

Community Impact in European Solidarity Corps Activities

Conference

12-14 June 2024

Sofia, Bulgaria

REPORT



Report

Conference on Impact in European Solidarity Corps Activities

12-14 June 2024

Sofia, Bulgaria

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Acronyms

ESC - European Solidarity Corps

HRDC - Human Resource Development Centre

SALTO - Support Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities

NA - National Agency

EPLM - European Platform for Learning Mobility

RAY - Research based analysis and monitoring on European Youth Programs

CoE - Council of Europe

Q&A - questions and answers

The report

The current report is aimed at introducing the main conclusions and messages of the conference “Community Impact in the European Solidarity Corps Activities”, which took place in the period 12-14 June 2024 in the city of Sofia, Bulgaria. The report aims at creating a bigger impact of the event, beyond the actual participants involved. It is therefore also intended at:

- introducing the main content related messages of the conference, e.g.: basic info on what community impact is, tips and tricks on how to increase impact, etc.
- presenting the event in a user-friendly way, responding to different senses of the audience;
- highlighting the conclusions on the challenges and needs;
- referring to take-aways that can be considered for the training to be held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands in October 2024.

Introduction to the conference

Between 12 and 14 June 2024 The Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC) which is the National Agency of Erasmus+/Youth and the European Solidarity Corps Program in Bulgaria, SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre in collaboration with the Dutch NA Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, French NA Agence du Service Civique and Italian NA Agenzia nazionale per i giovani prepared and implemented the conference “Community Impact in the European Solidarity Corps Activities”.

The conference corresponds to some recent developments in the European youth policies and programs which shows that: *“more emphasis is being put on the impact not only on the individual level, but also on the local community or wider society”* ([Desk Research “The value of learning motilities and its impact on communities” desk research by Justina Garbauskaite – Jakimovska](#)). These movements are enhanced by the shift in the motivation of young people for taking part in such programs and projects. On the basis of recent research activities collecting data from European countries (e.g. RAY research) it is evident that youth attend Erasmus + and ESC activities not only for the development of specific competences. **The young people are more and more driven by how they could transfer the overall experience into activities contributing to the socio-economic improvement of their communities.**

The conference took place amidst the moment of the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus + and European Solidarity Corps. It was therefore intended to present the importance, value and the impact of the two programmes which goes beyond the numbers and data collected and reported. **Through the ESC and Erasmus+ activities the participation of**

young people is secured thus creating their position as citizens and developing their attitude toward the community processes.

Venue

The conference “Community Impact in the European Solidarity Corps Activities” was held between 12-14 June 2024 in Astoria Grand Hotel, the city of Sofia, Bulgaria. The conference was initiated and designed to collect, share and spread the knowledge about community impact.

Objectives

The specific objectives were the following:

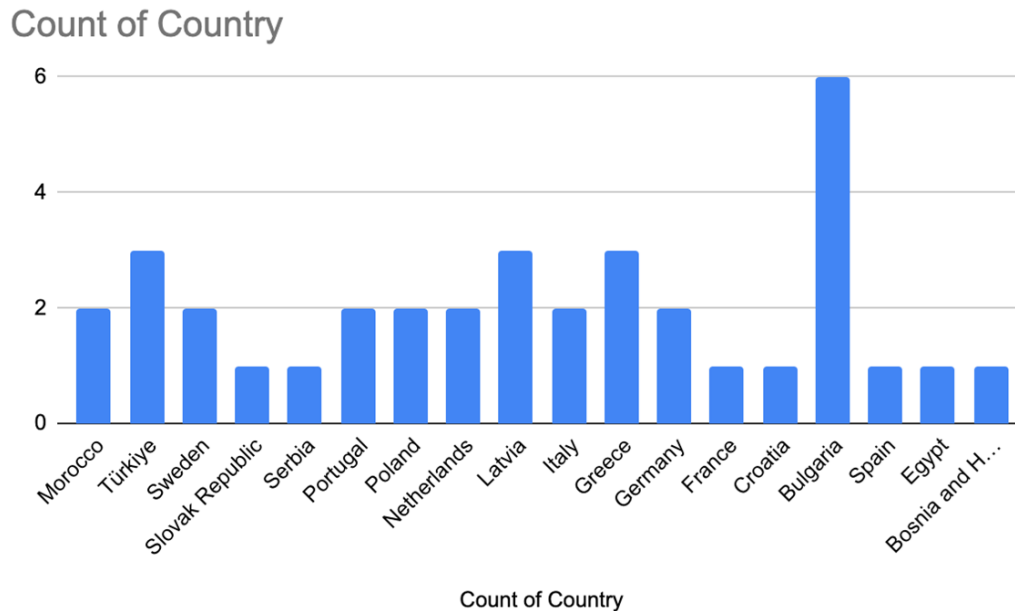
- Provide an **overview of existing resources and knowledge** referring to community impact in learning mobilities, with a specific focus on European Solidarity Corps learning mobilities.
- Explore the **shared understanding of community impact** as a concept and examine methods to enhance community impact.
- Provide an **overview of community impact indicators** and present **practical examples** of their applications.
- Collect inputs for a development of a plan to **address the additional needs** of youth workers and organisations across Europe in relation to community impact in learning.
- **Inspire participants** for activities with an increased impact.
- **Use the results** of the Conference to **spread the understanding** of community impact, contribute to the common framework in Europe.

The Participants

The event brought together more than **40 participants from 18 different countries**. The profile of the attendees varied from those having a managerial role in organisation; **founders or presidents; to the ones responsible for program and projects; practitioners and representatives of national agencies (Bulgaria, Latvia, the Netherlands), SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre and others**. Within the course of the conference, they have worked together in big and small groups in order to create a common understanding of community impact that can be translated to their own reality and applied to projects in the framework of the ESC program. The participants

also tried to identify **ways to overcome challenges when it comes to planning and achieving impact; explored the available tools for measuring impact and learned about how to increase the impact.**

The following graphic provides an overview of the countries represented at the conference.



The final list of participants is available in the appendices.

Key questions of the conference

- **What is community impact?**
- **How does it translate into the European Solidarity Corps activities?**
- **How to plan impact and what are the challenges?**
- **How to measure impact?**
- **How to increase the impact?**



Programme flow

DAY 1

Official opening

The conference opened in the late afternoon of 12 June. The official speakers included:

- Liane Riordan - Programme Manager in charge of the European Youth Portal
- Mihail Balabanov – Executive Director of Bulgarian NA
- Dimka Radeva - Secretary General of Bulgarian NA
- Kriszta Molnar – Coordinator at SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

The perspective of the **European Commission** on the topic of the impact was presented by **Liane Riordan, Programme Manager** in charge of the **European Youth Portal**. She indicated that based on recent developments it's evident that **the impact which different projects have goes beyond the directly involved participants**. In her perspective the community impact should be perceived on several levels. The first level is the European Solidarity Corps Program which in its basis is aimed at impact; the second level is the one of the different actors and their roles in the activities. These two come together into this peculiar community of the Commission and the beneficiaries which has a strong two-sided bond. The centre of all these, the most important element, are the young people who speak about how they have influenced the community. In her perspective the youth are the ambassadors of the key messages of every activity and the ones that contribute to the impact. Liane Riordan **emphasized on the importance of sharing personal stories, testimonies and the example of the young people who have attended** the variety of projects and activities. This needs to be promoted and communicated to the wider society and is one of the steps to amplify the effect of every intervention.

The official opening was followed by a speech from the hosts, done by **Mr. Mihail Balabanov – Executive Director of Bulgarian National Agency**. He stated that the conference took place at a strategic moment - the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus + and ESC program, when the National Reports from the member states were already shared. Mr Balabanov presented some of the insights and highlights from the **Bulgarian National Report** such as the **huge impact of Erasmus + and ESC Program for promoting volunteering and European values**, the importance of the two programs for the development of European identity in the young people and overcoming some economic disparities. Regarding the topic of the conference, he shared that when it comes to **measuring impact** it could be challenging since it **goes beyond the indicators and output**. This is why in his perspective the conference was of paramount importance. The intention of him and the entire team of HRDC were to fully engage and participate in the

event. Mr Balabanov stated that all the collected input will be presented at the level of the decision-making bodies.

The participants in the conference were warmly welcomed also by the **Secretary General of the Bulgarian National Agency Dimka Radeva**. She shared her expectations that the conference will be an opportunity for the participants to identify new inspirations for the future work. Mrs. Radeva has also indicated that this is the **first residential conference** of SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre **on the topic of community impact**. She expressed her gratitude toward the partners from the Italian National Agency, the Dutch National Agency, and the French National Agency and indicated that the conference will be followed up by a training course in October in the Netherlands. Mrs. Radeva also thanked the entire team of the Bulgarian National Agency (Human Resource Development Centre) for the great work.

SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre was presented at the conference by **Kriszta Molnar** – coordinator. In her presentation she emphasized on the **bridging role of SALTO between the European Commission – National Agencies – Beneficiaries**. The centres in the SALTO network also have the role of introducing some relevant topics. She also marked the fact that this is the first residential conference organised by the SALTO on the topic of community impact and that the **results will have a significant role for facilitating the future training needs**.

The conference was facilitated by **Eleni Stamouli and Sarah Beeftink**.

About the facilitators

Eleni Stamouli - Facilitator

Since 2007, Eleni Stamouli has passionately pursued the path of a freelance trainer and facilitator in Non-Formal Education, working with diverse audiences within the framework of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programs. Her activity covers a wide range of topics, including Human Rights, Inclusion, Community Engagement, Gender Violence, Social Entrepreneurship, Skills Development and Fair Trade, among others. She has studied Communication and Psychology, and has a Master's in Adult Education. Known for her positive energy and questionable sense of humour, she works well in group environments, contributing to a dynamic atmosphere. Additionally, Eleni has been an active member of a fair-trade shop-café women's cooperative since 2011.

Sarah Beeftink - Facilitator

Sarah Beeftink is a freelance trainer and facilitator in Non-Formal Education and the field of personal development. As she is part of the trainer spool of the Dutch National Agency, she is involved in the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ trainings for ESC volunteers, the Discover EU learning cycle and Solidarity Project Worklabs. She has been working on the topic of Community Impact for the last few years in direct and indirect ways. She has been part of projects focused on Community Impact herself and involved with trainings for young people within the Dutch Civil Service. Having studied Educational Sciences and Humanistic studies, she has a big love for processes that support learning, personal growth, active citizenship and finding purpose in life. With her power, she is able to motivate and inspire the people she works with, which include young people, volunteers, youth workers, mentors and trainers. She is described by her colleagues as caring, keeping the bigger picture in mind and facilitating a welcoming and safe atmosphere.

During the first session they introduced the participants with the working methodology and program. The conference was organised around the principles of non-formal education and active participation. It was based on collective learning approach, networking and accommodating different learning styles. The conference took place within the course of 3 days, 8 sessions. (in the appendices). The format suggested that a greater part is dedicated to input from speakers and experts, but also leaves space for reflection so that the audience has the time and space to make sense of the input and relate it to their own context.

To amplify the participative approach and involve the participants as much as possible, the program's methodology included activities such as discussions in groups, application of interactive tools, and others.

In the preliminary phase of the conference the participants shared their expectations and needs. From these it was evident that it is necessary to establish a common understanding toward community impact indicators, to receive recommendations on how to improve the way it's measured. The expressed needs served as bases for setting the objectives.

The participants also indicated their **learning intentions**. Among these were the following:

- **Networking**, identifying new partners and sharing, learning from the different experiences;
- **Impact measurement** indicators and assessment methods, how to increase the impact of projects, how to improve visibility;
- **Tips for overcoming challenges** when it comes to community impact;
- New inspirations, ideas on **how to increase community impact** in projects.

Upon setting the learning objectives the participants merged into the session about defining community impact.

What is a community impact?

First key note speaker: Dr. Justina Garbauskaitė – Jakimovska

Dr. Justina Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska is a non-formal education enthusiast, educator, and researcher based in Vilnius, Lithuania. Justina is the co-author of the practical guide "Community Impact in Learning Mobility Projects" and other publications exploring European youth projects and their effects on communities. In addition, she co-authored the desk research "Community Impact Indicators for Learning Mobility," providing insights into the metrics and outcomes of the European youth programs. Her work combines academic rigor with practical application, emphasizing the importance of learning mobility in fostering community engagement and development. Justina also works as an external expert for project assessment of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps in Lithuania and is a member of the RAY (Research-based Analysis of European Youth Programmes) network. When she wants to write "you", her fingers automatically add in the end, so she writes "youth" instead.

The input during the first conference day of Dr. Justina Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska was aimed at understanding community impact and its importance. The presentation was based on previous work and desk research conducted by her. The key points of the input are available and further explained here: [Community Impact in Learning Mobility Projects, A practical Guide](#).

The presentation started with outlining the time frame of the work on the topic. The beginning for Dr. Justina Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska was in 2018 when the **European Platform for Learning Mobilities (EPLM)** approached her in order to do a **desk research on the value of learning mobilities in communities**. The focus was how both programs Erasmus + and ESC Programs impact communities. The influence on the society where a certain project was implemented was obvious however not much data was collected. The main findings of the research are available [here](#).

After the research a conference took place in 2019 in Ostend, Belgium about the *"Power of Learning Mobilities"*. At the conference one of the topics of interest was the community impact. This was a momentum of realization that there is a lot of proof of the importance of this thematic area and a lot of research started. The next step was the creation of **the practical guide** in 2021, **organised around the understanding of community, the impact and the combination of the two**. Only in three years' time a lot has been done and the topic naturally grows. It was explored deeper later on during training courses, seminars, and within publications with a specific focus on ESC projects.

The topic of community impact based on all of the above can be understood through the questions:

- What is a community?
- What is an impact?
- What is community impact?
- Why is community impact important?

From individual to community

The simple answer to the importance of community impact would be that when an **ESC project** is implemented it is done **not** with the sole purpose of **individual development** but because of **its contribution to the entire community**.

There is a lot of attention to the personal learning in the separate programs. However, a recent movement to more attention toward community can be identified where the individuals are placed. This is an important aspect of every project or intervention, since the capability of showing the impact of the work toward the society supports the **recognition, enables changing and adapting of an ongoing project, improves the programs**.

What is a community?

“...in my perspective in a community there is an inner connection, shared identity binding you to it”, participant at the conference

To understand community, in accordance to the input of Dr. Justina Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska , there needs to be a clear distinction between:

Organisation – a group of people working together toward a common goal;

Social Group – a small group of people interacting and sharing mutual understanding;

Community – a large circle encompassing smaller circles labeled social group and organisation.

When it comes to the concept of community, very often it is used as a synonym of social group or organization. An organization itself could be a community but together with the social group they are on a smaller scale and include a very few people. The community encompasses both categories and it is something bigger, a large circle. Some of the key

features of community are: **the sense of belonging** (“the inner feeling of belonging”); it forms around **identity** (ethnicity, religion, political preferences, sexual orientation) and the most common type is the political type of community. Other communities are connected through **common interests** (e.g. gamers, sport). Very often when community is defined, it is described through the geographical area (town, neighbourhood, and country). In reality a community goes beyond this. There are **also communities** which are **formed in the online space** (for example gamers are part of an online community). The essence of the community is that there is an on-going interaction between people based on empathy, mutual support and sense of responsibility.

The participants were asked to reflect and identify the communities that they belong to. As a result, they have identified the following: **the community of the dancers; the cat lovers; the global community**. All these responses highlight that communities are not limited to the area where people are situated and usually are based on the **common interest**.

What is impact?

“Impact is the drop which has a ripple effect”, Dr. Justina Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska

On project level the impact is very often confused with the results (outputs). However, the primary difference is that when it comes to output, it is something planned and intentional and **impact is about what has changed the effect on society**. The output of an activity could be the improvement of a certain skill. The impact on the other hand will be how this skill is used and in what way it is later supporting personal development.

When it comes to community impact it is usually measured by checking the initial state of the society, at the beginning of an intervention and then comparing it with the status at the end. All the changes that might have occurred are impact. It is very simple. What is important is that the appropriate tools for measurement are used. The tools can be decided on the basis of the change in the society that you want to identify. **There are two types of tools: quantitative and qualitative**. The quantitative are **questionnaires**, at the beginning and the end; measurements of number of activities before and after the project, scales, etc. Qualitative tools include **observations, case studies, interviews, focus groups and others**. More on the tools is available in the practical guide.

Types of impact and levels

The following **types of impact can be** differentiated:

- **Direct:** The main outcomes of an activity achieved through **direct communication** with the target groups. It can be the establishment of a network, the creation of friendships, relations, etc.
- **Indirect:** Changes which appear through **indirect communication**. It addresses those not directly included in a project, but might have heard about it, or live closer to the area where activities take place, or walk around the area of intervention. It is very difficult to measure it and to state that a certain change happens because of a project. There are many other things that happen and have influence on those who are not directly engaged. In order to detect the indirect impact an observation over time is recommended.
- **Intended:** Includes what is **planned**, what we would like to happen. For instance, when it comes to international volunteering, it can contribute to intercultural learning in sending and hosting communities.
- **Unintended:** This is what happens at the end, the **unplanned consequences**. When developing a project idea, it is of a high importance to consider this. The unintended impact is the other things that might happen and influence the community. For example, with specific intervention aimed at expanding the scope of the activities, the ethnic distance could be increased because certain groups are not addressed or included in a meaningful way.
- **Positive: The positive experiences** for the community, which are **planned**. For example, it could be the active participation of young people, their intercultural learning when it comes to mobilities.
- **Negative: The unplanned, negative experiences.** For example, it could be that young people develop their competences with the participation in many different projects, do a lot of mobilities which results in them permanently leaving their communities.

There are also **different levels** on which impact can be experienced:

- **Micro** - the groups which **directly learn** from a project. It can be the young people, the organisations which were involved or which are partners of a project;
- **Mezo** - other groups, **but linked to the topic** or the field youth workers, mentors, multipliers, other organizations, and stakeholders;
- **Macro** - the changes which **happen on a bigger scale**. It's important that the project will be a part of the changes and it will affect policies, program. This is the regional, national, European level.

When a project is planned and implemented it is essential that: the changes on the individual level lead to changes in the community, which impact all actors and changes systems. **THE IMPACT IS MORE THAN A PERSONAL CHANGE.**

The input was followed by a Q&A session. Some insights of the session:

- The participants requested hints, tips focused on how to better describe the impact for those reporting projects. It was recommended to check the findings from RAY research, since there is a lot on how to improve a program, what could be potentially added; **useful way to improve the description of the impact could be through the [Quality App](#) tool developed by SALTO the Network** where the questions are different than the one in the application form, but they highly resonate to the concept of impact;
- Next question was related to the link between community and creating a common good and what is the difference between a community and network. It was explained that the first morning session of the second day will be dedicated to common good; it was again emphasized that **community relates to the “inner feeling” that you belong and suggest more empathy toward the others;** whereas a network is more a “gathering of individuals” it relates to the professional field and is more scattered;
- Question about **the RAY research** was raised and if it impacts communities and mobilities. It was responded that the research collects data from all the European countries and it has a qualitative part and it was evident from it that **solidarity projects have the greatest impact on communities** and on people’s life
- There was a question related to defining the steps that a community can go through to achieve a change. It was answered that among the necessary conditions are that the people encounter something different; they have to be open-minded which might be difficult; and be supported. **The biggest changes** can be seen **in communities who have not encountered foreigners before.** It shocks them. It is however highly important to **work upon this experience** in order to achieve a change. **It is not simply enough to expose people to something new.** There should be contact with the newcomers, awareness should be raised; **the community has to be involved.** These are the things that you should keep in mind. The more interaction the bigger chance of impact;
- There was a request about defining the link between **funding and societal change.** To this a recommendation to explore a **research done in Ireland** on measuring how funding youth work could lead to savings.

DAY 2

Community Impact in European Solidarity Corps

The first session in the morning was aimed at contextualizing **community impact in the framework of ESC projects.** The input delivered by Dr. Justina Garbauskaite – Jakimovska was linked with work by other practitioners and institutions which she has supported.

When speaking about community impact in ESC projects, the first thing that comes into mind is the [program guide](#).

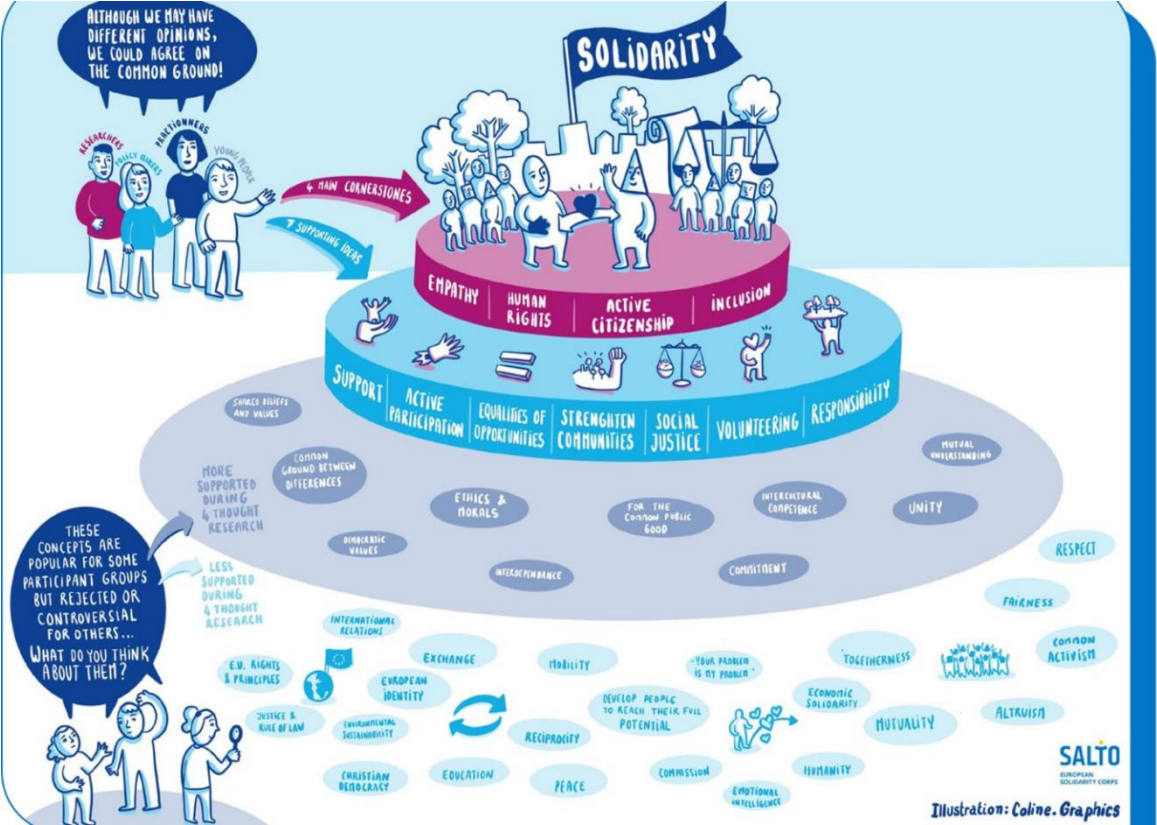
“..young people need easily accessible opportunities to engage in solidarity activities, which could enable them to express their **commitment to the benefit of communities** while acquiring useful experience and competences.”

European Solidarity Corps Program Guide, 2022

This in Dr. Jakimovska words come to prove that the program is targeting the community.

One of the findings of the [research 4thought for Solidarity](#), where researchers spoke to experts, practitioners, organizations, is that the **European Solidarity Corps Program** put the concept of solidarity into the narrative. It was something implied, something that it is worked on but the program makes it more explicit. The research tackles the question of what solidarity is and the respondents link it to feeling or an action in the common interest. The essence of solidarity is represented in the research through the metaphor of a “solidarity cake” in the following graphic:

What does the concept of solidarity encompass?



The graphic depicts the concept of solidarity and the primary references that practitioners, researchers and decision – makers connects with it. At the bottom of the

cake is terms mentioned only by a few of the respondents. The higher you go, the more often the term is used in the interviews.

Main things that the youth sector understands by solidarity are: empathy, human rights, active citizenship and inclusion. This resonates with the **aims of ESC Program**, it can be easily found in it. When a project is being prepared it should be based on these corner stones, it needs to relate to these values. These concepts come to: support equality of opportunities; enhance the active participation; develop the responsibility toward strengthening communities; ensure social justice; promote volunteering.

Another step that is taken in **explaining the concept of solidarity is the publication of [Creating Community Impact Trough Solidarity](#) by Adina Şerban, Clara Drammeh and Dan Moxon.** It presents examples from a variety of projects and how solidarity “blossoms” there. In the different projects, solidarity is coming as:

- solidarity with a **single community group**: it is shown within the same community group (for instance a program is developed to support young mothers);
- solidarity toward **other communities**: the action is targeted toward other community (young people are doing something to improve the wellbeing of other groups);
- solidarity between **two communities**: one community to other and the second one is reciprocating;
- solidarity between **two social groups**: since the social group is smaller than a community, the intervention takes place on a smaller scale, (example: a youth group supports the elderly, but they are reciprocating);
- with a **social cause**: a specific cause is the motivation for a solidarity action. The most common now is the environment.

From all of these examples it is visible that solidarity implies community.

The importance of communities in learning mobility projects is evident from the fact that this is **the environment where the young people come from**, it's the place where the needs of a project are felt and researched; where the impact is realized, where the change happens.

Three types of communities can be identified within the ESC programs:

- **sending**: the communities which **send their young people** to other countries to volunteer;
- **hosting**: the communities **that receive the young people**; the volunteers;
- **returning**: the community where **the young people return**;

In the input a special attention was given to the **returning communities**. It should be always considered and some steps needs to be taken for **reintroducing the young people** upon returning into the community.

The following insights were shared in terms of achieving impact:

Firstly, community impact is usually achieved through **direct interaction** with participants. This is the most important aspect and the biggest change happens when you interact with local people or the community that you want to show solidarity with. Some examples of this interaction are the following: organizing dinners together; having volunteers at home; visiting other NGOs. It's important in these cases not only to be present but also **to interact**. **Being exposed to something doesn't mean there is an impact**. Secondly, some small impact can be achieved through **the multiplying effect** where there is no direct interaction, no engagement in the solidarity project. This happens through **simply inviting** friends, families, neighbors, journalists, politicians to an event. This might provoke some interest; they might start research, look through it. There are "a lot of mights". In **visibility measures** there is even **less impact**, the lowest level. It was recommended that if specific visibility materials (pictures, posters) are developed, to keep them exhibit for the longest possible period in the community venues, where the project took place.

A point to be considered in terms of the created impact is that **projects don't happen in a vacuum** – participants learn, get new competences and therefore the community get new people.

In the Solidarity Projects communities get new activities. They see that young people are active and care about a topic, or an issue. The most popular now is the environment and their actions raise awareness in other members of the community, the young people take a position, they have a cause to stand for, and they are not passive.

When developing a project idea, in order to decide **how to achieve an impact, the interventions should be planned so as to be relevant for the community**, to resonate with their needs. If not, they will not come and engage. The change is achieved when an activity tackles the things that "hurt", because this means it's relevant.

In accordance with the presentation, the impact of solidarity projects could be introduced as a way to:

- increase **in commitment, participation, and active citizenship**.
- **stimulate pro social behaviour** (young people act toward issues in community);

- **channel values, attitudes, and behaviour into a positive direction** (core stones);
- bring **European values and resources to the local level** – more people learn about this level, not everyone knows about it;
- increase **community cohesion through social mixing** of diverse identities.

On **organizational level** ESC projects improve the visibility among local people. This is especially important for organizations that are working on an international level and their work is not that known. **These projects contribute to volunteering recognition, in general strengthen the position in the community and bring social capital for the organizations.** The organizations are getting stronger.

On **volunteer level** the community impact of projects contributes to **improving language skills, the new people coming bring new perspectives, intercultural competence is increased, promoting participation and social cohesion.** When returning the volunteers bring new perspectives and new ways of thinking, so the community gets new knowledge. It could be potentially put in action.

To summarize: **For organisations the community impact** of ESC projects is **extension of ongoing work and additional resources (social capital and funding).** **For the community is the intercultural and intergenerational learning,** developed community bounding by bringing more people together and introducing the European dimension. In a broader sense it brings new activities and opportunities.

Generalizing the impact for the **sending communities impact** is weaker, needs to be maintained and it's difficult to measure. In order to understand it, **there is a lot of investment needed on behalf of organization to identify the impact,** as there might have been changes after the return of the volunteers. For the **hosting communities the biggest impact is identified in communities which have never before been exposed to newcomers before.** It strongly depends on how the community is incorporated. Inviting the community, engaging them in a meaningful way is important.

Based on the findings of European research (RAY research) ESC projects have the strongest impact on young people.

Q&A session

The first question asked by the participants was regarding **measuring impact** and the respective indicators, specifically when it comes to ESC projects, since it was indicated that they had strongest impact. Dr Justina Jakimovska shared that there is **a [publication on community impact indicators](#) to which she has contributed in the areas about participation.** An example was given that in order to measure a change specifically in

youth participation which could be measured by check the election turn out before and after. If there is a change this might be because of the implemented project, but might not be. It is very subjective. When it comes to ESC projects an impact could be a group of young people do an initiative on community building and they are seen and followed by their peers, in joining for example the activities of a youth centre.

A question was raised about supporting people when they come back and **the impact in the returning communities**. There is no available funding at the moment for such activities though **it is an object of discussion** and the opinion of researchers, practitioners and even decision makers is that it should be seriously considered.

Another inquiry from the participants was in regard to **sending** and **hosting** communities, and should the sending community be less prioritized or even "ignored". **The importance of taking a closer look at the sending communities was linked to the fact that they are indicative of the reasons for leaving of the young people, especially for going abroad**. So it should be also researched. In line with this a comment was made about the practice of organizing seminars in the sending communities, which is a possibility that young people going through the same process meet. Ideally the sending community is later on the receiving and thus an initial investment could lead to a greater impact.

Introduction to RAY network and research

Key note speaker: Dimka Radeva

Dimka Radeva is driven by a deep belief in the value of collaboration, democracy, education and culture as drivers of global social change.

Since 2018, she has been working for BG NA, dedicated to coordinating the development and implementation of the Erasmus+ and ESC programs. Through her experience, she has come to understand the transformative impact of communication on people's perception of their surroundings. „I'm passionate about espresso, social change and democratic practices."

The presentation was aimed at introducing the participants with some **updates** about the key **findings of RAY network** and **the highlights of a summit held in Helsinki, Finland** some weeks prior to the conference. This meeting brought together researchers, NA agencies, beneficiaries and policy makers and was aimed at introducing the development of the ERASMUS + and ESC programs and the impact they have on young people in Europe, and the importance of data and research in improving the quality of both programs.

In brief about the RAY research: It started in 2018 in Austria as a research project of Erasmus + Youth in Action Program. It was a collaborative work of the NA responsible for the Youth in Action Program and the Institute of education and science in the university. Currently there are more than 30 NA involved and the ESC program was integrated in 2019.

The RAY network collects a lot of data from all over Europe, but the presentation was more targeted toward the following: **an indication of a shift in the mindset and the motivation of young people to participate in EU projects and programs**. An increasing number of young people state that they part in programs and projects not only for the personal development (language improvement, meeting new people) and building competences, but also in order **to take an active role in socio – political processes**.

Some of the discussions at the summit were related to the future of the Erasmus + and ESC programs, the emerging new ideas and inspirations coming from beneficiaries. The new needs of the National agencies were also explored and how they will support the beneficiaries in the future.

Some of the findings from the Bulgarian national report on RAY research were shared. The NA is involved in 4 RAY projects. One of the questions in the research was focused on the **underrepresented groups** in these projects. The highest number was the one of **youth and children and citizens**, which is an area for improvement.

In the presentation an emphasis was again placed on perceiving the conference as a possibility for the participants to identify useful aspects for their future work.

Q&A session

A comment was made regarding **the shift in the attitude of young people** which was **not that explicit** from the practice. It was clarified that these conclusions were based on data that was derived from responses all over Europe, connecting 3 generations of programs.

Specific **data from countries** was requested and is **available [here](#)**.

Prior to closing the session, the participants discussed in small groups the following two questions: how their projects relate to solidarity and which parts of the introduced information are applicable to their practice:

- one of the groups shared that specifically important was for them **the shift of attitude in young people** for attending projects; this they related to the way how projects are promoted and presented;
- organization which works with public schools in areas in **Ankara**, predominantly **populated with refugee's groups** shared that their volunteers and also **ESC volunteers** are working in communities with huge social tensions at the end of each period development of **empathy** toward each other is visible and development of multicultural competencies;

- **“empathy is something common between our projects.... without empathy we wouldn’t create an impact”**– this was the conclusion of one of the groups.

How to plan impact: presentation of two local projects

The first presented project was: **International Youth Center in the city of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria** presented by the current manager Monika Todorova - Stoyanova

Monika Todorova-Stoyanova. is part of the team of International youth centre Stara Zagora - the first centre with Quality label of the Council of Europe in Bulgaria. The last 8 years she worked like Roma Educational mediator. Her professional experience in the role of mediator is like youth worker with special support to Roma youngsters. She was trained in program for youth workers and Roma mediators in program of the Council of Europe specially create for the youth centres in Bulgaria. Like youth worker she has few projects created from non-formal groups of youngsters. Now she is a manager of the youth centre in Stara Zagora and youth work is her job and my passion.

A project developed by the Municipality in the city of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria for the establishment of a youth centre was presented. The initiative was funded under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area. It’s been open for 10 years already, and it was awarded with **the Quality Label** for youth centres of **the Council of Europe**. There is a second centre in the country bearing the prize: **Municipal Enterprise, “Youth Centre Plovdiv”, the city of Plovdiv**. This was a huge success because Bulgaria was the very first country in Europe with two awarded centres.

At this point there are 8 youth centres in the country which function in a network, they have combined efforts in order to contribute to the development of youth work on a national level.

The mission of the International Youth Centre in Stara Zagora which was developed by the team, based on their practice, is: *International Youth Centre contributes to the personal development for young people and improvement of their well-being and social inclusion. Youth Centre identifies itself as an incubator for ideas and initiatives that promote civic engagement. It is an active participant in the dialogue with decision-makers in the field of youth policies as well as an advocate for their qualitative deployment at local and national level.*

Some of the **good practices** of the centre were shared, such as: youth camps for the development of a youth led initiatives; creation of non-formal groups of youngsters to develop projects like the **solidarity project, “The exceptional”, “Ecotopia”** (creation of eco escape room), and the on-going project **“Living Library”**.

Secondly the “Smokinya” Foundation in the city of Plovdiv, Bulgaria was presented by its founder and director Tihomir Georgiev.

Tihomir Georgiev: Youth worker and trainer from Bulgaria with 12 years of experience. He is a certified NLP coach, psychologist. His focus is on embodiment, ontological phenomenological coaching, NLP, humour. Tihomir was a Trainer and designer of programs in more than 92 international educational projects. Tihomir is in the National Agency of Bulgaria HRDC trainers' pool since 2014.

He is the founder and director of the Smokinya Foundation. Smokinya Foundation contributes in creating a world that works for everyone out of love, care and cooperation.

The approach of the foundation is heuristic – a method for empowering a person to discover, or learn something for themselves. Smokinya provides an alternative context of learning – experiential, 'hands-on' or learning by doing. They strive to spread heutagogy as a way to life-long learning and maturity.

Smokinya Foundation realizes its vision and values through providing educational mobility to a wide range of people – youth and adult. They train, coach, mentor, educate, and support youth in developing competences and make choices for their life, education, and career.

Smokinya Foundation follows the UN youth agenda 2030, the 11 Youth goals, and EU strategy in the field of youth to Engage, Connect, Empower.

Since 2023 the focus of their work is on rural development by bringing youth from different countries to a settlement of 60 people – the village of Mrachenik. There, they are developing local partnerships and focusing on the opening of an international educational and volunteering centre in the former village school. They bring refreshment, aliveness and reconnection for both locals, and internationals in the village. They organize practical activities with hands-on skills development, supporting local elderly, making environmental actions, promoting multiculturalism, education, mobility.

They host short-term educational mobilities (courses, exchanges, visits), and long-term mobilities (volunteering, camps, internships).

Locally they regularly organise events which gather 40-60 young people who participated in different projects, and those who never participated in Erasmus+. We Reach, Engage, Connect, Empower through facilitation of peer to peer networking and sharing.

At Smokinya we also use digital tools and develop competence: WordPress, Slack, Slite, Google Suite, Canva etc.

Smokinya Foundation is a non-profit organization, in public benefit with the clear vision of contributing to the creation of **a world that works for everyone**, a world out of love, care and cooperation. It's a rather new organization, functioning for 8 years. Main areas of work are linked to leadership, communication, authenticity, volunteering and thus contributing to personal development and coaching. In total the Foundation has 19 ERASMUS+ and ESC projects, 850 people directly involved (hosting and sending volunteers).

Tisho was an EVS volunteer in 2013 in Nograd, Hungary in an organization situated in a rural area. This experience influenced him to work in the field and establish the Smokinya Foundation.

Since last year, the Foundation managed to get for the purpose of its activities an old school building which with their own efforts is being renovated. They have managed so far to have their own kitchen, sanitary facilities and appropriate conditions to hold camps. It is situated in the village of Mrachenik with the population of 50 people (3 children). However, the organization is aimed at reviving the place, its cultural and social life and to use it for quality education activities with young people. Last year the first camp took place in the village and it amazed everyone. The impact could be related to the curiosity of the locals for the moment of return of the international volunteers. In addition, the local businesses were engaged and companies donated to their projects, such as Schneider Electric, METRO, Modeleese and others.

When it comes to **impact, the model** which the organization applies is the one developed together with some partners and prepared by **ASHOKA** – global NGO, creating change makers. They have introduced them with the following model, applicable to their work:

Resources = > Roles = > Responsibilities = > Relations = > Rules = > Results

This could be applied from a small team to the whole community and how all of these are really important. This was further tackled in the small group, as well as the levels of impact and how to create direct and indirect impact (through the multiplication). They have some tools under preparation also.

After the two short presentations the participants have the possibility to learn more about the projects in two parallel groups.

The discussions in the two groups were organized around the following questions:

- **How do you plan for impact in your local community?**
- **What challenges do you encounter regarding community impact?**
Are the challenges internal/external?
- **Do you consider unintended impact?**
- **How do you deal with these challenges?**

The participants were also able to add their own questions.

Findings from group 1: Prior going into the questions of impact (how to plan and what are the challenges) the group wanted to know more about the “Living Library” project and also the dialogue with decision makers.

Two projects were developed by the young people themselves “The Exceptionals” and “The Living Library”. The “Living Library” is a format developed by the Council of Europe and **the idea is to provide people with the opportunity to meet representatives of specific community groups about which there are a lot of stereotypes.** This way the young people could have a conversation with some “living books” to understand more about them, beyond the stereotypes. This was based on the previous project, **“The Exceptionals”, which was aimed at foreigners (coming from England, Greece and Turkey) and that was indicative of the need to break the barriers between the local community and foreigners.**

Monika shared further details about the “Living Library” project. It is a result of a preliminary research on the needs of the young people done by the team of the youth centre. They have asked the youth about the issues that they can identify in their communities. One of the things was the need for social events for foreign university students and for Roma young people. These are two very different groups. The foreign students don't seem to have a lot of opportunities to interact with their local peers. When it comes to Roma youth, one of the challenges which the youth centre still faces is the lack of understanding that this is a space for everyone. The centre is aimed at creating collaboration and combining efforts of the young people to create something together regardless of their ethnic belonging. The social events are something normal.

How do you plan for impact in your local community? The centre has discussions with young people, collecting their opinions and working with them. The hard part is to introduce the institutions with the ideas of youth. There is an intention for future professional research about the reality of young people. It's not a single project but a whole process, which resonates with local, national and European youth policies.

In terms of planning the program, the youth centre aligns the educational offers with the needs of youth, the strategic priorities on local and national level. They also keep some proven in time good practices.

Since planning has several stages and steps, a question was raised about whether the young people are consulted in every step and how their suggestions, opinions and recommendations are considered. It was recalled that the majority of the delivered activities are based on the feedback of the young people and that they are also consulted even for the spaces of the centre (e.g. the escape room, the music room was based on proposals by the youth). **The young people are also able to initiate activities.**

There was a question in regards to ideas or suggestions which are not implemented and how this is handled. It was indicated that as long as an idea corresponds to the values of the centre, the young people are provided with the possibility to try to put it in practice, even if they don't succeed it's still learning.

What challenges do you encounter regarding community impact?

For the last year their work was predominantly concentrated on reaching out and including groups which are not very active. The centre bears the Quality Label of the CoE

because of their good practices with Roma young people, but this is a constant work and not very easy. It's hard as this is a group which is not very active. When it comes to youth work the field of practice usually is not very big and it engages the same group of young people.

It's challenging also to explain the essence of youth work. The advocacy processes and the meaningful youth participation are also some difficult processes.

A question was raised in regards to attracting and engaging young people into activities since for example in Turkey it is rather difficult to involve adolescents on EU projects because after graduation they have plans to work or start a family. When specifically comes to **Roma** from their experience it is hard to maintain communication. To this Monika replied that it is essential to **create a relation with the group**, to gain their trust and also to work with mixed groups (Roma and non-Roma groups). This brings young people closer even though it is not an easy endeavour. An example of such activity is the championship for presentational skill. Apart from practicing and improving this skill, the championship is also an opportunity to have young people with different profiles and backgrounds together for some days. This is an incredible experience for Roma young people, since they are presenting in front of an audience, they practice the language, as some of them are bilingual. It is challenging but at the same time creates relations.

A question was raised about how the groups coming to the youth centre which are a specific community interact with the wider society. Monika shared that **the idea of the youth centre is to be a community building, where everyone is welcomed and it is not just for specific people or groups**. There is also the aspect where the youth centre interacts with the different communities through qualitative field youth work. To achieve this, the team goes where the young people are, where the Roma youth are and there is a specific day in the work schedule dedicated to implementing outdoor activities and promoting and informing about the work.

There was also a sharing about the prejudices which very often occur toward the received funding, that it is only because they are targeting Roma young people and that this centre existed only for them. One of the biggest successes of the centre was to overcome this prejudice in the community. The centre is for everyone and not only for this or that group. It was a long process.

A question was placed about managing the negative impact. This was hard to answer since the position of the centre has improved; there is a lot of impact also on the level of the practitioners. The initial mistrust and division was overcome.

There was a question regarding the **diversity of the groups** visiting the centre and since there is a big number of young people attending the various activities and programs, the group was also different (this including underprivileged young people, young people with disabilities). As a youth centre they are **cooperating with other structures** such as the prevention centre for example and when there is a specific group they also use expertise and support from the relevant institution.

The participants also ask about the way that the **needs** of the groups which find it hard to have this feeling of belonging accommodated in the centre. To this it was recalled the work with foreigners in the centre, as well as engaging young people from segregated neighbourhoods.

How do you deal with the challenges?

In terms of overcoming the **challenges** they make mixed¹ groups of young people, this is **solidarity** in practice, **values** in practice. When such cultural events are implemented, meaning people are provided with the possibility to show and present their culture.

How do you see the youth centre in 10 years?

The question is very broad and it relates to youth policies, also to some current developments of establishing some new youth centres. **The future is to see young people in decision - making positions.** This is difficult but currently there are consultative youth councils at the municipalities and such structures, which engage youth organizations and structures could be the key to having a meaningful participation and structural dialogue.

Findings from group 2: About the project: The aim of the project of Smokinya Foundation was twofold: revitalizing the village of Mrachinovci ,as well as bringing youth projects there.

How was the need of the village identified?

The need of this project was identified through discussions with locals, who were explaining that **“everybody went away, no young people, no babies; everyone has gone to big cities”**.

How was the place selected?

The place was identified because of the **reasonable and affordable prices** of the properties and because other municipalities were not open for a partnership regarding provision of a property.

What is the period of interaction with the local community?

At the moment the project which they implement **young people stay for 3 weeks in a camp format at the village** and the plan is to have 4 people for 1 year, international or national volunteers, the idea is that there is someone representing them all the time.

How is the practical interaction with the locals implemented?

¹ By mixed group to be understood, a group engaging young people with different ethnic belonging, in the specific case Roma and non-Roma youth.

The interaction with locals is taking place through spending some time with them for some coffee. Tihomir agrees that **the impact happens once you are at the place.**

How many people from the locals participate?

The group engaged in the project from the local community are **15 -20 people** out of the **50** inhabitants. They are engaged on a voluntary basis.

What challenges are encountered?

The challenges they encounter are related to **the public image of NGOs in Bulgaria and the lack of trust in them.** In addition, they connect organizations by targeting only groups with deviant behaviour.

What are the plans for the future?

The future intentions are: **to renovate a big room, to have a common space protected from weather which could be offered for the locals also to use.** It is also planned to accommodate young people in the houses of the elderly. They can help in the garden. This way the generations are brought closer to each other. In line with this an example was given from the Netherlands that: it needs at least 1 year to develop the trust with the local communities. For community impact it is important to involve the locals.

What are the internal and external challenges?

The challenges shared were: **internal: lack of knowledge and experience in the team for managing such a big project, as well as funding.** Only two full time people are working in the Smokinya Foundation. **The external: after the initial resistance, now local people are more welcoming.** It seems that slowly this challenge is overcome. Recognition and trust are shown: a local person from Germany gave a large donation. What is important from Tihomir's perspective is to continue being transparent and thus build trust.

Have you encountered any unintended impact?

Some of the negative impact that was identified included the **waste system**, the **bad infrastructure, no recycling**, bringing 40 people in the village demands for an infrastructure with bigger capacities and that the group is causing some disturbance and has to be mindful with the music. They have tried to overcome these in a way that the Foundation is registered in the village, so they want to show that they have a long term intention.

How do you plan to make it sustainable?

For ensuring the sustainability they are doing fundraising and plan to use the structural funds.

Challenges in community impact

After the input the participants at the conference shared which **challenges they could identify with**. The following were derived:

- lack of financial sustainability of NGO
- diffidence on our intentions (money laundering, political backing, scams), lack of understanding with EU values
- anti-migrant attitudes
- prejudice towards a certain ethnic group and "division of youth"
- local resistance to change
- misconception towards NGOs
- burnout
- attracting youngsters and finding a place in their priorities; ensuring their dedication
- Local communities may be suspicious of NGOs and European funding, making transparency and building trust within the community a challenge.
- visa process
- biases towards the groups we work with
- community support
- reaching youngsters and connecting local community with ethnic groups;
- problems with local authorities
- engaging youth
- lack of notional support for spaces for youth centers
- financial issues, stereotypes, engage local communities and young people
- not understand what IMPACT means
- picking the right' activities and projects for young people

- not enough awareness at national level concerning international projects, their potential, their need of support
- programs, NGOs and project are not keeping up with the changes in youth and their priorities
- wrong assessment of needs
- Total lack of national governmental support for funding, and allocation of spaces to conduct non formal education activities
- commitment of volunteers
- lack of youth interest (individualism rather than social involvement)
- different expectations
- cultural perception is an essential challenge that we have to be aware of before launching the project

Some other challenges which the participants meet and have not been mentioned included:

- considering the impact aspect when setting the focus of and designing activities
- need to develop facilitators' guide on the topic
- accept that we are only HUMAN and will not manage to deal with all challenges
- National Agencies favouring specific organizations in big cities, and disregard rural NGO efforts
- using opportunities for projects for individual benefit without being aligned with the values and understanding the objective
- no employees in the organization only volunteers so we have a lack of time to manage the project

How to deal with challenges and plan the impact

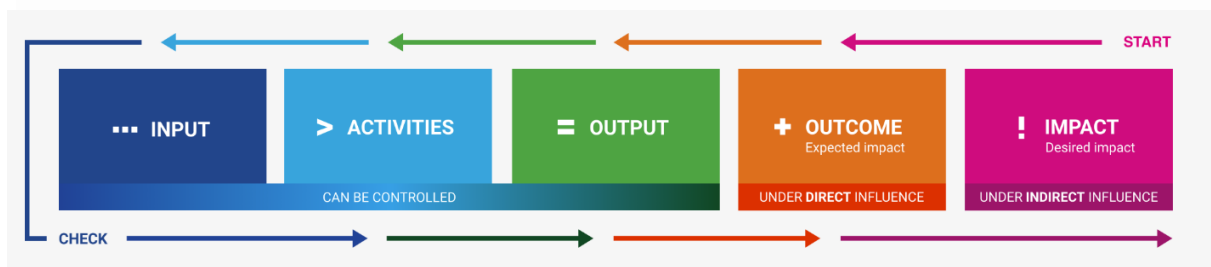
Introduction to Impact tool

The [Impacttool](#) was introduced by Angela Medendorp

Introduction of **Angela Medendorp**: *She is a programme advisor with the Dutch National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth, Erasmus+ Sports, and the European Solidarity Corps. For the past few years, she has been the coordinator of the Volunteering Projects taking place in the Netherlands. As such, she advises approximately 80 organisations involved in the programme on how to increase the impact of their activities.*

Angela started her presentation with the importance of the **impact** specifically at the **evaluation phase** of project proposals. One of the key aspects of a successful application would be the potential **contribution** of the planned intervention **to society** and how it corresponds to the changes which the program addresses. **Solidarity, inclusion, active participation** should be embedded in the planned activities. Angela shared with the participants that what will secure receiving funding, in her perspective, is to prove the credibility of a project. This happens by making it explicit how it will contribute to a bigger societal change. One of the tools to make this clear, transparent and to better communicate it in an application is the [Impact tool](#). It is integrated in the websites of the Dutch National Agency for Youth and European Solidarity Corps. This tool is for the **planning phase** of a project. It was created in 2017 -2018. It's closer to Erasmus + Program, but it could be related also to ESC.

Applying this tool means to **start and finish with impact** (on the graphic). The idea is to create your own equation. It tackles the questions: What do I need to have? What do I want to achieve? What do I have to do to reach the impact? All of these support an organization to discuss research and develop so as to make the equation work. There is a digital template. It is a two sided process, **a cycle** that you have to go through. It could be that you want to achieve an impact for which you don't have the necessary resources, or the activities that were planned have different outcome from the initial plan. This is why it is essential to use this in the preliminary phase, refer to it, if needed to reassess and adjust the activities.



An explanation was provided for each of the key terms, which are referred to in the Impacttool: **output, outcome and impact**.

Output – measurable results, the actual things that are being done. For example it can be a number of activities; the participants involved in an activity.

As bases of the tool was applied the [Theory of change](#), which divides the impact in two types:

Outcome – expected impact; it can be connected to the big societal change that you are aimed at; change in skills, knowledge and attitude in a target group;

Impact – desired impact, indirect influence.

The Impact tool is useful for strengthening the planning process. It supports the process of conscious consideration of impact from the beginning. The tool could be used for deciding what kind of stakeholders can be involved, what type of indicators would be used. It is aimed **to be applied at the planning stage**. However, it is not limited to that. It could be used during the implementation and evaluation phase, **to go back to the initial idea**, to adjust and revise. In the Impact tool there are also referrals to mapping, budgeting and others which can be useful.

Following the presentation, a question was raised about the **simplification of the application forms**. It was explained that this is an **ongoing discussion** on how to make it easy and accessible. However, the aspect of the impact has to be there for the improved understanding of a project.

Based on the input, in groups the participants tried to identify the ways to overcome challenges. Their findings were the following:

- Diversification of funds;
- Trying to appeal to people's interests to get them involved in the cause;
- Establish a common evaluation system for assessment of project proposals in Erasmus application;
- topics to reach people's reality;
- find extra financial support;
- accept that you are only human and not all challenges could be solved by us;
- enhance cooperation on local, national and EU scale between organizations;
- by keeping to the vision, values and transparency we believe in.

The afternoon session was opened with an interactive Kahoot game, aimed at ensuring that the same understanding toward community impact is established. It was also a way to introduce the input of the next key note speaker. The questions were related to some of the terms which were already explored such as **defining the community** on the basis of **shared interests between groups of people**; the meaning of **community impact as a way to provoke a change in the attitudes of a community**; **direct impact** as the direct result of a project to the community it addresses, At the Kahoot session some other definitions were add: **dissemination of results** that is spreading information about the results to the community and relevant stakeholders; **exploitation of results**, meaning spreading information about the results to the community and relevant stakeholders;

valorization of results that is the process of disseminating and exploiting them with a view to optimize their value and strengthen their impact; **mainstreaming of results** which is convincing decision-makers to adopt the results of a project in policy, systems or practices. There were questions related to **multiplying the results of a project**, which is to integrate them into new projects, follow up activities and other organizations. The ways of engaging the community through identifying the relevant stakeholders was also mentioned. Through the questions the **positive social impact** was referred to as the positive effects of an individual or organization's actions on people and the planet and respectively **the negative social impact** as the bad effect of a project's activities on a community's well-being. The crucial element for **planning impact** was defined as being clear on what is the change you want to see in the community. One of the questions tackled **measuring impact** as gathering evidence to see the change that occurred; the measuring itself happens on the basis of the set indicators in the application form of a project. **The baseline measurement** was explained as the measurement of the existing situation in a community, to show later how the project affected it. This is the most important aspect for measuring the impact later on. *The key performance indicator* was described as a measurable element that's used to quantify the progress of the objectives. There was a question related to the two methods for measuring impact, namely **quantitative and qualitative**. The questionnaire/survey were identified as the most common **quantitative** method for measurement. When it comes to **qualitative tools** they measure the experiences, processes, assigned meanings of community impact. An example of **an indicator for measuring the quantitative impact** of a project is the number of website visits. In website analytics engagement refers to visitors' interaction with a website, if they view more content. In the questions there was a reference to measuring negative/unplanned impact. This can be identified through asking open questions to community members to make space for the unexpected to be expressed. When it comes to amplifying the community impact one of the ways is to provoke intergenerational dialogue. The final question in the Kahoot was about making project's impact sustainable which means to have the capacity to maintain the change that has been produced.

Following the Kahoot quest there was a brief presentation which was introducing the community impact indicators seen on two levels: the volunteers' and organizational level.

Community Impact Indicators

In the ESC program there is a division of two types of indicators.

For the volunteers:

- active citizenship and participation;
- social capital;
- skills and competences;
- socio-demographic background.

For organization:

- active citizenship and participation;
- social capital;
- skills and competences;
- inter-cultural.

All this comes as a transition to the next input.

More on measuring impact

Adding to the input in regards to measuring impact was done by Tenna Soerensen Jochumsen – project officer at **Centre for European Volunteering (CEV)**. The Centre has developed a **methodology** which was applied in an online platform for measuring the community impact on two levels: **as an organization and as a volunteer**.

Intro of Tenna: ***Tenna Soerensen Jochumsen** is from Denmark but based in Brussels, Belgium where she is working as Project Officer for Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) since January 2024. For several years, Tenna has engaged herself in the civil society sector mainly focusing on volunteering and creating inclusive activities for young people and marginalised groups. She has done so both as a volunteer herself and through previous roles in Danish and International Non-Governmental Organisations. Tenna is currently leading CEV's V-CALC project, which aims to introduce new tools and methods to measure volunteering impact in communities across Europe.*

CEV was established in 1992. Currently it has **60 member organisations**. The organization is oriented toward promotion and support of volunteering at national, regional and EU levels. CEV has an active role on the **value – based volunteering debate in Europe**, works toward the creation of an inclusive European society based on solidarity, inclusion and active citizenship. These were some of the values already introduced and this is reaffirming the findings that these are the main reference points when it comes to measuring impact.

The project which was presented was **V -CALC (Volunteering Impact Measurement Training in Europe)**. It started in March 2023 and will be finalized next year in February. The project is a collaboration between organizations from several countries including Beyond Barriers Albania (Albania), Fundacion Hazloposible (Spain), DKolektiv (Croatia), Out of the Box International (Belgium), UEA Consulting Ltd (United Kingdom). V-CALC was initiated on the basis of the identified need of a quantitative method to measure the impact of volunteering. It is aimed at engaging in **training activities** 800 volunteer managers, coordinators and organizers with different backgrounds. There are four objectives: first to develop the **methodology**, to create a **user-friendly platform** which

gathers information and data, **to train** and to build the capacity of volunteers' managers and coordinators to use the methodology and the platform; to ensure **sustainability** of the project.

Since CEV is working on a European level and not directly with the community, they rely a lot on member organizations to provide their insights on trends in volunteering in their respective countries but also on the impact of it. The collected input is brought to European policy level. It was identified that in some countries there is **no systematic measurement method for the impact of volunteering** so this was part of the basis for initiating the project.

The starting point was to identify a **definition of volunteering**. It is something done of a free will, which is usually unpaid or with the aim of no financial gain and makes difference to individuals, communities and to society, and/ or the environment (the impact). This fits very well to the definition of **the European Commission (see [Volunteering charter](#))**. Next step was to identify the **target groups** of the project: volunteer managers and coordinators and to understand their needs and interests. Among the findings from the need assessment was the necessity of a user-friendly way to collect data, which is accessible, including in different languages and universal across Europe. This **tool** was needed to cover a wide range of impact across beneficiaries, volunteers, organizations and communities to report **on insights on volunteer's programs and experiences**; to host knowledge from different resources, so not only the directly gathered information from volunteers, or volunteer managers; to bring it to policy on local, national and EU levels.

The following steps were inspired by the **Theory of Change**, which was also referred to in the input regarding the Impact tool. The project started with the assumption that organizations which engage volunteers in **diverse programs** will create diverse competences in them and involve them in a **diverse way**. This will lead to volunteers exhibiting and **making a difference** to individuals, communities and the environment. The impact then will be that individual lives are changed, communities are empowered, societies are strengthened and the environment is protected for all. These were the aspects included in the methodology and applied in the platform. All this is to say that the **development process** was based on some **assumptions**. This relates to the idea that if organizations and volunteers use the methodology they will also have an input. They also had the outputs, the outcome and impact. The output will be having the 800 volunteer managers included and they will be using the provided material. This is expected to have outcomes on volunteers, organizations and communities. The assumption for the impact is that the **platform provides reports for organizational users about key indicators** of their work. The generated numbers by the calculator however will not describe and contextualize **the impact on the volunteers**; this is to be measured by the evaluating organization. It will be something on which the organization **builds on** and it **will collect data in one place**. This will give more insight into the activities and in which areas of work impact can be found.

The platform is still **under development**. Some of the functions are the report, which can be seen on monthly and downloaded on quarterly basis so it is visible how it develops. The subscription is possible for **both volunteers and organizations**. When an organization's register through the creation of an account. Afterward they have to indicate their program (it could be ESC for example), they have to share the level of cooperation of the program, how it is funded, the budget. Next is to register the activities with some more general information and specifying which skills will be gained by volunteers through them. At the end an organization is able to **access the impact section** but this is internal (**number of volunteers, activities**).

Volunteers are also involved. The process is similar: registration, indicating the activities that they participate in (based on the input of the organization, they can choose), upon completion of the activity they provide qualitative information and at the end go to the impact section.

The possibility of taking part in **online training sessions** was shared with the participants. The sessions take part in the course of two hours, and are available in English. They are based on a training manual which later on could be used. Volunteers' managers could be from all over Europe.

The presentation was followed up by **Q&A** sessions:

- There was a request for clarification whether the methodology was for the impact on volunteers and organizations, or it could be applied on communities. To this it was responded that the tool is primarily to gather data that will lead to a better understanding of the impact of volunteers and organizations on the community but of course, it will take some time to gather a sufficient amount of data to draw specific conclusions.
- Additional information was needed on whether what is generated as an impact is visible for the volunteers or for the organizations. It was explained that both are connected, so that the **generated results are aligned**. It was mentioned again that this is a **starting point** for going into deeper exploration, more of collecting data.

"Your Take-aways"

This part of the program was aimed at engaging the participants into creating their **own small guide on how to plan and measure the impact of a project** that their organization would run. There were 6 groups formed by similarities in organisations' target groups, aims, characteristics (e.g. big/small organization, working in urban/rural area, similarities in the topics they work on).

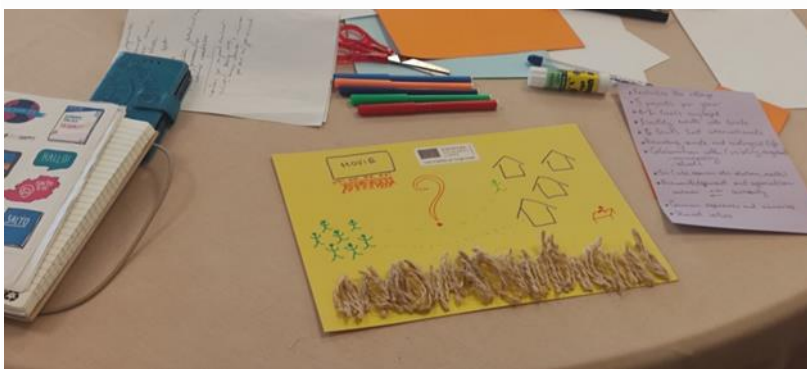
The main findings of the groups are presented in the next lines.

Group 1

The process in the development started with the identification of the **common feature** between the members of the group: they have all come from organizations, working on local and international level, which are hosting and sending volunteers (long term and short term). They also provide other possibilities **like youth exchanges under Erasmus+ and motilities for youth workers**. The organizations in this group are also involved in activities with local volunteers, a group of 12 – 15 people engaged on temporary bases. Due to this many different aspects of their work, they are part of different communities and so when discussing how to plan the impact they have, go back to the question: **Why are we doing these activities/projects?** The short answer would be: „**without motivation and expectations you cannot deal with volunteers at all**”. Among the key reasons for their involvement is to **provide opportunities** to individuals, as well as to organizations to have volunteers. They want to produce and enhance change in the different communities they are working with and for; in general, to provide **international encounters** so that the young people and everyone could broaden their horizons. There is also the aim at **multiplication** that volunteers share their experience and other people involve from their communities and social groups. Measuring and finding ways to show the impact is also important. They do regular **surveys, meetings** with volunteers and local people, **organizing trainings** specifically for mentors, coordinators and give a lot of value to personal projects of volunteers and their active participation. **The local context** was also taken into consideration in a way that when involving local people in projects its meaningful for them to engage in youth exchanges and to encourage them to try **other opportunities like ESC** and then to have some prepared communities to become trainers, mentors and so on and this is a way of achieving a greater impact.

Group 2

The first step for reaching the impact in accordance to this group is to start with the **shared values in the community** where you operate and the newcomers (organizations), to create conditions for **common experiences and memories**. This is a **long process**, going together to social events, visits.



Some of the other key points are:

- **acknowledgment and appreciation of the new comer** to community and the other way around;

- identifying **rules of the communities, resources, roles, relations, results** – these are explicit in the work of the organizations but it's also something which the communities also have;
- establishing **a collaboration with municipality and educational institutions** both for visibility and recognition; to promote simple and ecological life.

The group has also set **some indicators**, as a starting point on which to build on, like for example: to have five of the local people **hosting international volunteers**; to implement twelve **events** together, to have 1 or 2 of the **locals employed**, to have at least five projects implemented in this community. The overall aim is to revitalize the village or the rural area.

Group 3

This group developed some **generic guide on community impact**, which from their perspective should start with the **definition of the objectives** and why the project is initiated. What they have developed was based on **identifying the common feature**, the overlap between the projects they implement. All of them want to **empower their target group**, to address specific needs and raise awareness about it and to get **recognition** for which the community impact is essential. The **baseline measurement** that is applied can vary between quantitative and qualitative and can be decided **on the basis of the objectives**.

Community **engagement** can be achieved by **approaching target groups** through their friends and families, creating ambassadors for the messages. It's important to have **participation by different groups**, especially if the project has an intergenerational aspect. Communities can be engaged in the form of communication with local stakeholders, keeping them informed.

For the measurement of the impact it could be really useful to have a **survey**, analyzing the differences pre and past, recapping the measurements

The final step in their work was **sustainability** which was interpreted as having sustainable impact on the project, through identifying the relevant stakeholders and securing the funding.

DAY 3

The morning session on the final day of the conference continued the round of presentations about the personally developed impact guides.

Group 4

The common feature identified in this group was **working with volunteers**. They have approached the task of preparing a guide as something to be used in their organizations for introducing the concept of impact and how to measure it. This was presented in the form of a **mind map**.

At the starting point of an organization the first step according to this group is to **name and know the community** that is worked with. It could be determined by the geographical aspect, but it could also be **on the basis of belonging**.

Next would be **to identify the needs** – establishing the baseline of the state of the community, it could be through questionnaires or other tools, it is important to identify the conditions so later on you can compare. Also **identify the stakeholders** – check with whom a cooperation is possible and could support. **Plan and measure impact** – this step looks simple, however it makes one of the participants in the group reconsider the perception of community, that it is not only something defined by geography. For measuring they have decided to **apply the Impact tool** (in accordance to this group the tool supports the user to define what is **outcome; output; the activities and the impact**). This will contribute to the planning, enabling to connect the findings about the community with the project. As you **define the activities on the basis of the impact** you can see what the best way to achieve it. It can be also very useful if a revision of the activities is needed.



Group 5

The key points discussed in the group included: what the **community is**, the **desired impact** on it and **measuring the impact** and **sustainability**.

The starting point was to define **the desired impact**. This was done through the division of the overall impact into two parts: **impact on volunteers and impact on the society**. It should **go both ways**, as the two aspects are very important in order to create more opportunities, to guarantee personal development of the volunteers, and to improve lives. The impact on **volunteers: enhances their personality**, gives them **opportunities to grow** and they **develop some new ideas**. The volunteers learn and apply this in supporting the people in the community.

The impact on the **local community** level: it increases the number of young people and newcomers to **use sustainable tools, considering the environment**. All the projects which are being done are engaging the community, so having an impact is essential.

The engagement of the community: it could go through volunteers sharing **their experience** (reflections on the moments and the emotions, thoughts and ideas); **the feedback forms** are also important so that to communicate to the organizers how they felt, to indicate their proposals and ideas on the program. The feedback can be very useful in order to be able to engage the community better. To add upon **the multiplying events** needs to be considered in order **to contact people** who are **outside** of the project.

Measuring impact: there is a link between engaging the community and measuring the impact. In order **to engage** there has to be a good impact. Here **the feedback forms** are again **important** in order **to improve the standards** of activities and projects. The pretest and posttest aspect was added. This is important to measure also to what extent the project was successful. This however is highly dependent on how people learn.

The last point is about **sustainability**, because the organizations represented in this group work predominantly with young people who are more thinking about the current moment and the idea is **to bring their attention** to the sustainability aspect. For the organization these aspects should include **diverse financial tools** and **involving income actions**. For the volunteers it could **include raising awareness for sustainable transportation** or on their personal level. The engagement of the community, their dedication is also important for the sustainability aspect because without **the human resource** you **cannot implement activities or projects**.

Group 6

The starting point was to **identify the common feature**: small organizations or networks working in the civic sector. They work toward the **environment, participation, and social inclusion**. The **desired impact in the communities** from their perspective includes: want the beneficiaries **to develop skills, competences, foster intercultural learning and boost the active citizenship and create social coherence**.

Their vision on the community engagement is through the **intergenerational approach events**, giving **visibility** to the work and also final campaigns.

The indicators that were developed were based on the shared tools during the conference. They have decided to use **qualitative and quantitative methods**, like **questionnaires** in order to assess the level of impact in the community and there are certain topics around which it will be designed: the level of **awareness, stakeholder involvement, sustainability, number of participants, follow up activities, opportunities created, level of engagement**. This all should be measured pre- and post-projects.

Tips on how to increase impact

Input by David van de Velde – impact researcher in the Impact University of Erasmus.

Impact Centre Erasmus is situated in Rotterdam, the Netherlands and it is aimed toward conducting research and provision of education about:

- Impact thinking;
- Impact measurement;
- Impact research.

Part of his job is to research for organisations and institutions. Currently they are working on a community service programme called MDT and the impact of it. It is similar to ESC and engages all young people from the Netherlands, aged between 12 and 30 and is about volunteering. The projects are very diverse since they are targeting a very large group. This variety includes: **provision of young people** with the possibility **to volunteer in different organisations** in order to decide which suits them best; **engagement in training** for certain skills which enables them **to initiate events** where all the people in a certain area can participate. In the midst of this they are trying **to measure the impact**. Some of the lessons learned from this experience were shared.

The three topics tackled in the video included **impact thinking**, as a starting point, how it is **measured** and how to **manage impact**.

The impact thinking starts with answering the questions: ***Why do you do what you do? And what do you think you will achieve with what you are doing?***

The answer may be: to increase the **society's cohesion**, to **overcome inequality**, to limit loneliness, etc. All of these are desired outcomes and it doesn't explain in an explicit way how the activities lead to these outcomes. Therefore, it is important to start **impact thinking**, which includes what you are doing, what the desired impact is. Very often projects have great activities but it is not fairly clear how they will lead to the desired change. Some **practical tips on impact thinking** are: have a **critical thinking** toward the project and identify **why and how things work**; make your impact **goal practical**, it has to be ambitious, but also realistic. It is important to think things through instead of directly going to measure the impact. The opportunities are endless, but thinking it through you will decide **what is important to measure**. Lastly if there is a very extensive program, **start small** with for example one element of it and make a **logical and easy** to follow story. In this it could be specified **how activities lead to the impact goal**. More on this is available in the annex.

When it comes to measurement it is important to **measure only what is relevant** to your impact story. This should relate to the **focus of impact thinking**. Research and management are usually done to prove to financiers. It's not really helpful to know how

you can improve your community impact. Therefore, **focus research on measuring to improve** as this makes the whole process more relevant. This is how the project benefits from research. When you measure to improve the **findings could be also used to prove the outcomes**. It is important to remember that **measuring is not only quantitative**. People often think of questionnaires, when there are so many qualitative tools. It could be **using the existing research** about the impact you desire or **evaluation conversation** to ask about certain effects that the program could have. A planned **contact moment** could be also used for research.

Last point is to measure things and the impact you have. There are **certain levels** which can be influenced. Of course we want to **contribute to social cohesion, reducing poverty**, etc. However, **measuring this type of impact** requires a lot of diligence, research skills, good controlled group, time, and financial resources and usually these are not available for small community programs. This is why it is important **to measure things** you really **have a control** to and **collaborate with knowledge institutions** for the rest.

The third point about impact management was based on the following mantra:

Fall in love with the impact, not the activities

In impact management sometimes it is necessary to take hard decisions like **stop certain activities** because it doesn't lead to your **desired impact**. There has to be a **constant learning loop** so you can make a **realistic promise about the impact** you will create and how you will create. This way you will **avoid making unrealistic claims** to funders. You **will learn** from new insights. These insights lead back to learning and improving your program. Lastly **impact** isn't a one-time activity, it **is a process** and it's about managing. It's important to make an impact and the information you gather is **part of the decision making**.

Final insights of the participants

- Reconsidering the **order of the things as a project is developed**. Normally it starts with the application form, but perhaps it is better **to start with the impact** that you want to achieve. **Thinking, reflecting, formulating the impact** and then wrapping it up with the measurements which will be used.
- **Putting the impact first** – sometimes too much focus is placed on implementing the activities based on the timeline, the budget justification but **through the conference the priority of impact has raised** and sometimes it's better to negotiate the activities, the implementation or duration in order **to achieve greater impact**;
- Placing the **impact first but in a different way** – as a project or activity is planned to consider what the impact will be, what is the aim, how the community will be

supported with this project, **thinking of the result will make it easier to decide what will be the steps;**

- The participants really appreciated the quote: ***Fall in love with the impact, not the activities*** in terms of placing importance on what will be achieved, instead of what to do.

Additional needs on the topic identified by the participants

In accordance to participants, the following topics need further exploring:



What would support you in enhancing the impact you are making with your projects?



What would support you in enhancing the impact you are making with your projects? – Specific suggestions:

- Mentor; more about research methods; programs that support organisations on core level, relieving the stress of writing to survive; some tutorials for measuring impact, planning the project impact; better EU online platforms; examples of good practices; trainings, videos, materials on specific sections of the Program Guide; network for dissemination with friendly tools; online resources specific to the National Agencies; Training and/or materials for best practices on for more specific communities in ESC e.g. Sending and Returning communities; local organizations helping each other in dissemination the results of a project and friendly cooperation with every NGO working in the neighborhood; less paperwork; application support tools; training on how to use indicators to measure impact; online working groups; training sessions for the organizations staff to help them get better project ideas and implementing it in a good way; having more professional (researcher) support; stable financing; mentors from the Netherlands; clear program guide, NA experts who have experience in the field of youth work, reporting system that is focusing on impact and quality, not on extreme paper work.

Closure

The final session of the conference was dedicated to be a **celebrating moment** for the participants for the work that they have been doing and also to indicate their **learnings** from the past days. Some of their sharings are included:

“Result is not an impact!”

“Impact thinking!”

“Make a change in the community!” “Keep it simple!”

“Impact is going beyond the activity!” “Fall in love with your impact, not with the activities!”

“Start small and make meaningful impact!”

“Why do you do what you are doing if not for the community!”

“Impact starts with an intention!” “Thinking big, but start small!” “Your choice determines your impact!”

Evaluation

The evaluation of the conference included some sharings from the participants and the team at the very end of the conference, after the closing session, as well as **an online evaluation** form. On the spot the participants expressed their **gratitude for the whole organization and preparation of the conference**; they were grateful for the provided possibility to take part in it. For the majority of them this was a possibility to **expand their professional networks** and there already were **some plans for future collaborations**. They **have increased their knowledge** on the topic of community impact and feel confident on how to better integrate this in their work.

The online evaluation form included **numeric scale** for measuring some statements referring to levels of learning and general satisfaction and also **some open questions** where the participants had to explain the reasoning behind their numbers. From the participant’s responses in the evaluation form it is evident that the conference was successful and to a great extend their expectations were met. In the evaluation the participants indicated **the need for even further and in-depth work on the topics of community impact** (more about the indicators and tools for measuring impact). The participants were **pleased with the general atmosphere, the other participants and the possibility to get new contacts**, ideas, inspirations. They expressed that from their perspective the conference **was not a conventional one in terms of format**. The event was closer to a seminar, or even a training activity. The participants recommended that this **hybrid format is communicated earlier in future events**. They consider that a **relevant overview of the existing resources and knowledge about community impact was provided**. The participants consider that they got an insight on how the impact can be measured. Based on the evaluation form, there is still a **need for some additional support on how to achieve community impact**. **The objectives of the conference were met** to a greater extend, the participants feel confident in the promotion process of projects about community impact. In terms of the **provided input** they find it **relevant for those working on project level**. The most relevant sessions that were identified by the participants **highly resonate with their professional profile**: they have mentioned **the understanding of community impact, the measuring of it, the networking** (agora), etc. The majority of the **participants feel that they can apply what**

they have learned once they are back to their organisations. The attendees felt that **their participation was encouraged to a greater extend, respect was showed and networking and cooperation were stimulated.** The participants **recommended more consideration to the environmental aspect of the event.** The work of **the facilitators** was **highly appreciated.** The information and the support provided by **the hosting team** before the event and on the spot **were highly evaluated.** The logistic of the event in terms of board and lodging were also highly appreciated.

Thoughts for the future

On the bases of the received feedback from the participants during the reflection moments at the conference, the results of their evaluation; as well as the main conclusions from the evaluation meeting of the team, the following **recommendation for future** events were derived by the two facilitators:

1. **Program design:**

- **Conference format:** The conference was not a conventional one; it was more of a **hybrid type**, a combination between a conference and training which provided project organisers with the possibility to understand community impact and to improve the way it is integrated in their projects. For those of the participants that were not directly involved in projects this created some confusion. For future events it is recommended that **the format is communicated to the participants at an earlier stage** or else preserve the traditional approach.
- **Opening speech by the Commission:** The first speech at the conference done on by the Commission was **an asset** to the event. The opening is important for setting the energy and the framework; however, it is recommended to consider, if possible arranging a **present speaker** and avoid online format.
- **The active participation:** despite the fact that the participants were surprised by some of the methods applied which are more common for a training course, it would be good to engage the participants in more **active way.** For example, an **interactive, motivating activity** (like the Agora, see below) that fosters high energy levels and ice-breaking feelings **at the beginning** would be a good idea.
- **Agora: A networking session** during which all the participants presented their organizations and current project/-s. This included some preliminary work by the participants such as **preparing their own posters** which were printed for the event. Here, in line with the sustainability aspect of the event, it should be made very explicit why the posters were printed. Firstly, it is not possible to use an online collage since **the activity requires simultaneous presentations.** In addition, these posters can be used by the participants in future events.
- **"Your take-aways"**- This creative session during which the participants had to **make their learnings concrete** and identify ways of transferring the knowledge to others worked well. The format is however more relevant for a

training and if in the future a traditional conference is being prepared; this **could work only if very well explained and introduced.**

- **Preparation of the speakers:** It is essential that all the presenters **share the same understanding of the topic of community impact** and the other concepts they are introducing.
- **Speakers' time management:** It is recommended that **more time** is provided for **the input by the speakers**, in-depth questions are prepared for introducing the Q&A part, which should be discussed with them beforehand with the experts.
- **Environmental sustainability:** More attention should be paid to the preference of green events. For example: **limit the printing** (the celebrating photos of the participants may not be printed), **recycle bins, emphasize the green aspects** (no plastic bottles were used).

2. Logistics:

- **Arrival and departure timings:** It is important to **know in advance these timings**, so that the team is aware of how many people could be missing from the opening and closing parts of the conference; how many will be staying after the end of the event and also participants can be grouped and share transportation to the airport.
- **More information about the program:** In order to create more realistic expectations in the participants it is important to provide them with more information about the **program of the event at a bit earlier stage**, more details, explanation, more about the choices made and the reasoning behind them.

3. The participants – composition and involvement:

- **Target group of the event:** the present group at the conference was predominantly of project managers, there were also some representatives of National agencies. For the **greater diversity** it is recommended that in the future **researchers, policymakers, and national agencies staff** are invited as participants and the program is adjusted accordingly. Perhaps the selection process could be a bit more critical so **that more coherence** is achieved in terms of expectations and motivation of the group of participants.
- Important aspect is also to **ensure the relevant number** of participants.

4. Positive elements that should definitely be kept:

- **The diversity of experts-speakers:** This provided the feeling that not only researches and experts could contribute to the topic **but also local projects** and representatives of organisations. This indicated that the topic is relevant for everyone.
- **The Padlet with resources/ the reading corner:** The Padlet, where all the resources were uploaded was **an important element of the conference since it has many resources which can be explored after the event.** The reading corner helped the group to actually go through the documents and determine whether or not they are helpful and relevant to them.
- **The warm energy of the team:** facilitators, organizing and supporting team were warm and inviting, ready to find solutions, flexible and meet the expectations.

- **Time management:** It was important that **time management was reliable** and the starting and closing time of each session were kept. The slide presentation with the timings prepared by the facilitators was helpful.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Programme of the conference

	12 June Wednesday	13 June Thursday	14 June Friday
09:30 - 11:00	<i>Arrival of participants</i>	Community Impact within the ESC framework	How to increase Community Impact Connections to the future
11.00 - 11:30		<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>
11.30 -13:00		How to plan impact in projects and what are the challenges: local examples	Celebration Moment Evaluation and Closing
13:00 - 15:00	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
15:00 - 16.30	Opening and Getting to Know Each Other	How to Measure Community Impact	<i>Departure of participants Optional program</i>
16.30 - 17.00	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>	
17.00 - 18.30	Understanding Community Impact and its importance Networking	Your Takeaways	
18.30 – 19.00	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>	
19:00 - 20:00	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Dinner out</i>	

Appendix 2 – List of participants

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Amir Tursunović - NGO EU "jEZERO"

Bulgaria

Ralitsa Rumenova - "Values, Virtues, Integrity" Foundation

RadinaDimitrova - "Situational Center Open Doors" Foundation

Croatia

Matilde Concetti - ESC volunteer

Egypt

Amira Mohamed - MI HI For Training and Development

France

Françoise Janin - Association du Hameau des Buis

Elisa Maziere - Casa Columba

Germany

Ekkehar Lippold Steinbeis - Innovation Center "European Projects"

Lina Schnabel - NaturKultur e.V

Greece

Dimitrios Gkatzos - University of Piraeus - Department of Digital Systems

Eleftherios Baltzidis - Entaxis - action for inclusion and education

Vaia Manoli - Directorate of Primary Education in Arcadia /NECI.Gr

Italy

Dario Modugno - InCo Molfetta

Latvia

Agija Lace - Agency for International Programs for Youth, Latvian NA

Ieva Grundsteine - Agency for International Programs for Youth, Latvian NA

Maija Kolberga - Agency for International Programs for Youth, Latvian NA

Morocco

Wiam Bahili - Emines

Yassine Elaghmati - Azemmour Mobadara Foundation

The Netherlands

Cyril Schouten - Rouwcafe Meetup

Mariam Kirakossian - Stichting Bright Future

Poland

Anna Karwatka - YoWo Poland

Marta Piątek-Lasota - Regionalne Centrum Wolontariatu

Portugal

Camila Gonçalves - Bonae Spei Associacao Cultural

Sofia Gonçalves - Surf Clube de Viana

Serbia

Aleksandar Ristic - Young Researches of Serbia

Spain

Elia Lacarcel - Ayuntamiento de caudete

The Slovak Republic

Tomas Bachmayer - Mozaika Svaty Jur

Sweden

Femi Adeniyi - Trans Europe Halles

Irina Sotnikova - Fryshuset

Turkey

Ismail Eren Maden - Ilksenol Genclik Hareketi

Hakan Dulkadiroglu - Kecioren Etlik Youth and Sport Club Association

Sercan Varkan Durak - Egitim Yoneticileri ve Uzmanlari Dernegi

Preparatory team

Angela Medendorp - programme advisor with the Dutch National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth, Erasmus+ Sports, and the European Solidarity Corps

Kriszta Molnar – Coordinator at SALTO European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre

Sarah Beeftink – Facilitator

Mariya Angelova - Rapporteur

Human Resource Development Bulgarian National Agency (hosting organization)

Mihail Balabanov – Executive Director of Human Resource Development Centre

Dimka Radeva - Secretary General Human Resource Development Centre

Deya Tosheva – Sector “Education for Adults”

Stefan Gruev - Sector “Education for Adults”

Speakers

David van de Velde – impact researcher in the Impact University of Erasmus (remote);

Dr. Justina Garbauskaite – Jakimovska - educator and researcher based in Vilnius, Lithuania

Liane Riordan - Program Manager in charge of the European Youth Portal, European Commission (remote);

Monika Todorova - Stoyanova - manager International Youth Center in the city of Stara Zagora;

Tenna Soerensen Jochumsen – project officer at Centre for European Volunteering;

Tihomir Georgiev - the founder and director of the Smokinya Foundation, city of Plovdiv Bulgaria.

Appendix 3 - Handout tips on increasing community impact

Impact Thinking

Impact thinking is all about answering these questions: Why do you do what you do? And what do you think you will achieve with what you're doing?

Some practical tips to get started with impact thinking.

- Stay critical about your own project. Often we see projects that have great ambitions but it's not clear how their activities add up to these ambitions. Look at your project with a critical mindset.
- Make your impact goal or your desired impact practical. It has to be ambitious but realistic at the same time. That's something to play with.
- Think it through before instead of immediately going into measurement. Measurement opportunities are endless, by first thinking it through you know better what is important to measure.
- Start small! Start with one element of your program and make a logical and easy-to-follow impact story. In this story, you specify how your activities lead to your impact goal.

Impact Measurement

Only measure what's relevant for your impact story.

- Don't measure too much, that's often a trap. There are so many interesting possible effects that you could measure. But stick to the focus you got through 'impact thinking' and keep yourself from drowning.
- Focus on research and measuring 'to improve'. When you carry out research to improve your program the research becomes more relevant because your project benefits from it. When you're researching with the goal 'to improve' you usually can also use these outcomes to prove, but never the other way around.
- Measuring isn't solely quantitative. We often see people running towards questionnaires when we start talking about impact. But there are so many different (qualitative) methods.
- Measure the things you have control or influence over. Stick with what you have more direct influence in measuring over and collaborate with knowledge institutions for the rest.

Impact Management

Fall in love with the impact, not the activities.

Managing your impact and steering based on the results of impact measurement or impact thinking sometimes implies making rough decisions to stop a certain activity because it doesn't lead to your desired impact.

- Be willing to kill your darlings. It can happen that this beautiful activity you're carrying out doesn't yield good results regarding your desired impact.
- Create a constant learning loop so you can make realistic promises about the impact you can create and how you will create it. This learning and steering on impact will avoid making unrealistic impact claims to funders that you cannot attain. In this you learn new insights from impact thinking and impact measurement, which then leads back to learning and improving your program.
- Impact isn't a one-time activity, it's a process. It's about 'management' and managing is a verb. It is important to make impact and information about your impact part of decision making.
- Tools which can help you with impact management.
 - Community Canvas - <https://community-canvas.org/>
 - Impactpath - <https://impactpad.nl/english/>
 - Scientific research on long-term effects

Useful links

[General Padlet of the Conference](#)

[Community Impact in Learning Mobility Projects, A practical Guide.](#)

[4thought for Solidarity](#)

[Creating Community Impact Through Solidarity](#)

[The Value of Learning Mobility and its Impact on Communities – desk research](#)

[Desk Research “The value of learning mobilities and its impact on communities”
desk research by Justina Garbauskaite – Jakimovska](#)

[Desk Research on Indicators of Social Impact](#)

[Community Impact Indicators](#)

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