

Granollers, Spain
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1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to summarize and evaluate the different events that took place in Hiroshima under the framework of the International Youth Conference for Peace in the Future and to extract the main lessons learned to propose some initiatives to be held in Granollers, my hometown and an active member in Mayors for Peace.

2. Feedback on the events of the Conference

As already said during the Conference in Japan, the main evaluation on the Conference has to be decidedly positive: the organization was excellent, most of the events were extremely interesting and the colleagues from all around the world, and specifically from Japan enriched the debate in diverse and constructive ways. Among all events, I would underline and encourage to repeat them the different visits to Miyajima, the traditional Tea Ceremony, and, above all, the homestay. I had the privilege to stay in Kure for two days, visit the Yamato boat and the port of Kure and had a short but intense taste on the Japanese culture and way of living; I will never forget how well I was treated and the incredible richness of the Japanese way of life. Therefore, I suggest that homestays should be a permanent activity on the events schedule.

Besides, I also very much enjoyed all the trips to different places around Hiroshima and its surroundings, and the possibility to have dinner in different restaurants depending on the collective decision: my group chose that each day one of its members would choose a different restaurant, allowing everyone to satisfy their preferences and proceeding in a peaceful, democratic mechanism. Similarly, I also liked the idea of working in different groups divided following multicultural criteria: my group was composed of 5 nationalities, and I was the only European along a Russian colleague. Such division created even richer conversations among us following our radically different cultural environments, and forced us to develop greater empathic attitudes towards each other.

Besides, I also believe that the Conference has still room for improvement, especially in the dynamics used to foster the debates on the last two days of Conference. Although the good will and efforts of the convener and different staff is to be commended, the debate flow resulted redundant in several moments, and the different topics overlapped amongst themselves in a significant way: perhaps a more reduced but intense conversation, targeted at negotiating a final declaration as done in the last session, with the aim of exploring both our similarities but most importantly our differences on the perspectives on peace. This proposal does not deny the validity and importance of the debates held, but aims at improving them by focusing on the important issues at stake and moving away from the less relevant ones.

3. Lessons learned and potential proposals for Granollers

This section covers the main lessons learned from the Conference and tries to group them into a single peace project for the city of Granollers:

- Hiroshima has been, is, and always will be a symbolic hotspot for peace: one of the sentences that I have most repeated after going back to my normal context after Hiroshima is that everyone who feels compelled or has any intellectual curiosity about peace should go at least once in life to Hiroshima. The Peace Memorial Park, its museum, and the whole cultural and historical legacy of the place creates a unique atmosphere where the visitor better understands the

need to continuously spread the message of peace around the world derived from the belief that peace is the better path to a better future.

- The second lesson learned is the particularity of how Japanese people deal with peace and how they understand their duty to perpetuate the historical legacy of a place such as Hiroshima. Coming from a Latin, Mediterranean, European context, our understanding of how we deal with historical legacies is much more rooted in protest, in a communication flow that goes from the inside to the outside; that is why, for instance, the National Day of Catalonia commemorates a defeat in a war, and why it is common to celebrate it by demonstrating in the streets. From my experience in Japan, your way to commemorate goes much more from the outside to the inside, creating an extraordinarily interesting emotional dimension through poems, songs and other cultural demonstrations. I was particularly surprised by the celebrations in August 6th, the colorful flowers combined with the rigorous white in everyone's outfit, creating a unique atmosphere.
- The third and perhaps most important lesson is to realize, once more, that dialogue and debate have an incredible capacity to create contexts for mutual dialogue, understanding and empathy even for individuals coming from radically diverse cultural environments, and, in some cases, with mental images prone to cause conflict. Dialogue and debate were at the heart of our Conference, and they have to be at the core of any cultural, historical or political process aiming at connecting two counterparts in conflict. Debates emerged in a great number of topics, from the mere understanding of peace as such from participants coming from different cultures to whether a legacy of war and conflict in a concrete city caused a greater commitment from it to peace promotion. The more intense debates were those on the negotiation of the Hiroshima Appeal, especially with regards to whether democratic regimes are more likely to produce peace: some participants argued that certain non-democratic regimes could produce at least the same political stability than democratic ones, but the general feeling was that rights protection was something inextricably from the promotion of peace.

Therefore, the main proposal for Granollers has to do with the promotion of dialogue and debate among young people. It is at this age when our personality, our political viewpoints and our social and cultural commitment are less solid and more volatile, and, therefore, it is at this age where an individual needs to be exposed with conflicting, opposed views, with other mentalities, cultural understandings and political visions. The underlying assumption is that the more a young person listens to different perspectives, the richer will be his or her own, and the more humble and empathic will be when dealing with conflicting opinions. At its time, it is such humility and empathy what will create a more tolerant, democratic and peaceful society, as ideas from others will be better channeled and digested into one's ego.

The project, then, aims at bringing together into the same table different students from different neighborhoods in Granollers with different cultural backgrounds, ideologies and experiences in order to create an open forum for discussion and debate. A key question is whether the conversation is open or follows a specific objective; for instance, what each of the participants understands that is best for the city, or what is each one's understanding of a certain principle. It is undoubtedly surprising the diversity in cultural backgrounds among students in Granollers: those who have their families living in the city for decades, those with families from other parts of Catalonia or Spain, those whose parents arrived from other parts of the world and those who they themselves have arrived at a certain

point to the city. It is my belief that such a rich cultural heritage is nowadays unexplored and even sometimes the cause of potential conflict; therefore, the objective of this project is to identify ways of confluence and convergence in order to construct common and shared experiences that unite young citizens of the same city in their diversity.

On a more advanced stage, it could be considered to include other cities in the cultural dialogues, in a very similar way to what we did on the final days of the conference, but working intensively towards a common perspective in the form of a joint declaration: it is when we negotiate, when we encounter difficulties, when we need to manage tension situations that we get the most out of a given experience.

4. Proposal for Granollers and the Mayors for Peace Program

As mentioned in the previous section, the main lesson extracted from the conference and to be applied in Granollers has to do with the potential that dialogue has among individuals from different environments, cultural backgrounds and mentalities. Several years ago, diversity in cities was low and people came from rather similar locations; however, the current globalized system has changed everything and in a city such as Granollers, home to 65k inhabitants approx., people from extremely different environments cohabit in a peaceful and diverse manner. It is a huge opportunity, then, to make people from these different cultural collectives encounter and share their values, worldviews, and opinions to others, especially in reduced groups from 10-12 people. Such groups could have a leader in charge of moderating the conversations and would work together in order to produce a final memorandum on the lessons learned, which could be later disseminated through official press instruments to the overall citizenship.

In reference to the Mayors for Peace Program, I would underline that one of its most important values defining the overall project is to empower and channel the voice of youth around the world to disseminate the importance of working collectively to promote the importance of eliminating the production and use of nuclear weapons. Therefore, adding both the municipal nature of the initiative with its concern with youth and their potential as a catalyst for change, I would propose the Program to adopt a more active, activist-like role in trying to lobby and pressure more local and national institutions to push the nuclear abolishment agenda forward. Adopting a more political perspective at each of the initiative's chapters would foster a bolder pressure for public institutions to promote greater change.

5. Conclusion

All in all, the objective of this report has been twofold: firstly, to summarize and evaluate all the activities undertaken in the framework of the International Youth Conference for Peace in the World held in Hiroshima in August 2017. On this regard, I have congratulated once more the organization and the quality of most of the events, and I have suggested some spaces for improvement especially with regards to the last two days of debate, which sometimes fell short and suffered some overlapping in the topics dealt. The second objective has been to come up with a proposal based on peace promotion for my city, Granollers; a proposal enshrined in the values of dialogue, debate and empathy that I experienced in Japan. That is why my proposal aims at connecting students from Granollers coming from different cultural environments and backgrounds for them to construct shared memories based on the realization of their diversity, as a mechanism to promote greater empathy and humility towards the other, and under the hope that such values may contribute in creating more peaceful and democratic societies in the future.