

Cosmopolitanism: The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Post-COVID-19 Era



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The idea of Cosmopolitanism, or interchangeably Global Citizenship, dates back to the time of Ancient Greece when Diogenes of Sinope declared himself as a “citizen of the world.” Since then, it has remained a mere idealistic concept for most of human history. In times of great conflict and war, the idea had to face accusations of being anti-nationalistic, or unpatriotic. However, the devastation of human civilization during the Second World War, followed by the urgent needs for global cooperation, called for an embodiment of this vague idea at an institutional level. Born out of this need, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (UN, 1948) is considered the political foundation of understanding modern day Cosmopolitanism. Not surprisingly, the post-World War 2 era was also a period during which human rationality came under challenge, and recovery programs such as the European Recovery Program (ERP) – better known under its other name, the Marshall Plan – implemented at the time are considered the historical roots of modern development aids.

While philosophical discussions around what Cosmopolitanism truly is and whether it is something practicable are still ongoing, decades of globalization have refined the idea into more tangible and detailed agenda. In September

2012, the UN's Secretary-General Ban launched the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), which sets the priorities to: 1) expand access to education, 2) improve the quality of learning, and 3) foster Global Citizenship, to empower achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Such an emphasis on Global Citizenship was succeeded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Global Citizenship and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) was again stated as one of the key arms of SDG4 (Education) at the World Education Forum 2015. The declaration identified the new educational goal as a *"holistic and humanistic vision, which contributes to a new model of development,"* and further defines it to be a *"vision [that] goes beyond a utilitarian approach to education and integrates the multiple dimensions of human existence."*¹

Among the outcome targets of SDG4, SDG 4.7 (Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship) states the educational pursuit of: 1) sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, 2) human rights, 3) gender equality, 4) promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, 5) global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. This may seem just another line among 168 other targets. However, it is not to be underrated in that SDG 4.7 clarifies contents of education, while other targets only focus on accessibility and quality of education. Further, it shows how GCED is considered an engine for achieving sustainable development.

In 2020, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)² updated the indicator corresponding to SDG4.7: SDG4.7.1 (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment. This was a result from the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) approving to upgrade indicator SDG4.7.1 from tier III status (no established methodology) to tier II (established methodology but countries do not regularly produce data), which implies the achievements will now be monitored.³ Discouragingly, UNESCO's 2020 report shows only 11 countries fully implemented all four arms of SDG 4.7. In particular, Korea fully implemented only (d) student assessment, while the other three arms were only somewhat implemented, along with other countries such as Iran, Chad, Estonia, Haiti, and Iran. It has been pointed out how in many other countries students are assessed even when the educational system does not provide the full resources for the learning experience, and Korea was not an exception of such thin implementation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has vividly demonstrated how interdependent and interconnected a world we have been living in, as well as how fragile it can be. Specifically, there has been a differential

¹ UNESCO, UNDP, et al. 2015. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

² United Nations. 2021. Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

³ UNESCO. 2020. Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education—All Means All.

impact of the pandemic, depending on characteristics such as, but not limited to, income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, which has revealed the limits of the system we have been living in. In terms of resilience, it will continue to reveal the limits as we recover from, or adapt to, the pandemic.

Inclusive recovery and sustainable development, without widening the inequality gap, are already priorities of national institutions and global organizations. This cannot be done without proper public awareness that supports such institutional level effort. However, the propagation of inclusiveness faces strong repulsion from the public, partially due to the pandemic itself, ironically. The emphasis on inclusiveness and sustainability are often accused to be emotional and naïve, or even, not very surprisingly, irrational. It is time we contemplate the meaning of rationality, a concept the modern world abides by, but which has often been misused to justify the arbitrary boundaries of inclusiveness. Cosmopolitanism and GCED may not fully answer the question of who, what, and how to include. Still, they will definitely provide an opportunity to revisit and question the answers that we assume to be “normal.”

The impact of the pandemic on educational achievement at the individual level is also a key concern that needs further attention. Especially in a longer perspective, the younger generation has been deprived of the interactive experience to learn diverse perspectives, and the window of opportunity may be quite limited for them. While the alternative means, such as digital technology, might have helped to maintain students' cognitive skills, achievement in socio-emotional skills and behavioral learnings must have contracted more severely.

GCED suggests a practical option for these social and educational needs in the post-COVID-19 era. Admittedly, there is no concrete consensus of what Cosmopolitanism is or who Global Citizens are, and therefore, the structure of GCED also focuses on experiential learning and critical questioning. Through this, GCED aims to *“empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world.”*⁴

GCED should be mainstreamed in both the formal education sector, and other non-educational organizations providing programs for lifelong learners. At best, this will crucially contribute to social cohesion, empowering inclusiveness in national and global society. At another best, it will still enrich the social agenda and discussion by providing a common language to people. Global Citizenship and GCED may not be a full encyclopedia for the post-COVID-19 era, but they might still guide us with small tips on who to travel with and what to keep in the backpack before getting back on the road. **KIEP**

⁴ UNESCO, UNDP, et al. 2015. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4.