

ECMI
REPORT



EUROPEAN CENTRE
FOR
MINORITY ISSUES

A Youth Exchange Project
“Raise your Voice”

Cisternino, Italy
10-20 December 2013

Tamari Bulia

Report #63



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Youth Exchange Project “Raise your Voice”

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“Youth in Action” is the European Commission programme managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The seven-year programme aimed at inspiring a sense of active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans, involving them in shaping the Union's future. Promoting mobility within and beyond EU borders, the programme encouraged non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, in addition to the inclusion of all young people in Europe and its neighboring countries. The Youth Exchange project “Raise Your Voice” was one of the last waves of such projects within the frameworks of 2007-2013 Youth in Action Programme.

Tamari Bulia, February 2014
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I. INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT

The youth exchange project “Raise your Voice” took place in a small community of Cisternino in Southern Italy between 10 and 20 December 2013. It gathered young people from five countries: Italy, Germany, Ireland, Georgia and Armenia. The venue of the project was a former religious institute with shared facilities, currently used as a venue for non-formal educational events organized for young people.

The main organizer of the event was YouNet - an Italian NGO based in Bologna, while four other organizations were involved in implementation of the project:

- New Communities Partnership (NCP) from Ireland,
- European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) from Germany,
- Georgian Association of Educational Initiatives (SIQA) from Georgia,
- NGO “Meliora” from Armenia.

The general aim of the project being promoting active citizenship and empowerment of youth, it also aimed to support youth social inclusion in society through intercultural learning and non-formal education. Based on three aspects - intercultural exchange, knowledge sharing and promotion of active citizenship, the focus topics of the programme were: role of media in conflicts and rural life of youth. Pursuing the aims and topics of the programme, the specific activities planned within the programme included:

- Presentations of participants on their home-country cases of rural life, unemployment of youth and role of media in conflict resolution. The presentations outlined the context of the issue and identified problems faced in their home-countries, possible solutions and best practices.
- Working on radio sessions on chosen topics and preparing radio broadcastings for local radio station.
- Intercultural evenings to learn about the cultural backgrounds of other participants.



- Discussion sessions among the participating groups.

The report presents the project from the perspective of the participants, outlining their general impressions and achievements in terms of intercultural and knowledge exchange, and promoting active citizenship among youth.

II. THE GROUP

The project involved in total 30 participants from five country delegations, selected by five local coordinating organizations. Being a coordinating organization of Germany, ECMI has selected participants living in Germany. Brief profiles of the group members are presented below.

Carolina Brose

Carolina is a BSc student at the University of Flensburg, studying Education, English and Health and Nutrition. She has profound interest in intercultural activities and can speak German, English, Polish, Turkish, Spanish and Mandarin languages. She has gained experience with different cultures while working at the international office of the University of Flensburg. She is also interested in business concepts, and therefore takes active part in female entrepreneur workshops.

Daria Gaiduk

Originally coming from Kazakhstan, Daria is a student of Culture, Language, and Media Master program of the University of Flensburg. She has an excellent experience in teaching languages (English and Russian). Daria was particularly interested in participating in the project as it combined the main fields of her interest: media and cross-cultural relations. She has been interested in media since the school times, after being an editor of a school newspaper, writing articles and essays, and conducting interviews. She has previous experience in Film Media, working as an assistant to a Danish film crew filming a short movie and an NGO filming a

documentary on camel milk in rural areas of Kazakhstan.

Dejan Mavrovic

Originally coming from Serbia, Dejan is MA student of European Studies at the University of Flensburg. Being an author of several publications in Serbian, he has also authored a research paper based on newspaper articles concerning the process of securitization of an "Albanian threat" in Serbian media, based on the theory of securitization (Joint work together with Luka Steric and Marija Ignjatijevic). He is a member of student organization "Team Youth Initiative" in Serbia dealing with questions on youth (student) education and development.

Erma Mulabdic

Coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Erma is currently MA student of European Studies at the University of Flensburg. She has previous working experience in NGO sector in her home country where she assisted in coordinating projects on women and children in rural areas, including assessment of awareness about their rights, active participation in the community, gender relations and ways they can voice their needs and interests. Erma has recently completed her internship at ECMI. Within the framework of the youth exchange project, she was the leader of the German team.

Mariana Jimsheladze

Mariana comes from Georgia. She has completed the MA European Studies course at the University of Flensburg, where she is currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Social Sciences. She is particularly interested in the role of media due to her prior working experience at a local radio station in Tbilisi, Georgia. Currently she is conducting an internship at ECMI.



III. ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Intercultural exchange

Participating groups came from different parts of Europe, including EU or Non-EU countries. Interesting to note was that the German delegation was particularly multicultural as most young people who expressed their interest in the project, were international students currently living in Germany.

Intercultural aspect being an important part of youth exchange projects, the project “Raise your Voice” gathered people with different cultural background and customs. The groups were presenting their home-countries in terms of culture and traditions as well as in terms of the topics discussed during the workshops. Each delegation was required to make a presentation on their country focusing on youth and major issues that young people in rural areas face. The groups had a chance to hear and see each country’s particular situation, problems and best practices, to find out more about how media can influence conflicts, the use of propaganda and presentation of specific examples of politicization of media for the purpose of increasing ethnic tensions. This particular session sparked an intense discussion about diversity in the European Union and the EU policy on migration and integration of immigrants.



ECMI Group after their presentation. Photo: Mariana Jimsheladze

In addition to intercultural exchange being part of the programme contents, it was also present on a daily basis through joint

cooking sessions or maintaining the facility by the participants themselves. Creation of a small community where daily tasks were shared, and the participants had to live and work together, the project successfully fulfilled its intercultural requirements. The delegation was divided into rotating teams of handling everyday tasks as cooking, cleaning and supporting. In spite of a few challenges in the beginning resulting from the cultural differences and stereotypical thinking, the participants managed to develop into a team and easily adapt to differences.

An additional part of the intercultural experience was cultural evenings with food, music and dancing that reflected each culture specifically. Some groups sang recited poems, and showed pictures and videos from their countries. The cultural evenings were everyday highlights leaving everyone willing to visit the wonderful places seen on photos or videos.

Knowledge exchange

Topic 1: Conflicts, youth and media

The programme included two workshops particularly on the role of media in conflicts.

The first workshop started with an introductory and general presentation made by Barbara Bruno (Project Leader, YouNet). Ms. Bruno presented ways in which media can influence positively or negatively existing conflicts as well as cases of worldwide conflicts with a focus on the role of USA and how it was projected in media. After the introductory presentation by Ms. Bruno, the participants had a chance to speak about conflict cases from their respective countries. The discussion afterwards was mainly about the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict and Nagorno-Karabakh area which was presented by Armenian participants. However, a disadvantage was that participants had opportunity to hear facts about the conflict presented by only one side. Although there were participants from Ireland and Georgia – countries with recently resolved and frozen conflicts, there was none or very little discussion about them.



Second workshop was based on a presentation by Dejan Mavrovic (Participant from German group, ECMI) about a research paper he authored: “Securitization of Albanian threat presented in Serbian newspapers”. The introduction was about the general role that media can have in conflicts and about the importance of freedom of media. The following discussion dealt with the issue of the level of freedom that media has in each country. Important to not is, that Italian and Irish participants argued that freedom of media should be regulated on the level of European Union.

The second part of the workshop was about how “news” becomes a “truth” through the processes of externalization, objectification/internalization, explaining the theory of securitization, and how media can play an important role as a medium through which politicians can influence opinion of people with an example of the Serb-Albanian conflict on Kosovo. Dejan presented how perspectives and tone of articles changed about Albanian people in Kosovo along with the change of the politics (politicians) in Serbia. From the “Albanian brothers” before the conflict, to the “Albanian terrorists” after the 90’s – articles show that there was propaganda through printed media which can be seen as one of the channels of influence on people’s opinion in Serbia. After the discussion participants came with the conclusion that lack of media freedom can be a crucial channel of influence controlled by state.

Topic 2: Rural life and youth

Another focus topic of the project - rural life and youth was introduced through the presentations of country cases and the theatrical performances by participants.

The presentations conducted by the participants from Georgia, Armenia, Ireland, Italy and Germany underlined particular problem areas in terms of youth and rural life. Among the problems identified and discussed were: abandoning the houses in rural areas as

seen in the cases of Ireland and Armenia, sanitation-water problems in Georgia, the problems of limited access to education and unemployment. The projects or organizations working on these issues in the discussed countries were also presented, “Meliora”, the youth organization in Armenia being one of them.

Theatrical performances involved means of playing “stories” related to the problematic issues of rural life of young people. Inaccessibility to medical care, insecurity of job maintenance for the young pregnant women, youth organizations unaware of their rights in rural areas, getting education and seeing no more future in village life are the examples of problems which were illustrated by means of such performances.

By taking part in live radio sessions at the local radio station and in several web radio sessions, the project introduced one of the possibilities for young people living in rural areas to express themselves, or to “raise their voice”.

Apart from the radio sessions, and identifying problems regarding the issue, the participants explored successful rural realities in Italy. They visited a local arts center and handicraft museums where the work of local youth was presented.

Promotion of active citizenship

Promotion of active citizenship among youth was one of the general aims of the project. The radio sessions were introduced as a tool for promoting active citizenship.

First of all, the participants were able to pay a visit to a local radio station in Martina Franca (neighboring community), and to participate in a live radio broadcast to promote the project. Before the groups would be engaged in radio broadcasts, a guide presented the concept of radio as one of the oldest media. The presenter explained the peculiarities of working with radio and the notion of “clock”. The presentation was followed by questions and



answers and discussions among the participants. Some of the participants have already had prior experience in working with radio; therefore the group also had a chance to hear their stories and perspectives as well. Later on, one participant from every national team as well as the organizer of the program was interviewed on air. Interviewees described the project and their answers were translated by the Italian team.

For the next step in carrying out radio sessions, the participants were divided into four groups 7-8 people each. While the first group carried out a radio session for thirty minutes, the second one acted as a “Press Release” group. Their task was to promote the broadcasting in social networks, and invite the audience. The third group used this time to prepare their session - to discuss the topic and the structure of the upcoming broadcast. The next thirty minutes were broadcasting time for the second group, and the next half an hour was the time for the third one. The fourth group had no radio session on that day. Their task was to create the platform for gathering the experience of the project. Each day the groups would swap their roles, the first group becoming the fourth one and so on. Thus, every group had experienced every activity.



ON AIR: Daria Gaiduk from ECMI group. Photo: <http://raiseyourvoice2013.tumblr.com/>

On the first day the “Press Release” group created the platform for promoting the radio broadcastings, which was agreed to be a blog. Raise Your Voice blog (<http://raiseyourvoice2013.tumblr.com>) gathers the activities of the first days as well as the pictures and videos of participants performing

their country music and being interviewed by the local radio station in Martina Franca.

During the online broadcasting through the twitcam.livestream.com platform, participants discussed arts, music, stereotypes, and the role of media in conflicts. Some of the radio sessions are available at:

<http://twitcam.livestream.com/user/YouNet>

IV. OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

Benefits

The youth exchange project „Raise your voice,, represented a unique chance for young people. Particularly, it enabled to enhance capacities of the participating groups through:

- Creating a culturally diverse team from different countries enabled the participants to learn about other cultures and the ways they deal with similar problems. It helped to overcome cultural stereotypes, leading to multicultural understanding and tolerance,
- The intercultural, non-formal way of learning was partially achieved through involving and including all of them in fulfilling the daily tasks in rural conditions as a team. Dealing with the daily chores together was an important team-building exercise, as well as the opportunity to get to know each other better,
- Living in rural conditions enabled young people to get aware of life of young people in rural areas in Italy, as well as in other countries through knowledge exchange between participants,
- Getting to know young people from other countries with similar interests and networking,
- Knowledge exchange among participants and organizers, as well as among participants themselves on the topics of the programme: conflicts and media, youth and rural life,



- Learning how to lead and host radio sessions,
- Giving a possibility to the participants to share their own ideas, knowledge and experience on topics of the workshop. As sessions were broadcasted online, it gave opportunity to share ideas with not only other participants, but with broader audience as well. Improving public speaking and presentation skills,
- Raising awareness on participating countries and the problems identified during presentations and discussions.

- Living in a community type of facility and maintaining daily chores (cooking, cleaning) was time consuming, in spite of the benefits that it has.
- During the course duration, minor organizational challenges were visible (such as, time management from participants or the organizer side).


Challenges

The participants from the German delegation have identified a number of challenges during the youth exchange:

- Apart from cooking skills, the German group lacked knowledge of traditional German games, songs for the intercultural evening. The reason behind this was the multicultural backgrounds of the delegation.

V. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Starting from the year 2014, the Youth in Action programme as well as six other programmes of the European Commission have been united and modified to create a new, common programme “Erasmus+”. Drawing upon the Europe2020 strategy, the new priorities of the programme in terms of youth actions are: improving employability and qualification of young people, reducing youth unemployment and fostering social inclusion. The programme has and will have a non-formal aspect, focusing on youth education/training/partnership building and mobility. ECMI is currently considering the future possibilities within Erasmus+ programme.

THE ORGANIZERS		
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