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Method of presentation: oral presentation

Abstract title: Fostering Integration of Children and Youth on the Move through the Creation of an Urban Youth Center in Athens, Greece

Background: One of the main characteristics of the unprecedented increase of migration flows was the unusual high number of children. After the closing of the Balkan Route and the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016 many families were stranded in Greece, unable to proceed to other destinations. Today there are approximately 51.000 people, among them a high percentage of under 18 years old. The estimated number of unaccompanied minors are 3,030 children.

Background: Network for Children's Rights is a non-profit organisation, which has been studying and promoting the rights of children. NCR has a large experience in implementing grassroots intervention in the multicultural neighborhood of the center of Athens. Informal discussions conducted with the teenagers already participating in the NCR's activities and their parents, pointed out the need of the existence of a space dedicated to teenagers and youth.

Method: The creation of a Youth Center (YC) is meant to meet the identified needs of youth living in the unwelcoming urban environment of Athens and in sites outside the urban setting. Particular focus is placed on youth, which face the peril of social exclusion and marginalization. The YC was established in late 2016. It provides a meeting place for 13 to 20 years old. It is open to all regardless of nationality, gender, religion or language and centrally located in Athens, open daily from 9am to 8pm. The YC offers art workshops and educational activities such as theatre, cinema, music, pottery, outdoor pursuits and sports, also foreign languages and teaching support.

Results: Teenagers of 13 different nationalities participated in creative and educational activities. The total number of adolescents enrolled in YC is 197. The participants in one-off projects in the YC Summer Program are more than 500 teenagers (refugees, immigrants and Greeks). The YC has succeeded to create interconnections between culturally different individuals and groups like the locals, the immigrant communities and the newcomers.

Discussion: Our initiative intends to motivate the youth to familiarize with the urban web of Athens and to foster empowerment and self – esteem. Furthermore, this project proposes treating the youth as the potential agents of a new vision for the future. It is about building social and educational structures and tools, which will provide the youth with essential life skills.

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