulted in the collective input of over 250 participants, which served as the basis for shaping this policy statement as well as its take actions.



EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

Methodology

Since its inception in 2007, AYUDH has focused on achieving personal development and societal impact through experiential learning activities. Through several initiatives, projects, workshops and discussions, our community has built a lot of intellectual, practical, and socioemotional experience in numerous domains that are important to young people in Europe. Or as described during the last summit: “AYUDH almost feels like a university where young people share their knowledge on so many different topics.” Our community has recently expressed the wish to advocate for experiential learning so that such opportunities may become more widely available to young people across Europe.

Workshops & Talks

To illustrate the versatility of experiential learning and to facilitate the diversity in interests among participants, AYUDH Europe organized a series of workshops ranging from gardening to acro-yoga to combating fake news, and much more. All workshops provided plenty of opportunities for theoretical learning, learning while doing, experiencing the effects of doing, and reflecting on one's own learning process – thus going through all steps of the experiential learning process (Kolb & Kolb, 2012).

In addition to workshops, the summit was graced with inspiring talks by speakers who shared how their experiential learning process greatly benefitted their personal development as well as their community. For example, Gadi Habumugisha, Mussa Uwitonze and Bizimana Jean shared how their project Through the Eyes of Children has helped countless vulnerable children in Rwanda to deal with their negative experiences through the art and joy of photography. Frederique Bedos shared how through film she hopes to inspire many young people to make society fairer, more inclusive, and more sustainable. Marion Chaygneaud-Dupuy shared how important it is to combine different ways of learning, and how this has driven her to initiate and lead large cleaning projects on Mount Everest. Inspiring talks were also given by Swami Shubamritananda Puri (making your voice heard), Swamini Amritajyoti Prana (building successful relationships), other honorable guests, and AYUDH alumni.



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The National Action Weekends

Throughout 2024, our National Groups organized residential seminars where youth engaged in hands-on projects to support their local as well as European communities. The Winter Weekend in Denmark marked the official kick-off for preparing the Voices for Tomorrow Summit. The countless ideas, dreams, and visions shared throughout this weekend formed the foundation for a week full of experiential learning opportunities offered to over 300 young people from across Europe. The Spring Weekend in the Netherlands was specifically organized around the topics of gender equality, feminism, and inclusivity. Through insightful discussion and embodied activities, participants were left with a renewed sense of inspiration and activism. During the Summer Weekend in Spain, young people from across Europe explored the topic of sustainability through workshops, activities, and discussions. Engaging all senses, participants felt reconnected with nature. Our participants also gathered in Italy in the Fall to dwell on the topic of mental health and how it can be better addressed in our societies. A final Fall Weekend took place in France with the purpose of evaluating the summit, gaining insights from our common experience and identifying a range for improvements, another essential aspect of experiential learning.



The Experiential Learning Panel

The Experiential Learning Panel focused on sharing with young people how experiential learning experiences contributed to personal development and positive societal impact, in different professions, different countries, and different generations. The panel consisted of 4 senior members and 4 junior members, accompanied by moderator Joolz Lewis, a conscious business and leadership consultant.

EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

The Experiential Learning Panel

The distinguished senior panelists included Dr.hc. Violeta Bulc, Former European Commissioner for Transport and Former Vice-Prime Minister of Slovenia; Ms. Fatou Jeng, Climate Change Youth Advisor to the Secretary General of the UN and Youth Representative for the UN Secretary General's Early Warning System for All; Mr. Himanshu Gulati, Member of Parliament in Norway; and Ms. Katharina Linne, Coordinator of the Master's Program Biosphere Reserves Management at the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development.

The youth panelists featured Mr. Krishna Nandan, academic coordinator of the Live-in-Labs programme at Amrita University; Ms. Samira Pfeiffer, participant in the Live-in-Labs programme; Mr. Leander Kretschmer, European Solidarity Corps Volunteer with AYUDH Europe; and Dr. Ties Fakkkel, former AYUDH Netherlands coordinator and youth researcher at the SYNC Lab/Erasmus University.

Panelists shared valuable insights on how practical skills can sometimes outweigh textbooks, the importance of stepping out of your comfort zone, and the necessity of balancing theory with real-world action. They emphasized the significance of engaging in sustainable projects and surrounding yourself with inspiring individuals to foster a meaningful learning journey. The event began with an introduction, followed by a moderated panel discussion focusing on practical ways in which youth can effectively tackle community issues. The session came to completion with various in-depth questions from the audience, and concluding remarks by dr. Joost Monks.

Break – out sessions

Following the panel session, all summit participants engaged in break-out sessions where personal experiences could be shared regarding experiential learning in their lives, what experiential learning opportunities AYUDH has provided or should aim to provide in the near future, and how experiential learning activities have the potential to positively contribute to the world. Participants were encouraged by facilitators and panel members and their input recorded on large flip-overs as well as through laptop minutes. The combined input of 8 break-out groups forms the foundation of this policy statement. In particular, most quotes were derived directly from these break-out sessions.



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EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

The Results

Throughout AYUDH Europe's 2024 "Voices for Tomorrow" summit, organized with the UNESCO Chair on Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development and co-funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union, the topic of experiential learning was explored in a variety of ways. Participants were provided with diverse workshops and talks centered around experiential learning, as well as low-threshold experiential learning opportunities as summit co-organizers. Participants could also learn from the experiential learning experiences of peers, professionals, alumni, and monastic seniors. All activities combined contributed to a stronger experiential learning mindset, resulting in many new ideas to positively impact local communities across Europe.

Participants' profound understanding and appreciation of experiential learning is reflected in the subsequent sections of this policy statement, which is full of the ideas, experiences, needs, and wishes of participants to make experiential learning opportunities more broadly available to young people across Europe to stimulate both their personal development and societal contributions. The hope is that these calls for action are heard and acted upon by policymakers, to complement AYUDH's grassroots efforts with top-down efforts.



REFERRING TO



PAGE 15

REFERRING TO

Young people at AYUDH have expressed their need for more experiential learning opportunities. Several major challenges await the current generation – climate crisis, global health challenges, social polarization – many of which young people feel insufficiently prepared for through formal education (Mazzucato, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). The focus of formal education on cognitive skills and stationary learning seems partially misaligned with 1) the diversity of talents among young people, and 2) with the labor market's (future) demand for hands-on professionals (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; OECD, 2018). A more action-oriented, holistic learning strategy that complements formal education, such as experiential learning, could cater to these unmet needs of young people.

Experiential learning is a process in which young people are invited to step out of the classroom, put their theoretical knowledge into practice, experience the results of their actions, and reflect on the outcomes (Gaffney & O'Neil, 2019; Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning involves interactions with the environment, with others, and with one's own inner experiences, to develop a holistic understanding of a formal topic of education. Through this process, young people may change the way they perceive their place in the world and take action towards both their own as well as their community's sustainable development. This “learning by doing” approach is gaining increasing popularity as it fosters practical, socioemotional, and value-based skills that help young people prepare for professional and personal adult life (OECD, 2015).

A broad implementation of experiential learning activities can also be considered a powerful means towards numerous of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's; UNESCO, 2015). Through experiential learning activities, such as internships or community projects, young people can contribute to safer, more inclusive, greener communities (SDG 11). Experiential learning also tends to instill an empathetic mindset in young people, which promotes the exchange of knowledge and resources, and collaboration instead of competition (SDG 17). In the long run, experiential learning activities can foster a next generation that is dedicated to equality, non-violence, and cultural diversity (SDG 4) – more so than formal education alone could achieve.

AYUDH's dedication to facilitating experiential learning opportunities

While policies may be most effective for facilitating the broader implementation of experiential learning, grassroots initiatives directly provide young people with experiential learning activities. Such grassroots initiatives, that are in the very DNA of AYUDH, have the benefits of being versatile, intrinsically driven, and well in tune with young people's developmental strengths. Acknowledging the gap between what formal education offers and the needs expressed by young people, AYUDH Europe is dedicated to improve and expand experiential learning activities. AYUDH Europe believes strongly in the power of collaboration, with policy makers, societal partners, other professionals, and in particular with young people themselves – to amplify the voices for tomorrow.



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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Prologue

Many young people feel that formal education falls short in preparing them for the major challenges of their time (Mazzucato, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). With its overemphasis on cognitive skills and stationary learning, formal education serves mostly to stratify young people into occupational categories and socioeconomic positions, more so than to foster a life-long intention for learning and an appreciation for diversity in talents. Young people's development could be further facilitated by providing opportunities to put into practice what is learned, experience its real-life effects, and allow for reflection on their own understanding. Such holistic experiential learning activities can help young people prepare for a fast-changing world, help create awareness of others' realities, and help preserve (natural) resources. Experiential learning is also better designed than formal education to lean into several typical developmental qualities of young people, such as their high levels of creativity, curiosity, risk-taking, and an innate desire to establish deep meaningful social connections (Siegel et al., 2014).

A strong case could be made for the need to incorporate more experiential learning into the lives of young people. Offering extensive experiential learning opportunities has been at the heart of AYUDH Europe since its inception and will continue to serve young people's needs. This statement contains examples of and suggestions for the implementation of experiential learning activities, and can be insightful to policy makers, youth professionals, young people themselves, and all else who feel inspired. Its content is based on numerous scientific studies, international reports, and direct input from young people at the brainstorm sessions (in "quotations").

I. Experiential learning complements young people's formal education

A. Contemporary formal education is valuable, but also falls short in important domains

Formal education teaches young people skills such as critical thinking, memorization, conscientiousness, and self-regulation. These cognition-oriented competencies help young people develop their head, but may forgo the development of the hands (practical skills) and heart (socioemotional skills) (Gaffney & O'Neil, 2019; Sipos, 2009). The predominantly stationary, one-directional learning approach in formal education also risks underutilizing alternative talents of young people and contributes to young people's experience of performance pressure (Cashman et al., 2023).

"People have different talents and different ways of learning."
– Nandhini



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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

I. Experiential learning complements young people's formal education

Formal education has also previously been criticized for being too compartmentalized (e.g., Pervez & Al-Harthy, 2014). For example, while formal education may only discuss the biological underpinnings of the climate crisis, young people could experience first-hand the biological, geographical, economical, but also emotional, social, and behavioral components of the climate crisis through experiential learning. The same would apply when learning about social inequalities, health issues, or other topics important to young people. While young people across Europe value their current education systems, the exclusive judgment on cognitive competencies, underappreciation of alternative learning approaches, and ecologically invalid compartmentalization of study topics are widespread concerns – for which experiential learning has potential answers.

B. Experiential learning is already appreciated in formal education, but rarely implemented

Formal education aims to teach young people not only what to learn, but also how to learn. In early stages of formal education – such as in kindergarten – experiential learning is widely encouraged, but over the course of time becomes less appreciated (Kirschner et al., 2006). According to students, one of the most meaningful experiences in formal education are internships, because of its experiential nature which happens largely outside of the school setting (Hora et al., 2020). Through internships young people “experience very different realities than university prepared them for” and they become “better able to connect all experiences into a holistic understanding of reality”. Other experiential learning components are also occasionally incorporated in formal education (e.g., organizing an event), but rarely are these the main educational strategy and rarely are all aspects of experiential learning executed (e.g., putting knowledge into practice, but not reflecting afterwards) (Moore, 2010). Despite an implicit appreciation for experiential learning in formal education, its implementation and execution leaves room for improvement – perhaps outside of educational institution's responsibilities.

Experiential learning in formal education is often provided in collaboration with local stakeholders. Long-term committed relationships between educational institutions and community stakeholders could ensure or even extend experiential learning opportunities that benefit young people's personal development and societal contribution (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). A shift in perspective may be required in society: from education as an individual endeavor towards a degree, to education as a community endeavor for sustainable and inclusive prosperity – a vision also expounded by the UNESCO Chair on Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development at Amrita University (co-organizer of the Voices for Tomorrow summit).



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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

I. Experiential learning complements young people's formal education

C. More so than formal education, experiential learning taps into young people's developmental strengths

An increasing number of researchers and youth advocates are recognizing the unique developmental strengths of young people – and the opportunities that these bring. More so than children and older adults, young people display high levels of creativity, optimism, problem-solving abilities, and social curiosity (see for example Siegel, 2014). In formal education, these developmental strengths are rarely perceived as qualities, and are sometimes even seen as frivolous, distracting, and recreational. In contrast, experiential learning activities build on these neurological, physiological, and socioemotional characteristics to utilize what young people are naturally good at to promote their learning process (Chan et al., 2021). Indeed, experiential learning has previously been shown to improve students' practical, analytical, and creative skills, more so than formal education alone (Baker & Robinson, 2016).

As put by young people, experiential learning is at times “missed in school”, where the focus is on “rigid perfectionism” instead of “the flow of learning” and effectively dealing with “struggles, fear, and pain” of the learning process. It may be one of the reasons why experiential learning has previously been found to improve knowledge retention up to 70% (Wijnen-Meijer et al., 2022), reduce drop-out rates among students (Knight et al., 2003), and support young people's journey to “open up to the world” and “find their own way”.

II. Experiential learning connects theory with practice

A. Experiential learning through AYUDH

AYUDH brings experiential learning opportunities to young people in Europe, with most learning happening during the annual summit and periodic local activities. At the Voices of Tomorrow summit young people could partake in over 10 different workshops. Workshop topics were carefully compiled to offer “a lot of opportunities to do many things that I generally won't do.” Creative workshops such as photography, zine making, and fashion design; active workshops such as acroyoga, dance, and gardening; and theory-oriented workshops such as combating fake news, stress management, and creating sustainable communities. All workshops contained aspects of all experiential learning components, with which young people could practice in a safe space, among diverse peers with diverse skills, under the supervision of intrinsically driven volunteer teachers who helped “tackle insecurities” and “reflect on your own reactions when you're out of your comfort zone” (for example when “communicating with people you don't know in a language you don't know”). Young people pointed out that in contrast to formal education during these workshops they were “encouraged to express [themselves] creatively; it is even incentivized” and to directly experience “the joy of giving” (e.g., receiving compliments for your own t-shirt design or daring to perform on stage). All workshops achieved their goals of being “both interesting and helpful for the world.”



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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

II. Experiential learning connects theory with practice

“You have to really do and see the things you’re studying to understand it.”

– Luce

Young people bring the inspiration and skills obtained from these workshops back to their communities, periodically resulting in local AYUDH activities. For example, several gardening activities, dance and music performances, high-teas, pop-up cafés, and waffle stands have been organized at the different M.A. Centers throughout Europe to which local AYUDH communities are affiliated. Such activities provide opportunities to develop both practical and organizational skills, like “management and planning” – in particular for national youth leaders.

B. Socioemotional learning and value-based learning

Experiential learning does not only add a practical and reflective component to formal education, but also a socioemotional and value-based component (Abe, 2011; Eyler & Giles, 1999). By interacting with people and communities outside of young people’s own bubble, opportunities arise for empathizing with others (Menezes et al., 2021), which in turn can result in more experiential learning activities, creating a positive feedback loop.

“With a spiritual mindset, every place and every person can teach you something.”

– Lakshmi

Repeated experiences seem key to young people’s socioemotional and value-based learning, as “it takes time to learn about people’s needs”. Similarly, repeated experiences can help young people to accept and utilize feelings as supportive in their learning process, instead of being ignored or considered distractive like in formal education (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007).

Besides theoretical knowledge and practical skills, young people appreciate experiential learning as a method for building a strong mind and personality. Examples include learning how to navigate unusual social situations (e.g., public speaking; approaching seniors; asking for help), mindful usage of resources (e.g., close the tap while brushing teeth), making others feel comfortable, respectfully discuss conflicts, overcoming fear, connecting with others, and unlearning stereotypes and taboos. AYUDH’s approach provides “lived examples that there is light and hope to get out of bad situations” and “a deeper purpose to why we are learning, beyond getting a job”.

“At AYUDH you can turn mistakes into learning experiences that can benefit society.”

– Ida



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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

II. Experiential learning connects theory with practice

C Experiential learning for sustainable and resilient communities

Young people at AYUDH emphasized the need for everyone in the community to feel fully accepted, as the cornerstone for building sustainable and resilient communities. More specifically, “appreciating cultural diversity” and “bringing people together who want to do good” can “bring out the best in people”. Young people feel that “at AYUDH it’s okay to be yourself, so everyone is welcome”; and that “it’s not one person above another, it’s two persons together.” Such a culture of acceptance and social safety can serve as a starting point for shared decision-making, shared opportunities, and shared prosperity in broader communities (Woodcraft & Smith, 2018). Essentially, “if you listen to everyone’s experience, you can build a society that corresponds to everyone.”

“If you listen to everyone’s experience, you can build a society that corresponds to everyone.”
– Raquel

Concerns were expressed about Europe “now moving to the political right and far right” and a lot of obscured, unattended “pain and suffering that everyone should know of”. On a positive note – and characteristic of young people’s resilience – “we see so many caring people at AYUDH, and it gives faith and hope in the next generation”.

Experiential learning activities are well-suited for “spreading information and sharing experiences” and “can easily break misconceptions and boundaries of our minds.” Not only do the experiential learning activities at AYUDH help young people make their communities more sustainable and resilient, it also helps expand their sense of community beyond neighborhood, city, or country: “AYUDH makes me more socially aware of different cultures and makes me feel like a world citizen”. In line with young people’s developmental needs and goals (Fuligni, 2019), AYUDH facilitates bonding with peers and contributing to society “not only theoretically, but also the practical implementation in our own lives.” The evidence-based approach at AYUDH has previously been found to enhance young people’s civic responsibility and intention to work towards sustainability through active participation and experience (Burns, 2011).

“The talks here are not just theoretical but also about how to implement it in our own lives.”
– Meline



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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

III. Making impact while learning

A. Learn to help and help to learn

Young people at AYUDH are learning how to help others, while also helping others to learn. As such, experiential learning activities at AYUDH have the potential for exponential impact. At Voices for Tomorrow, numerous young people expressed that “every person, however formally unqualified, has a lot of wisdom that they gain through their lives” and that “a lot of people have no formal degrees or theoretical knowledge but have been among the most beautiful and nice people I ever met” – an open mindset that promotes highly effective, transformative learning (Ionescu, 2023).

Experiential learning activities are also social opportunities for meeting other young people with different talents and different experiences in society. Thus, experiential learning activities have the potential to enrich the social world of young people and also to build a strong community that is willing and able to help each other in times of need.

***“I sometimes learn more from teaching others than
others learn from my teaching.”***
– Milosz

This year’s launch of the alumni network is a testimony to AYUDH’s focus on learning to help and helping to learn. Over the past two decades, thousands of young people from across Europe (and beyond) have been facilitated to find their values, purpose, and place in society. AYUDH alumni – former participants who have matured beyond participation age – are a valuable source of human and social capital that the current generation of young people at AYUDH can benefit from. The alumni also embody AYUDH’s spirit of learning as a lifelong pursuit instead of a mere obligation.

B. Standing up for social causes

Throughout history, young people have always championed equality and justice – and will continue to do so in the future (see for example UNICEF, 2024). When considering bigger challenges at school, work, or in society, young people perceive experiential learning activities as a valuable method because “good solutions don’t come from a normal outlook, but only when thinking critically about issues from different perspectives.” Even minor learning successes can give young people the feeling that they are “flying”, and may be more motivating than theoretical achievements.

***“Be proud of who you are because in our society it is hard to
find people of that quality.”***
– Nath



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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

III. Making impact while learning

On numerous occasions, young people across Europe show great heart towards nature, animals, and others in need. In the past two decades, AYUDH members across Europe have taken initiatives for a tree planting program to restore animal and insect habitat, provided support to people who are homeless or have a disability, and prepared food and drinks on various charitable occasions.

Through such experiential learning activities, young people apply a simple set of skills with great consequences. The real-life impact on the wellbeing and happiness of others instills a profound sense of competence and purpose in young people. Experiential learning activities also gives young people the knowledge and credibility to propose policy ideas. As such, the AYUDH framework is much appreciated by young people as a means to “equalize opportunities”.

“A lot of people are thought not smart because we don’t harness their potential, when in reality they are smart”
– Fatou

C. Building bridges

For two decades, AYUDH Europe has been building bridges between young people across Europe, but also between young people and policy makers, other professionals, institutions, and nature. Such connections have resulted in countless experiential learning opportunities for thousands of young people. Starting from a compassionate desire to help young people develop global leadership, self-efficacy, and cultural flexibility as essential skills for building bridges (Ng et al., 2009), AYUDH Europe has transformed into an impactful changemaker that can serve communities.

“By learning as an individual it has an effect on society.”
– Leonie

Several projects that sprouted from AYUDH stand testimony to this, such as the White Crane Project and Trees for Peace. Several policy statements of recent years also stand testimony to the bridges that AYUDH Europe builds, not only for young people and policy makers to meet, but also in translating each other’s experiences, worlds, and vocabularies. In particular, young people desire to contribute to their community but don’t always know how, where to start, or who to connect with for resources. AYUDH Europe has been building bridges between young people and organizations to realize numerous projects that have positively impacted vulnerable groups of people, neighborhoods, and nature. Not only is AYUDH Europe committed to maintaining and strengthening existing ‘bridges’, but also to building new bridges for the benefit of young people and society.



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CALLS FOR ACTION



CALL FOR ACTION

To policy makers, teachers, youth workers,
young people themselves and other allies:

- I. Acknowledge the benefits of a good balance between formal education and experiential learning (instead of only formal education)
- II. Help young people validate their formal knowledge through experiential learning (and facilitate critical follow-up discussions)
- III. Facilitate peer-to-peer teaching activities
- IV. Evaluate young people's development by their application of skills and self-reflection (how), instead of solemn theoretical knowledge (what)
- V. Foster long-term collaborations between educational institutions and local stakeholders to ensure sustainable benefits for both students and community
- VI. Allow for pedagogical flexibility so that the formal education system can facilitate different students' needs (instead of a one-size-fits-all approach)
- VII. Trust young people's natural curiosity for knowledge, aspirations for independence and autonomy, their desire to bond with peers, and their motivation to contribute to society
- VIII. Start teaching children values and psychological skills from a young age, for example to deal with stress.
- IX. Take initiative to install something that you want in the school, like gender-neutral toilets, a small garden, debate club, etc.
- X. Provide support, as experiential learning can be confusing, emotionally challenging, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable for learners



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LITERATURE

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STATEMENT ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

2024, JULY 27th
AYUDH Europe e.V.

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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