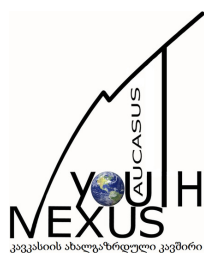


Digital Dialogue



Erasmus+

PROJECT SUMMARY



The context

Europe has been facing an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees in the recent years, in consequence of which the social and cultural structures of our societies have been undergoing a massive change. The new face of Europe is a challenge that requires new approaches, especially while working with young people who are facing the risk of developing radical and, in some cases, violent attitudes as the answer to the situation in which they can't have a proper dialogue with one another because of the prevailing stereotypes. As a group of youth workers and young leaders, we consider it crucial to enrich our toolboxes and change our attitudes in a way that would help more successful projects that are fitting both the realities we operate in and the target groups we work with. We believe the answer to this is to explore the possibilities of using digital methods for giving the voice to young people otherwise unheard, which is essentially the basics of truthful dialogue.

The above described context and needs stemming from it constituted a basis for our Digital Dialogue project and also for this small publication. In this document we summarized the two main methods we used during the training in Georgia: digital storytelling and participatory photography. We hope it will serve as a practical guide for everyone interested in discovering the potential of digital methods for creating more peaceful Europe.

About the project

Digital Dialogue was an Erasmus+ training for youth workers and leaders who are actively involved in promoting intercultural dialogue and preventing discrimination across Europe. In July 2018 we met in Bakuriani, Georgia, to learn from each other and to discover how methods and tools based on digital means of expression can be used while working with young people and help them to express themselves, get to know each other, and get involved in a peaceful dialogue with one another.

The objectives of the training course were as follows:

1. Discussing the potential of youth work in preventing discriminative, violent and radical behaviors among young people
2. Adapting our approaches and toolboxes to the modern (digital) realities that suits the real needs of young people better
3. Promoting tools and methods based on digital forms of expression as a mean for bringing together young people with diverse cultural backgrounds
4. Building a better understanding of the challenges and specifics of working with young people in culturally diverse societies

Approach

This project was solely based on methods and tools based on non-formal education which allowed its participants to be creative, explore and experiment. The role of the trainers and the amount of theoretical input was minimized, giving the participating youth workers and leaders a space to adopt a more pro-active approach and make the best possible use of their existing skills and knowledge. In result, they felt more responsible both for the educational content and the learning outcomes of all the activities, but this approach also let them learn how to use every presented method and tool in a way that suits the context they work in. We strongly believe in learning by doing, so this training was an opportunity for participants to go through all the exercises themselves (including taking pictures and creating videos), so that afterwards they will be more able to spread the methods and implement similar activities with the young people they work with.

Why to talk about digital methods?

Digital means of expression are a powerful tool to be used while working with young people and helping them discover their potential. By taking part in creative activities and expressing themselves digitally youngsters can increase the level of their self-awareness and learn how to understand themselves better, as often during this kind of activities they deal and express emotions that remain otherwise hidden. Apart from its great benefit as a tool for self-discovery and reflection, digital means of expression can be used for building understanding between people, especially those who are at risk of facing social exclusion.

The potential of using digital means of expression has been widely recognized amongst organizations working with young people both on national and international levels. There are many trainings and youth exchanges based on artistic forms of expression aiming at boosting participants' creativity. However, youth workers often underestimate the benefits that can come from using modern technology-based tools as a way of working with young people with fewer opportunities who face difficulties that result in risk of social exclusion.

Part 1:

Participatory Photography



Introduction

Participatory Photography or Photovoice is a visual method coming from the understanding that people are experts in their own lives. It encourages self-expression through photography and enables those who are traditionally the subjects of photography to become its creators. Participatory photography projects focus on a specific issue and aim to teach the participants ways in which photography can empower them to inform others and help them to be more involved in their communities. In result participants are enabled to documents their own lives from inside and represent themselves to the outside world.

Photography is a very easy way of expression. It allows others to experience participants' life, emotions and feelings through the photos they create. It is a direct expression of reality that is believable and reflects the life of the members of the community. It is a method that is accessible to all, regardless of their age, culture and previous knowledge. Participatory photography projects do not require any expensive equipment or software, therefore they are affordable and accessible even for people from economically disadvantaged background. The power of the method lays in the fact that it brings up the voice of people who are otherwise unheard. It gives both the participants and the community means for creating dialogue as it encourages awareness raising, advocacy, and self-development.

Participatory Photography projects are designed to be a learning process both for the participants and for the people that will have the opportunity to see the pictures afterwards. It should be respectful, fun, flexible, empowering and well planned so that everything happens in a safe environment and helps participants to raise their voice and express themselves in a creative way.

The method can help marginalized groups express their needs, but also can be used with people with disabilities, people suffering from dementia, people from vulnerable areas, seniors and children. The power of the method comes from the fact that it is accessible and beneficial for people with any kind of background.

The process

In a typical Participatory Photography workshop participants go through several steps of reflection and process of creating their own digital content. The process starts from getting to know the concept and the ways in which it can help the participants or/and their community. The next step is to combine small technical aspects of photography with practical exercises, which enable participants to go through a highly effective process based on "learning by doing" principle. In the end of the workshop each participant is expected to produce a collection of photos, from which he or she should select between 3 and 5 works that are to be subsequently exhibited. Additionally, each participant create a small text to accompany every picture, which makes the message more understandable for its future spectators.

After the individual selection has been done, participants work together to design and plan the collective exhibition that is to combine all their personal works into a consistent entity presenting the project results to the community.



Organizing workshops

A typical Participatory Photography workshop should last for 3 days, the standard duration of activities being 6 hours a day. It is based on a close interaction between participants and facilitators, who introduce the technique and guide young people through the creation process. The creative work itself is a very individual process, so participants are helped and receive instructions and advice from the facilitators. The workshop can be adjusted in its duration and intensity depending on the specifics of the target group. It is possible to have sessions only once a week or only in the mornings, depending on individual needs and expectations of your participants.

Getting started

Creating a safe space it is essential to make sure participants feel comfortable enough to share their points of view, explore their emotions and share opinions. The process is very personal, that is why it is very important to hold the workshop as much as possible in an environment familiar to the participants. When this is not possible, their creativity should be more challenged to different interpretations and they should be encouraged to collect the pictures in a more free way.

Space

A perfect training hall for Participatory Photography workshop needs to be spacious enough to enable participants to both have group activities and exercises. This hall can be anywhere but it is encouraged that the space is in the participants' familiar environment, so that they still remain close to the problems they want to advocate. It is convenient to have access to computers and photo editing programs, but this is not essential for the success of the workshop.

Equipment/Materials

The necessary material are simple and easily accessible. Each participant should be able to use his or her own camera. It can be of any type and you should encourage participants to use their own devices, regardless of this being their phones, disposable cameras or more advanced digital cameras.

Providing each participant with an access to equipment can be quite challenging, especially if you are working with people from disadvantaged economic background. Keep in mind that Participatory Photography is more about the process than about professional equipment and extremely high quality pictures. It is more than enough for participants to use their mobile phones or simple cameras.

However, if you need to gather some more equipment, you can use it as an opportunity to already reach out and connect to your community, for example by creating a campaign encouraging local inhabitants to lend/donate some of their personal cameras.

Participants

There is no age limit to participate in the workshop and it is not essential to have any previous experience with photography. Before the project it is good to know your participants' expectations and profile so you can adjust some of the exercises to the group's specific needs and background knowledge.

It is important not to work with a very big groups as the participants should be able to share and discuss the produced selection with both the facilitator and with the entire group. This is a time consuming process and you should have a group small enough to be able to provide them with enough time, support and attention.

Before the workshop that you may ask your participants to prepare some pictures illustrating their realities and environment. This should allow them to already start exploring and reflecting upon the issues they would like to advocate.

The schedule

Day 1

- Getting to know each other – 1 hour
- What is Participatory Photography? – 1 hour
- Picture treasure hunt – 2 hours
- What is That? – 2 hours

Day 2

- Feelings in Pictures – 1h30 minutes
- Self-Portrait – 1h30minutes
- Photo Dialogue – 1 hour
- Portrait – 2 hours

Day 3

- Photo Perspectives – 1h30minutes
- Making a Selection – 2hours
- Working with Text – 1h30minutes
- Preparing the exhibition – 1hour



Photo Exercises

Your participants' level of knowledge on photography might be very different. You can have both people with almost no experience and those with some background knowledge. It is important to start with simple exercises and then, depending on the level of your group, proceed with more technically advanced activities. However, you should always make sure that participants understand that, regardless of their technical skills, every picture they take should reflect the concepts they want to present.

Below you can find a short selection of exercises that can be used in the Participatory Photography project:

What is that?

What for?

1. To increase groups dynamics
2. To promote creativity in the group
3. To create self-confidence of working and sharing in the group

Materials

Camera (one per group)

Timeframe

10 minutes to explain and receive instructions. 1h to collect all the pictures and 50 min to share it with the group.

How?

Participants are paired up (in case of larger groups it is possible to have groups of 3). The task is to choose 3 different objects, take a very close picture of each of them and a picture that shows the object in a bigger perspective.

When they come back to the group they show each picture to the rest of the participants that have to guess what the object was.

Picture treasure hunt

What for?

1. Promoting visual creativity
2. Introducing participants to the topic
3. Encouraging more self-confidence in the process of taking pictures

Materials

Camera (one per each participant)

Timeframe

10 minutes to explain and receive instructions on the subjects/situations/things they should photograph. 1h30min to collect all the pictures and 20min to share it in pairs

How?

Participants are introduced to several subjects/situations/things they should find and take a picture of.

Example:

1. Something red
2. A portrait
3. A close-up
4. A pattern
5. A photo which tells us something about how you feel today
6. A tree
7. A reflection
8. A photo which tells a story
9. Something what you like
10. Something happy

After the instructions they are invited to explore the surroundings and produce one or more pictures of each subject indicated, reflecting upon the meaning they want to convey.

The exercise ends with participants sharing and discussing the pictures they have taken either in pairs or in small groups.

Feelings in pictures

What for?

1. Understanding how to express feeling through photos
2. Understanding how color and perspective can change our perception of a picture

Materials

Camera (one per each participant)

Timeframe

20 minutes of presentation of how color and perspective can influence the message we want to convey and our perspective and feelings in pictures. . 1h to collect all the pictures and 10 min to share it in pairs.

How?

After the short introduction on the topic participants receive a list of feelings (such as sadness, happiness, frustration, anger, fear, etc.) they have to transmit in each picture.

After they come back to the group they should share it in pairs.



Part 2:

Digital Storytelling



Introduction

Digital Storytelling is a method of empowering people by supporting them to share their personal life stories with the help of digital means of expression. Joe Lambert, founder of Center for Digital Storytelling and one of the main promoters of the method, defines digital story as "a short, first person video narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music and other sounds".

Workshops based on Digital Storytelling can be used as a way of working with disadvantaged young people in a wide variety of contexts. The method can be successfully implemented especially with groups and individuals who are facing challenges and problems whom they find difficult to speak about. Being very much based on modern technologies, creation of personal digital stories is an engaging process especially suitable for young people, since they are used to express themselves digitally, with pictures, short videos and sounds that are easily shareable online. At the same time the method is fully accessible for people with no previous background in technologies, as it is entirely based on easy to use software that is accessible free of charge.

The main benefits of using Digital Storytelling in a context of working with youth at risk of exclusion are the following:

EMPOWERMENT: young people acknowledge that they are unique individuals, that their personal stories matter and they should not be scared to express them.

BONDING: by listening to each other's stories youngsters learn how to communicate better and focus on similarities rather than differences between them, which makes them less prone to conflicts and violence.

CREATIVITY: participants activate their creative potential and learn how to seek innovative (digital) ways for conveying the messages that are important to them.

(SELF) REFLECTION AND EMPATHY: the whole process is very reflective and lets participants gain a new perspective on themselves and the others, which helps them deconstruct the stereotypes they might use in their lives.

The process

1. Creativity

We start out by helping the participants finding their stories with several creative exercises which invites them to get in touch with memories and subjects that are important in their lives. The group starts, already here, to get to know each other, which creates a comfortable and safe space to share in.

2. Story Circle

When each participant have the story they want to tell, they start developing their script individually. This is followed by the story circle, an important element where everyone gets to read out loud the rough draft of their script, followed by constructive feed-back from the rest of the circle.

3. Production

When the script is done, the participants get their voice-overs recorded which are imported into a simple film-editing program on their device. They collect the imagery they want to use, and start the editing process. We always encourage our storytellers be creative and use what is at hand.

4. Sharing

Every participant will end up with a short film of 2-4 minutes, and the last part of the process is to share and celebrate the films in the group.

Organizing workshops

A typical Digital Storytelling workshop is a 3 to 5 day activity during which participants work closely with the facilitator and other group members to create their personal digital narratives in a form of short individual videos. You can adjust both the duration and intensity of the workshop, depending of individual needs of your participants and the problems they are facing.

Space

A perfect training hall for Digital Storytelling workshop needs to be spacious enough to enable participants to both have group activities and exercises as well as work individually on their stories without being disturbed. As part of the process involves recording their voice, you need to make sure you can use an additional small room that is relatively silent. The training room has to have fast and reliable internet connection as participants will be using online sources during most of their work.

Equipment/Materials

Each participants should be able to use a laptop/tablet to work on their individual videos. Make sure that they all have already installed the necessary free software (iMovie for Macs or MovieMaker for PCs) before starting to work. It is desirable that they all have headphones and mobiles or cameras to create their own pictures during the process and to record their voice (each participants reads and records their script aloud).

It is good to ask participants to bring some photos depicting important events from their life and bringing up memories. It will be much easier for them to work on a visual part of their stories if they have some pictures selected beforehand.

Participants

Before starting to work with the group, it is necessary to get to know the participants and investigate both their expectations and the level of their experience in using digital means of expressions. It is recommended to ask each participant to fill out a short questionnaire where they can state their motivation and describe their competences (working with movie making software, photography, script writing etc.)

As participants will be interacting closely with the facilitator, it is recommended not to work with a very large group. The desirable number is maximum 6 participants per facilitator.

The schedule

Day 1

- Story generation: Creative Exercises - 3 hours
- Digital Storytelling - introduction - 1 hour
- Script writing (250-350 words) - 4 hours

Day 2

- Story circle - sharing stories with a group; giving and receiving feedback - 4 hours
- Voice over - reading and recording the script - 4 hours

Day 3

- Gathering, creating and editing images for the stories - 3 hours
- Introduction to editing programs (iMovie and MovieMaker) - 1hour
- Editing the videos, combining all the elements (visuals and sounds) into ready Digital Stories - 4 hours

Day 4

- Screenings, celebrations and feedback - 4 hours



Ethical considerations

Digital Stories can be a great way to advocate problems and challenges that young people are facing. Sharing videos with the wider communities can bring majority and minority groups together and help them build a better understanding. That is why all the participants are encouraged to share their videos, both during public screening and by publishing them online. However, it is very important to remember that none of the participants should be pushed into sharing their stories if they are not ready, especially if the topic is sensitive or involve talking about very personal issues. In case they do agree to publish their stories, it is necessary to ask them to sign an agreement and give them a possibility to withdraw their consent at any point.

Another thing to take into consideration is to make sure that none of the published videos breach any copy rights, so that they are either entirely consisting of digital content created by participants themselves or were based on a creative common license.



Creative exercises

One of the most challenging parts of the Digital Storytelling workshops is to encourage participants to open up and release their potential. It is crucial to give them some time to get creative in the beginning without putting much pressure on thinking of their personal stories as such.

Below you can find a short selection of creative exercises that can be used in the beginning of the Digital Storytelling workshops.

A letter to a friend

What for?

1. Practicing structuring thoughts into short written forms
2. Connecting verbal and visual layers of the story
3. Gaining self-confidence to share with others

Materials

Variety of postcards with different images (there should be more postcards than participants)

Pens

Timeframe

10 minutes for writing, 15 minutes for sharing (depending on the size of the group)

How?

A selection of postcards is spread on the floor. Participants are given short time to look at them and choose one each. The chosen postcard should have an image that evokes a strong memory of a feeling. Afterwards each participant writes a short message to a person who is important to them (such as a friend, a family member, a teacher or even the participants him or herself). The message should be connected to the image on the postcard. After the individual writing phase participants (volunteers) are asked to read their postcards out loud. The other group members are asked to give feedback and ask questions aiming at bringing more details of the story.

Bringing Up the Memories

What for?

1. Re-connecting with the past
2. Putting memories into writing
3. Discovering the emotional layer of the stories

Materials

Pens and papers

Timeframe

10 minutes to write the story, 5 minutes to share in pairs

How?

Participants are given time to think and write down the first happy childhood memory they remember. They should be encouraged to think of the emotions they felt back then and try to include them in the written description. After the individual work they are asked to share in couples.

The Story Behind My Last Picture

What for?

1. Learning how to use personal images as a basis for short narratives
2. Gaining more self-confidence in sharing personal stories
3. Asking questions that help discovering the meaning of the story

Materials

Phones/cameras owned by participants

Timeframe

20 minutes

How?

Participants are asked to open the last picture they took with their phones or cameras and think about the story behind it, asking themselves questions such as Where was it taken? Why did I take a picture like this? How did I feel? Was it something important? Instruct participants to use the very last images they have taken, even though they might seem boring or irrelevant. After thinking of the story participants share in couples, asking each other questions to discover more details connected to the story behind the picture.

Summary

Non-formal educational methods based on artistic means of expression can be successfully used in a variety of contexts. By inviting participants to be actively involved in the process of creation, those activities give them a chance to look at both their own personal challenges and the problems of the wider communities they live in in a new perspective. Projects based on digital means of expression also enable participants to reflect in a more structured way, revealing issues that remain otherwise hidden. The results of such a process can be used for shedding light on important social problems, such as discrimination, violence, and marginalization of vulnerable individuals and groups. In result, the process of empowering and giving voice to people at risk can bring a significant change in both their individual lives and the way the society perceive them.

The everyday practice of working with youth at risk of exclusion is challenging and demanding, especially in the context of countries where the mature civil society is still in the process of forming. Hence, the main conclusion after this training course implemented in Georgia is that there is a great need for seeking and promoting new ways and methods to approach vulnerable groups of youth and the society in general. As many of the youth workers who participated in the project admit to struggle with challenges stemming from the fact that their participants and other target groups are inactive and unmotivated to take part in social, educational, or cultural activities. Therefore, we consider it crucial to promote digitally based methods as they are interactive and being very much based on using modern technologies can be seen as an opportunity to attract young people who are otherwise skeptical to get involved in non-formal educational activities.

We hope this summary and the tools presented will provide youth workers and NGO activists with a set of practical guidelines and practical examples that will help them start with their own activities and project based on digital means of expression and therefore will contribute to a better inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the communities they work with.