

→

[home](#) | [about this site](#) | [contact](#) | [sitemap](#)

[About EYW](#)   [European Youth Week in your country](#)   [European Youth Week in Brussels](#)   [Best Youth Projects](#)   [Press](#)
[Best youth projects » Selected projects](#)
[Overview](#)
[Youth in Action](#)
[Selected projects](#)

## A WORLD IN NEED OF UNIVERSAL VALUES

European values are good, but let's take an extra step. Let's talk about universal values. "In a world of constant change and geopolitical activity, we have to keep in mind that we're all citizens of the world", says Fabrice Lachenmaier from Idées Nouvelles Europe (INE).

INE is a twelve-year-old association in France that wants to promote Europe and help young people feel European. The association works with information and teaching, mainly focusing on three important groups of people who distribute information and affect public policy: teachers, media and politicians. INE has more than 70 partner organisations and the average age of the participants in their projects is 17.



Last year they initiated the project "Jeunes ambassadeurs d'une citoyenneté planétaire" ("Young ambassadors for a global citizenship") - in short JACP. The project involved 800 people in France, Italy and Spain, but also in Peru, Argentina and Chile.

The project started in Mendoza in Argentina, where a committee was set up to produce the pedagogical material needed. The next step was a one week long meeting in Nice, France, to start work on a universal charter of basic human rights.

After that the group has produced information material, such as brochures and a website, on this charter and they are continuously leading a major information campaign about the matter directed at youth in the participating countries.

### Working on the charter

"We already worked together with our European partner organisations before, creating a Summer School for citizenship. But it was interesting to work with the partners from South America. We could explain to them how Europe was built and listen to their views of citizenship", says Fabrice.

The project partners are youth organisations of the given country, who focus on youth and citizenship. Each organisation chose two young people to become ambassadors for universal citizenship and to go to Nice to work on a universal charter of basic human rights, inspired by the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights.



"We wanted as many people to work on this as possible. But we were



nervous about that the perception of certain values would be very different in the different countries. So it was a nice

surprise for us to realise that the basic values still were the same in both South America and in Europe”, says Fabrice.

In fact, the greatest challenge the INE faced was an administrative issue - the issuing of visas.

“This took us a lot of time. For example, fifteen days before the proposed arrival of the Peruvian group to France their visa requests were refused. Three Peruvians had taken part in all the stages of this project, but in the end only one could attend the meeting in Nice. We lost two plane tickets and the young people who had even met with delegates from the National Assembly of Peru to discuss the trip could not come. Naturally they were very disappointed.”

Initially, French was supposed to be the “working language” of the project. But during the course of the project, plans changed.

“In the end everybody spoke their own language. We didn’t use any interpreters. And it worked! Sometimes there were problems, but overall the young people communicated in a very concrete way on this charter. They used their hands, their voices, images and situations.”

#### The dream is to continue

“This is not the end. After the actual project we want to continue distributing this material in schools and youth organisations and we hope that this text could be part of the pedagogy”, says Fabrice.

More and more countries are joining the project, including, for example, Ecuador and the United Kingdom.



Ecuador’s involvement is a special case that Fabrice is proud of. Along with the regular participants, a 23-year-old woman from Ecuador joined the meeting in Nice. She had heard of the project and as she was a member of Congress working on the new constitution of her country, she was very excited about the project.

“When she returned she wrote a report on the events and in the end it led to the concept of “universal citizenship” being mentioned in the new constitution of Ecuador. This was a completely unexpected and exceptional outcome!”

“South America is going through a lot of changes right now. So did Europe after World War Two. We needed a European identity then as they need a South American identity now. We were asked “Why don’t you come to South America to teach us how the European project was created?” I see this as an important political message. Europe is in the end a peace project, and peace is needed also in South America.”

The dream is that a universal charter of basic human rights would be applied all over the world. Fabrice sees JACP as a pilot project that could and should go much further. “We didn’t want to make “just” a simple project. We wanted this project to have a real impact”, he states firmly. “We need universal solidarity now.”



28.10.2008 by [Eva Nyman](#), the editor-in-chief of [youthweek.eu](#). Eva is 24 years old and has studied journalism at the University of Helsinki.

[back to overview →](#)

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