

**METHOD:**

# Flowers of Identity

**PROJECT**

"Once upon today..." in Europe

**AUTHORS**

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**PARTICIPANTS**

flexible

**DURATION**

3 hours

**KEYWORDS**identity, diversity, history, memory,  
community, narratives

## Objectives

- Participants reflect upon their self-perception und social perception
- Participants get to know each other more deeply; supports building trust within the members of a group
- They elaborate on the concept of identity and set it into context with the notions of history, memory, community and narratives
- Throughout the process, participants become aware of the fact that their own identity is a product of the communities they have been raised in and different stories that are connected to that community (community can mean family, neighbourhood, region, country, continent, etc.)

## Overview

Participants are asked to draw a flower with petals and leaves and attribute to each petal a concept that they consider important to their identity. These can include gender, nationality or religion, but also less obvious characteristics such as hobbies, interests, voluntary work, sexual identity, occupation, marital status or others. In the first round, participants work individually and design a private flower that is not shared with others. In the second round, they are asked to create a public flower to be shared with one other member of the group from another country. In the third step, participants form groups of four people from different countries. They are now asked to put their flowers into a landscape. That means each participant shall put his/her identity into the context of concepts of history, memory, communities and narratives. How does one's identity interact with the history of e.g. a certain country, memories and narratives that are shared in a certain community etc.? This exercise helps participants to draw on their own experience and the exchange with other group members to understand that identities are always rich and complex. As every person is unique, so are communities and people living in one country or in Europe as a whole.

## Background

"Who am I?" is one of the most basic questions an individual has to deal with. The method invites participants to think about this question in a playful way and usually leads to a large variety of possible answers. In this way, it raises awareness about the differences and similarities in people's perception of themselves. International youth meetings, where participants from different backgrounds meet, provoke questions such as: *What connects me with, and what makes me different from others? What is my role in a group? What shapes my identity? Who am I?* This conscious and unconscious process can lead to a questioning of the previous self-perception and values of par-

ticipants, in particular when controversies or critical questions arise. By dealing with those questions and facing possible difficulties, each participant and the group as a whole have the chance to grow personally and overcome boundaries or stereotypes.

Methods dealing with identity have been part of the basic repertoire within the international non-formal youth education for many years. Different activities use symbols for identity, such as a star<sup>1</sup>, an onion<sup>2</sup> or a molecule<sup>3</sup> to help participants think about their individual identity, what one person may have in common with another and identify stereotypes and prejudices. In addition to these aspects, “Flowers of Identity” is particularly useful in seeing one’s personal identity in a landscape of (collective) memory, history, community and narratives and that everybody is a product of all these things that can hardly be influenced by oneself. It follows the approach that all our identities are shaped by stories that we have been told since we were born: family stories, stories about our society and country, the world we live in.

Identity can be described as “the qualities and attitudes that a person or group of people have, that make them different from other people” and give them a “strong feeling of belonging to a particular group”<sup>4</sup>. Stories that are important for a certain group of people are shaping our identities and can be used to either unify or divide members of different groups. But these stories may change depending on the individual perspectives and choices of group members. “Flowers of Identity” wants to raise awareness towards the mechanisms that shape the self-perception as well as the social perception on our identities and which influence a collective memory has.

## **Preparation**

As for the practical preparation, the following is needed:

- At least two pieces of paper (Din A4) per person and pens in different colours;
- posters for the landscapes
- pin boards to put the results on display.

## **Course of the workshop**

### **Phase 1:**

#### **Introduction (5 minutes)**

The trainer explains that the session will give the participants the chance to think about themselves and to get to know each other better:

“The method that we are going to do is called Flower of Identity, and it works this way: In a minute, each of you will get a piece of paper. Please draw a flower with petals and leaves. You can freely decide on the form of the flower and how many petals and leaves you want to add. Afterwards, you can write attributes in each of the flowers’ petals and leaves. This can be anything you consider important about your personality and life. You should also know that this first flower is only for you. You will work individually and you don’t have to present it to the other members of the group.”

1 See Council of Europe (2012): Compass. Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People. Strasbourg.

2 See Council of Europe (2004): All different, all equal.

3 See Salto Youth (2008): Understanding Youth. Exploring Identity and its Role in International Youth Work.

4 See Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

## **Phase 2:**

### **Individual time for reflection (15 minutes)**

Participants have 10 minutes to draw their flower and to think about the attributes they want to write on the paper. During this time, there should be silence to give everybody the chance to work without disturbances. In case of questions, the trainers should stick to their initial description of the task, i.e. not give any examples or advice about attributes or the form of the flower. After 10 minutes, the trainer tells the participants:

“You have created a ‘private flower’ that is only meant for yourself. Now in the second step, we invite you to design something like a ‘public flower’, that means a flower that you would also like to show to others and explain to them. Maybe for some of you this won’t make any difference. Maybe some of you want to add something or erase an aspect that they don’t necessarily want to share with others. You now have 5 minutes to think about this and draw a new flower.”

## **Phase 3:**

### **Work in pairs (40 minutes)**

When all members of the group have finished their work, the trainer asks them to find a partner with whom they want to share their flower. This should be someone they would like to get to know better and share their personal stories with, but not someone they already know very well. The trainer says:

“Please find a partner and explain to each other the stories hidden in your flower. Please make sure that you meet someone new during this exercise, if possible from another country, but you should also do it with someone that you feel comfortable with. You will have 40 minutes to tell your stories to each other.”

## **Phase 4:**

### **Exchange in groups of four (1 hour)**

After 40 minutes the trainer asks the group to come back and sit in a circle. Now two couples should come together to form groups of four people.

“Now we would like to ask each couple to find another couple and form groups of four people. You will have one hour to draw one poster with your flowers in the middle by putting them into a context. To the context might belong the concepts of memory, communities, narratives and history. How does the context influence the identity of a person?”

## **Phase 5:**

### **De-briefing (1 hour)**

In this phase, the trainer initiates a deeper discussion on the experiences the participants made during this activity.

“After reflecting on your personal identity and sharing it in different settings, we would now like to invite you to share some of your experiences with everybody.”

The trainer could ask the following questions:

- How did you like the exercise?
- After this exercise, how would you define identity?
- What ideas came up about how identity is influenced by memory, communities, narratives, and history?

While discussing about the concept of identity the trainer can take notes on a flipchart what participants connect with the term identity and how in their opinion memory, communities, narratives and history influence it. In the end the group can try to find a common definition of the term identity. If this is not possible, the group can have several different definitions. The flipchart with the definition(s) should hang on the wall of the seminar room until the end of the meeting.

### **Recommendations for implementation**

According to the timeframe and the group, it is possible to give an example of how the flower could look like or even to indicate some things that might be written into the petals and leaves, e.g. gender, hobbies, nationality, etc. However, it is very important to make sure that the participants reflect upon their identity in different terms than those assigned to them by society. Therefore, we have decided not to give specific examples, but to rather explain that it could be any characteristic that participants consider important for themselves. Also, we recommend giving participants full liberty to design their own flower.

### **Variations**

As already mentioned, there are several variations of this method with a different focus. Therefore please check “Compass, Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People”, the Council of Europe’s “All Equal – All Different Education Pack” and Salto Youth’s “Understanding Youth. Exploring Identity and its Role in International Youth Work”.