

#recandchange

LOCAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF "RECOGNIZE AND CHANGE" PROJECT

Project implementation deadline: 3 years
Burgas, Bulgaria



The evaluation was performed by the focus group method

Date of meeting: 09.10.2020

Participants: young educators (YEs), representatives of partner schools, young people, representatives of NGOs

I Recognize and change – what did the project change and what did we recognize?

We changed some of the thinking, stereotypes, attitudes of the students, but we did not reach the parents. We have created a precondition for a more tolerant environment.

We helped to understand and accept differences, to realize who we are and what we are. We have accepted that discrimination exists around us, despite our understanding that it does not exist. We realized that each of us was in the role of discriminated against, a witness, and some in the role of an abuser.

Young people realized that the first source is often not themselves, but their parents, the family environment. The source of stereotypes are some of the media and politicians. That is why it is important to have a discussion at school and to have a civic education.

Some of us accepted ourselves (realized our identity) and sought change, but we realized that we are subject to the environment.

II The aim of the project is to form a new culture of trust and a change in attitudes to diversity, identity, discrimination and violence, caused by discrimination . Did the project achieve its goal?

The goal was achieved according to its expectations and capabilities. We worked with young people who trained their peers and made contact with teachers, NGOs and politicians. The youth trainers managed to build a bridge of trust with some of the students, as well as with the teachers.

The project achieved a certain percentage of change by applying a sustainable model of awareness, discussion of differences and discussion of acceptance of change. It was important that we worked with the students for a long time, within a few lessons.

Schools that participated in the project had a need for change and acceptance of differences in school and prevention of aggression and hate speech.

The project strengthened old and built new partnerships.

The project topics were needed and on time, but there was an element of training that was missing in terms of sustainability.

Politicians were involved in the project, but there was a need for media partners.

The competition was territorially limited and needed to be on a national level in order to multiply the results.



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III How do you evaluate the choice of the target group and the chosen topics?

The target group were a mix of high school and junior high school stage students from Burgas and smaller villages located around the city. In this way the methodology was implemented in schools where students are with diverse ethnic and social composition, which gave us a clearer picture on the adoption and change.

The target group was clearly defined and precisely selected. The training laboratories among the junior high school stage students passed with great interest towards the topic.

Among high school students (high schools) attention and interests were diverse, given the peculiarities of age and interests at this stage of their life development. For the most part, they realized the importance of the project topics. Of importance to them was the opportunity to discuss their own identity and freedom, as well as individual differences and relationships. This is a topic that is not covered in the educational program. The other two topics: discrimination and violence caused by discrimination had a direct expression in the thinking of young people. For the most part, they realized that although they had not previously recognized the manifestations of discrimination, each of them had been either discriminated against or a direct witness, and sometimes a victim or an abuser.

It is important to point out that in the Bulgarian educational system the so-called civic education is not affected and the themes of identity, discrimination and violence are not part of the educational program. That is why in this regard the project makes progress in terms of awareness and attitudes of students, emphasizing the theoretical concepts of identity, signs and forms of discrimination. The youths managed with the help of their peers (young educators) to learn more, to understand and take action to change.

IV What was the impact on the target group:

The students perceived the project topics in different ways and with different degrees of attention. There were students who expressed intolerance at the beginning of the laboratory classes, but after the discussions on the individual cases they managed to change their attitudes and opinions. For example, one of the young people shared "I don't really think like that, what I shared before are my parents' thoughts, they are not mine."

During the trainings, the students realized that it is very important to realize their identity, who they are, what their preferences, talents are, as well as to accept the differences in themselves and others.

The students asked further questions and actively participated in role plays and case studies.

"I learned a lot of new things, it was useful - discrimination was the most fascinating topic. Because it is most important to talk about it, because some people do not understand that they are discriminating, and others do not realize that they are under its blows."

V How would you define each of the project topics:

- 1. Identity and relationships:** "Important, because students have little knowledge and understanding of it. "; "Understanding "; "Acceptance"; " Self-perception (self-determination)"; " Difficult to understand by students, but necessary for their growth"; " A process of awareness that is often not supported by the family and the school"; " A necessary theme".
- 2. Discrimination:** "Segregation"; "Recognition in a role: participant or witness"; "Understanding inequalities"; "Easier to understand for students when the information is exported (by NGOs)"; " Prejudices and stereotypes "; Gypsies, LGBT
- 3. Violence caused by discrimination:** "Phenomenon at school"; "Aggression"; "Family upbringing"; "It's a pity how many people experience it, but are afraid to admit it"; "Latent aggression, sometimes by peers, afraid of being subjected to violence themselves."

VI Evaluation of methodology and methods used

The trainings were carried out in a school by young educators, who prepared their program with the help of the methodology consultant. Previously, the training program took place in an informal environment with the participation of youth trainers.

The approach for training of youth trainers in a residential environment is good. The topics were chosen very carefully. The program was balanced with theory and widespread elements of interaction: game methods, role-playing games, simulations, case studies, discussions, presentations, movies, videos, posters and more. The topics were presented clearly and understandably. During the trainings for young educators the methods were played/ simulated, which were then applied during the training laboratories in the schools.

Regarding the trainings in the schools, the youth trainers point out that it was necessary for the trainings to take place in a school environment, which provides better audibility and understanding of the topics.

“The trainings were well balanced with theory and practice. Students get involved with great interest in role-playing games and solving of cases. The discussions were lively. “

“ The types of discrimination which were mostly discussed: gypsies, homosexuals, xenophobia and new students (migratory) sexism. “

“ The idea for the videos and competitions was a bit strange to me with the conditions for forming teams mostly from one class. There should have been other forms, but overall the idea was good.

It was necessary for some of the trainings to take place outside the school environment, so that they do not feel that they are there on duty.

In most of the workshops in the schools, the teachers provided the opportunity for the young educators to conduct the classes independently, which enabled the students to be more frank and more active.

Young people have more trust in their peers, so we think that training with peers was the best.

The Covid 19 pandemic distanced YEs from the students. This was a risk that was quickly overcome. Short, themed films were quickly prepared and the YEs were able to quickly integrate into the online systems of individual schools and to conduct their workshops.

The three annual local conferences played a significant role in publicly presenting and multiplying the project results. During them the realized activities, the competition videos were presented, the project topics were discussed and the forthcoming topics and activities were presented.

The approach to conducting video competitions during the three project years was interesting. A positive approach was to change the preconditions of the competition – participants to be mostly from one class. Subsequently entered a more flexible approach enabling young people to be grouped into teams with friends and supporters outside the formal school environment. This presupposed a more informal cooperation and freer realization of the competition’s ideas. Some of the students wanted to present their competition projects through formal youth groups outside school.

The communication and partnership with the youth NGOs from the city was extremely good, as they encouraged and helped the young people to prepare their videos, social experiments and comics.

VII The role of teachers and schools:

The selected project topics are not part of the curriculum. These topics are often avoided at school or not discussed at all for fear that a child or young person will share with their parents, who in turn will create a problem through the media. Often Bulgarian teachers and schools have been the subject of a negative public reaction from small groups of parents who have objected to discussing topics related to civic education to learn about and accept differences. In this regard, many school leaders avoid commenting on these topics. Nevertheless, thanks to the local team of the project and the authority of the organization, the project was implemented according to the activities set in it and achieved its goal.

The assessment of teachers and school leaders is that the activities were conducted professionally and neutrally, because the topics were presented by young people, some of whom are students in the same schools. They were supported by the teachers. Also, the teachers gave both their trust to young educators, and freedom to present the topics in their own way in order to involve the students.

During the activities the teachers had mainly a logistical role, for organizing the class and the time for conducting the laboratory classes.

“Teacher participation should be limited because students are influenced by teachers and are more worried.”

“Sometimes when teachers participate, it bothers students. They are afraid to speak freely.”

“The teacher’s presence is sometimes important to support the discussion, but is often hampered by guiding questions (50%), depending on the teacher’s virtue system.”

VIII What should be the role of parents:

Parents have a primary role in the formation of prejudices in young people. Parents need to be worked with systematically, but in general this current project does not predispose to purposeful work with parents. Parent meetings are difficult to implement, even for the purposes of the school learning process.

However, the project played an important role in the relationships: parents, students and school. It should be noted that within the project, its specialized team provided a significant mediation and information role to raise awareness of the importance and consequences of a xenophobic conflict in one of the Burgas schools. There was a parent who initiated a campaign for the abolition of four children part of an immigrant family, for their alleged Turkish origin. After the intervention of the project team and the conducted educational laboratories with students, the conflict was finally eliminated at the beginning of the second school year. Most of the parents had given up their claims after the situation was explained to them and real examples were given that no one was insured against discrimination. The parents accepted the offer for YE to implement a training with primary and junior high school stage students.

IX Impact of the project on local NGOs (including youth organizations)

NGOs, including local youth organizations: Astika, Crocus, Youth Volunteer Network, Moira, were significantly influenced by the project’s objectives and activities. A significant number of volunteers of the organizations, who are pupils and students, took an active part in the project activities at all levels, including trainings for young educators, conducting workshops in schools, forming youth teams (from young people in schools with whom we partnered with) to work in an informal environment, incl. developing ideas and videos. The participation of young people in an informal environment, outside school, upgraded and deepened their knowledge by having a sustainable effect. The young people created some of the videos in the competition during the three project years. Outside of school, the young people built a network that works for sustainability and multiplication of results. In this way the integration and openness of the participants was obtained, including those with different sexual orientations and ethnicities.

X**What is the effect on politicians at the local level and was their participation in the project expected?**

The activity of politicians was not weak. At the local level, these are municipal councilors, the mayor and his administration, which is responsible for implementing local policies. A significant problem is that at the local level there are no legal requirements to implement local policies regarding discrimination, work with immigrants and refugees. With regard to the prevention of discrimination and violence, these functions are performed mainly by NGOs.

At the local level a representative of the National Commission for Protection against discrimination was included, but his function is purely representative without real functional competencies.

The municipality did not have an active policy to support youth activities, including training young people on selected project topics for the three years. The main problem for this is that there is no understanding coming from the municipal councilors to work with young people and support the activities of NGOs. Among some of the councilors, there is a negative mood or caution towards the various forms of sexual orientation and immigrants. This creates tension at certain times. The majority of municipal councilors tend to neglect the form of informal education for young people. However, the mayor's administration has shown positivism towards the project and its goals. Mainly, representatives of the mayor's administration took part during some of the project activities, such as holding annual conferences.

XI**How is your assessment of the team, incl. youth trainers, as well as for the project it self?**

The project team was formed by professionals working for years with young people, as well as on project topics. The organization has been working with students from schools in the city and the region for years and has the necessary credit of trust and authority. This made it easier to work with schools.

The young educators were selected with the necessary attention and motivation to work with peers on the selected project topics.

The youth trainers point out: "We got closer, we worked together with the project team. The topics were discussed repeatedly and in depth. Working with different classes made it easier for us to be in a team of two. The consultant in methodology or MLAE was always with us. We were often supported by foreign volunteers under the Erasmus + program.

" It's a very good job. The young people, through discussions and creative activity, were engaged on the topics. They were trained on the topic of human rights, to be tolerant to the rich human diversity, acquired skills with which to solve a conflict based on discrimination"(representative of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination).

Not all of the participants were productive so there is a need of a thorough selection – perhaps there should be a different number of trainings and with a good incentive.

The contribution of the trainer of the young educators and the consultant on the training methodology is defined as extremely valuable.

The project was useful because it touched on pressing issues as the attitude of young people towards refugees, xenophobia, sexism and LGBT.

The project had a positive impact on youth trainers, who became successful multipliers of project topics.

Overall, the evaluation of the project is positive. The impact on the target group and the local community is positive. There is a change in the attitudes of many students. The topics were covered in an understandable way and with relative depth.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (highest), the average score given by focus group participants is 9.25.

XII Recommendations:

1. It is important to have teacher training, and why not together with young educators. In this way, there will be more commitment and sustainability of results.
2. The media partnership and the involvement of the media in future projects are important. Through them they can promote the competitions, discuss topics and multiply the results.
3. Consider diversifying training laboratories by combining school-based learning and then in an informal environment.
4. Teachers should be mainly involved in providing the logistics for the implementation of the trainings, as well as to support the feedback afterwards.
5. It is important to include and tell personal stories from peers, even when ensuring the anonymity of students.
6. To continue the project by focusing efforts on working with certain communities in schools.
7. Do not abandon the chosen topics and upgrade them, because young people can be a conduit for change. Also, these topics are extremely important for the prevention of growing antisocial behavior among young people as a result of the pandemic situation in which young people lose touch with reality and with their relationships, communication skills.