

## **Workshop reports: Online-Conference “Sharing beyond borders 2020”**

### **Workshop 3: Youth Participation and Empowerment in the Danube Region**

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We really had a very good and intense discussion in our workshop 3 talking about the influence Corona pandemic had on the youth work and local NGOs in the Danube region. During the workshop we have discussed the following topics: positive and negative effects of Covid-19 on local youth work, successes and failures of local activists and NGOs as well as tools and methods, which were used during lock-down. I would like to share my screen and to show which nice mind map we've produced during our discussion.

Just before I start, we had three small inputs. One was from my side talking about our Danube Youth participation project and our intention to create the Danube Youth network in the future motivating and empowering young people along the Danube region to become more active. Afterwards, Tomislav Milunov from Serbia showed a very nice presentation telling how the young people (more than 200 volunteers!), were active in Vršac, Serbia helping the elderly to buy groceries and medicines, pay bills and raise money from banks, provide them with alcohol for disinfection and walk with their pets. Moreover, there was an input from a young girl, Constanta Ceban from Moldova. She is also coordinating a volunteering movement in the rural area in Moldova, that was active during the lock-down helping the people from villages during this hard time.

Discussing the question “How Corona influenced our lives and our work with young people?”, we have reached the following conclusions:

Some positive effects:

Corona was like a “pusher” for the digitalization all over the world, which is considered as a positive effect. On the one hand, people slowed down their lives a little bit, they started to rethink their lives and habitudes and they have started volunteering more. The voluntary work increased in many different ways. The flow of information increased also rapidly and there were some skills needed to structure all this information. This would mean not to speak too much in politics, but try to get to the point directly.

Negative effects:

Because of online schooling and online teaching there was the feeling to be online 24/7. The negative influence of the screen on your health and mind. This is rather stressful for the complete body, as you don't have the separation between being at school and being at home. There wouldn't be borders anymore.

Also the effects on the emotional side is a very important thing that is happening now and we have to consider this emotional influence and this emotional effects on the young people. Because of this social distancing and social isolation there is still very little information how exactly it will influence the young people in the nearest future. Moreover, we don't know for now how long this Corona situation is going to last and how we should proceed with schooling. Now we know that the lockdown is not everywhere. We try to open the borders, but still the question remains which future effects of staying at home for months will appear. Nobody knows them for now, so we'll keep an eye on that.

Some successes and failures:

People were getting more connected on the local level. They achieved to create trust between the generations and it's also a very interesting fact that young people are trying to volunteer and first, they needed to do this to build the trust to the elderly, especially for South-East Europe. The trust is a very important issue and not only elderly can give you the money directly for you to go shopping. There were many challenges for young people to overcome obstacles and to show the elderly that they're trustworthy. Moreover, sometimes local stores or local government gave them accreditations. They supported them, giving money for some advertising, so that they can show the trust to the elderly people.

On the one hand, some elder people rejected using some devices saying "No, we will not" switch to online tools. On the other hand, many did use online tools and to tried to communicate with others through chats and online calls. The example from Romania showed, that you can also use the stationary phones to make calls: they asked people how they were doing, if everything was okay etc. In such a way people got the feeling of connection being not "forgotten". A conclusion here is that you don't have to invent something completely new. You just have to call the person and ask some simple questions. This is easy, but this is something that we need.

What we need to do for the young people:

We need to teach them how to adapt to the rapidly changing environment, is to teach the young people to adjust. The environment is changing very fast. This is what we have to proclaim, how not to get lost in this flow of information, to get this direction to support. Because if you google online tools, you'll find thousands of them. But then they need some support not to get lost.

Funny fact: one participant of our workshop said that she joined it just because she saw that one of the speakers will be a young girl from Moldova. At the end of the workshop it became clear, that they even live in the same village but have never heard about each other's activities and met first time in online conference in Ulm. The conclusion: more young people have to get a voice and speak up during the international events and online conferencing proved to be a successful tool to bring people together.