

Programme “Social Prompter ”

Project “Time to re-connect“

Project coordinator: Jaunimo asmeninio tobulėjimo centras

Project partners: Young Agents of Change (Ukraine) Lobių dirbtuvės (Lithuania)

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Impact assessment of the project

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This project, funded by Lithuania and Ukraine Council for the Exchanges of Youth, was implemented in October-December 2021. It aimed to 1) Develop the sense of initiative among young people in Lithuania and Ukraine, promote cooperation among Lithuanian and Ukrainian people, 2) Create possibilities for young people to break stereotypes related with gender, nationality, race, disability, etc. 3) Introduce youth workers with “Social Prompter” game as a tool to reconnect with young people in a post-COVID era.

During this project, a four-day study visit was organised in Lithuania, where five young people from Ukraine and five young people from Lithuania had common activities, including the discussion of community theory, playing the games, training, cooking dinner, and visiting a local community for people with disabilities and their workshop “Lobių dirbtuvės”. The participants also played a “Social Prompter” game during the study visit and afterwards in their own communities.

Alongside, research was carried out to assess the impact of the project. It focused on short-term effects of the project activities. The research methods included one focus group with all participants and six semi-structured interviews with the participants (four from Ukraine and two from Lithuania). The research aimed at answering the following questions:

- 1) Does the project and the “Social Prompter” game help develop intercultural friendships and break stereotypes?
- 2) What’s the impact of this project on young leaders who take part in it?

Developing intercultural friendships and breaking stereotypes

The research data shows that the project has helped young people **develop both national and international friendships**. *“The project gave me new relationships, new friends.” “New friends, not only from Ukraine, but also from Lithuania, and I’m still chatting with my friends, and I think I will continue, and probably it will come into some cooperation later, I hope so.” “The relationship with those, at least from Klaipėda, never ends, we always say hello, when we see each other at school.”*

The project has **enhanced communication skills** of the participants. *“Communication was difficult because we had only one common language [...], but it helped everyone to step out of our comfort zone.”* Speaking

in a foreign language was regarded by the participants as an obstacle that had to be overcome and, thus, enhanced their communication skills. *“After the project I’ve gained more experience in speaking English and communicating with foreigners.”*

In addition, communication in a foreign language has **increased self-confidence** both of those who were rather fluent in English and those who were not. *“It was a matter of self-confidence to ask for help. This was one of the things that I’ve learned during that time.”* *“At the beginning I was very much afraid, because my English is not perfect [...], but what I liked very much was that people didn’t reject me, tried to help.”*

Naturally, communication with each other has resulted in **learning new things**. *“Although this is not my first project and I already knew a lot in theory and in practice, but I still learned a lot, for example I was very interested to hear what problems were in Lithuania and how you solved them, took into account your methods of communication with communities.”* *“It was a good opportunity to know more about Lithuania, more about Lithuanian people, to visit Vilnius.”*

It gave an opportunity to **learn about each other’s country**. *“It was very pleasant to communicate with people from another country and to learn things that I haven’t expected to learn. My general knowledge about another country have expanded probably more than it could have expanded at school.”*

Cosy and relaxed atmosphere during the study visit has inspired the participants to **share their experience** with each other. *“We had a lot of fun together, and I really wanted to share the experience between the participants, because it’s always interesting to hear other thoughts, especially when we are from different countries, and Ukraine and Lithuania have a really good relationship, so it was really interesting to know more about what people here think about Ukraine, about our relationship in a political sense, and how people look on projects in Lithuania.”*

The fact that participants were of different ages (high-schoolers and students) added new experiences to them and was regarded positively. On the one hand, younger participants **felt respected and accepted** as equal, on the other hand, older participants had a chance to **share their knowledge and experience** with the younger ones. *“What I liked very much, was that we were the youngest in the group, and we were not rejected, as it often happens when you are little and insignificant, this was not the case here.”* *“It was interesting that for some participants I was kind of mentor who told them more about projects or more about serious topics, [...] so it was a really great experience for me. I’m just happy that I could share my knowledge and my experience.”*

New knowledge acquired by the participants during the project has **inspired their desire to share it** with others within their own communities. *“After Lithuania, I learned a lot of interesting things and I have a really big desire to share it, about international communities, about how they work, it was very interesting.”*

Moreover, intense communication and examples of others have served as a source of **inspiration** for some young people **to take actions** within their communities. *“The girls were very motivated and charged me with the desire to work even harder for the benefit of the community.”*

“Social Prompter” game

“Social Prompter” game was regarded by the participants as a **good way to know each other**. Although young people admitted that they were shy at the beginning, with time they became closer and closer. *“It*

was interesting.” “We moved far away from the game, started to talk about other themes, personal experiences, feelings.” “It was a good way to know what other people think.”

In addition, young people **learned more about themselves**. “This game was a good way to know more about yourself.” “There are a lot of questions which you have never asked yourself, so I not only better know other people, but I also know more about myself.”

Alongside the increased knowledge about each other, the participants have **learned to appreciate differences**. “It just makes me understand that people are different, as they have different experiences, and when we are connected, even in so small groups, we can discuss more important things and make more interesting conclusions, so that makes us more aware and more understanding to each other.”

While appreciating differences, the participants have **learned to respect others**. “Of course, it’s a respect to others, I knew it earlier, but here I like felt that.” “I don’t have the right not to respect him because of that or another opinion, because their opinion also can be true, like when we view it from another point of view.”

The experience of playing “Social Prompter” has resulted in **increased open-mindedness** of some participants. They have realised that differences make people and nations unique. “This game helped me understand that every nation, everybody is unique, they have their own traditions, the right to think like they want. Earlier I would think why they are doing that, strange, now it’s like ah, OK, it’s their tradition, OK. It was great.”

The game has encouraged the players to **be more open** and inspired a desire to **share their experience**. “I’ve become more open to everyone, especially after this game it was like: I have to show it to others, I have to show it to other people, so it was great.”

The research data shows that the project has indeed **resulted in breaking intercultural stereotypes**, especially among younger participants. “All stereotypes have disappeared now. First of all, all stereotypes about Ukraine, [...] because I have communicated with real people and they told me a lot, for example, that Ukrainian and Russian languages are not almost the same, which is a big stereotype.” For those who claimed having no stereotypes, the project helped **understand the reasons behind different behaviour**. “Actually, I didn’t have any stereotypes, only I’ve proved it. Of course, we are different, but we can understand why we behave this way or another. One evening we had a conversation with a few girls from Ukraine, so we discussed all stereotypes, what they think about Lithuania and what we think about Ukraine, so we denied all that.”

A visit to the community for people with disabilities

A visit to a community for people with mental disabilities and their timber workshop “Lobių dirbtuvės” has helped young people **break stereotypes of people with mental disabilities**. “This meeting gave me a huge tolerance shock. When I was sitting there, I understood that, wow, they are the same people as me, and I communicate with them the same way, no matter how they look, how they talk.” “I’ve never expected that people with disabilities can be so friendly and so warm. This was the first such meeting for me.”

The visit had the strongest impact on those participants who met people with mental disabilities for the first time. It **caused them the feelings of surprise and discovery**. “This was the first such meeting for me

[...]. I was a little bit surprised at first [...]. Next time I would know how to treat them, that they should not be treated like children, and that they are the same grown-up people like us."

During the meeting young people have **acknowledged and accepted differences** between themselves and people with mental disabilities. *"People with disabilities are different, but they are wonderful in their own way." "I liked the meeting very much, and it showed me that even if we are different, we still are somewhat connected, and we should not reject them only because they are not like us."*

For those young people who had met and communicated with people with disabilities before, the visit to the community was less impressive. *"I've already had experience with people with disabilities, so for me it wasn't that much unusual, compared to other people."* Still, it has **helped them understand the needs of people with disabilities** and **charged them with new ideas**. *"It helped me a lot to see that people who have some disabilities, their first need is communication, they suffer, especially during covid-19, from the lack of communication and that's an important thing that we can provide to them." "It was interesting for me, because at home I am a volunteer in a similar centre and it was very interesting for me to compare them, to take into account something that could be implemented in Ukraine."* One of the ideas was to **involve people with disabilities into the "Social Prompter" game**. *"I have some thoughts in my head to try to reach more people, while doing this game with people who have some disabilities, so other participants will have another point of view, and have another person that differs from them, but lives their life and solves their problems, so I guess it would be a good way to break some stereotypes, to try to say to young people that disabilities are completely OK."*

For one of the participants the visit has **inspired a desire to keep in contact with the community**. *"This was a very pleasant place, and I would like to come back sometime, or at least to order their Advent calendar."* For the other it has brought out **understanding and concern** for the life of people with mental disabilities. *"It made me a bit sad because I understood how many problems those people face in everyday life [...] and we need to help them, because we have the opportunity, we have the resource, but we don't really think about it, so it made me think a lot after we left." "I will remember this meeting for ever, I guess, and I will try to make something in Ukraine, if I have the resource to do this."*

To summarize, the visit to the community "Lobių dirbtuvės" has **increased respect for people who are different**. *"And the last meeting with these people for the disabled, I think that they also influenced me to respect other people more."*

After the study visit

After the study visit, most participants played the game with their **close friends or family members**. *"Played only once in a circle of close friends." "I played it with my room mates, I live in a dormitory." "I tried to play with my parents."* One of the participants played the game in a **broader circle of young people**. *"The first time I played it, it was in Lviv, with the representatives of different youth organisations."*

They had different opinions about how well this game works, while playing it with people that you know well. *"This game doesn't really work in a circle of close friends, because people already know each other quite well, and some questions simply wouldn't work." "I played it with my friends, and although we know each other well, we still learned something new about each other." "Our opinions were different from time to time, so it was interesting to look at a problem from different points of view, and we started to*

understand each other really better.” “Social Prompter is different every time you play it, because people are different and their stories are different.”

Young people have noticed that **trust is a necessary precondition** for playing “Social Prompter”. *“It really goes well when people trust each other and there should be a nice atmosphere, because when people don’t trust each other, they don’t tell the truth and the game is not so interesting. So, it’s not that important that people should know each other, but it’s important to have some trust.”*

Youngsters who played the game in a circle of close friends did not break any stereotypes. *“I didn’t notice any changes.”* While the one who played the game in a broader circle of young people noticed that **cultural cards had helped them to understand regional differences** better. *“We played this game with representatives of different youth organisations from different cities of different regions, and they have different traditions, etc., so the cultural cards were really helpful for us, because we got to know each other better, and there are also regional stereotypes, how people in Lviv do, how people in other cities do, so it was great.”*

The reasons for not playing the game in a broader community mostly included the lack of time and pandemic restrictions. *“I’ve got classes online, so I haven’t got the chance of playing the game.” “I had my final exams, so I didn’t organize any big projects.” “It’s a pandemic situation now, and it is difficult to organize the game with completely unknown people, you have to prepare a lot.”*

Potential of the game

Even though most participants have played the game with well-known people, they do see the potential of the game in **reaching broader communities**. *“For example, I’ve applied for a few more programmes, and if I am successful, I can take this game to another country and share it.” “It could be helpful for inclusion with people of different ages, different views on life, and people who have different conditions of life, and also with international communities, because it breaks a lot of stereotypes.”*

The game might also be useful for **practicing English speaking skills**. *“I’ve got some professors say that this is a great idea, not only in bringing together the community, but also practicing English skills.”*

Younger participants believe that “Social Prompter” could be broadly used **in schools**. *“For example, we could play the game with all six-graders at a time in a school hall during one class.” “I could use the game at school to connect different classes, so that pupils could communicate, also in extra-curricular classes.”* They believe it has the potential to **bring people closer together**. *“Because when you know something about another person, you feel somewhat closer.”*

Developing leadership

Participants of the project have defined a community leader as the one who can be trusted by others, who can take the main responsibility, take up the challenge and help other people. It is the person who has a strong belief, very strong ideas about what must be improved and a vision of how some problems can be solved. Finally, the community leader is the one who has passion, a great wish to make some good changes in the community and tries their best to make these changes happen.

Research data shows that the project has helped younger participants **understand what it means to be a leader and how leadership works**. *“I understood how leadership works. Earlier I used to think that the leader is the one who gives commands and does nothing, but in fact, the leader makes a huge job to understand and unite the team.”*

Young people need certain conditions in which they could reveal themselves as leaders. *“People might not even know they have this potential until they get a chance to become a leader.”* In this respect the training session of the project has **created conditions for young people to reveal their personal leadership qualities and develop leadership skills**. It allowed the participants to see themselves as team members, to understand their role in the team and try themselves in the leader’s role as well. *“I liked very much that we approached the leadership topic gradually, step-by-step. At first, we could try ourselves in games and see how we behave in the activities, and how the leader comes up in the team. It helped me understand who I am in that community, for example, I understood that I like listening to others, I like following others, but at the same time I had a chance to try the leader’s role myself.”*

The participants have mentioned two teambuilding games which helped them **strengthen their leadership qualities and teamworking skills**. The first, X and Y game, was quite challenging for everyone. The players misunderstood the task and competed rather than cooperated with each other. *“We misunderstood the task and we failed it.”* Nevertheless, this experience has turned out as a very useful teamwork lesson for them and **showed the areas for personal improvement**. *“It was a very good lesson of what it means to work in a team and not seek your own profit.”* *“After that I understood that I don’t always hear what people say to me, so I’ll try to work more about it.”*

This game was especially challenging for the team leaders. *“We had to make a lot of decisions as team leaders.”* *“For me it was the main challenge to accept the fact that I’m going to be the one to put some idea into the working community, we are going to work out and then I’m going to take the responsibility for this whole thing because that was my idea.”* Even though the team lost the game, this experience has **strengthened the leader’s confidence**. *“It gave me confidence with the ability to take responsibility.”*

During the second game, “River with crocodiles”, the participants **understood the significance of communication within the team**, while working towards the common goal. *“Since we communicated really well throughout the process, we managed to reach the bank safely.”* They also understood that good communication includes listening to each other, especially when the tasks get more difficult. *“And at that moment I understood how important it is to communicate with your team, and how important it is to listen to each other.”* This game helped the players to realize that **a clear strategy is necessary for a successful teamwork**, and that each team member has a role to play in the process. *“The most difficult stage became the easiest one, because we simply talked with each other and had a clear strategy, and everyone knew what we were doing.”* Finally, the players have noticed that difficult situations are exactly the moments when the leader comes up, and that the team can reach its goal when the team members **trust the leader**, who takes up initiative and responsibility. *“Since we communicated and we didn’t interrupt each other, and we had the leader who came up with idea and then they led the process and didn’t have to interrupt each other and say that I know the better way, so the process was really smooth.”*

The project had the major impact on the development of **communication skills** of the participants. *“Activities were most useful in developing communication skills.”* *“Communication skills, which are pretty essential, I would say that they can be developed in such youth projects, in exchanges”.*

Cosy atmosphere and sincere communication have **increased self-confidence** of young people. *“Before I was very much afraid to talk in front of people, but when you have to do it and people are tolerant, always listen to you, this helped to feel more self-confident. And I can say that now I have less fear.” “It gave me courage, some leadership skills, because I had to communicate and got to know myself better.”* The project activities, especially games, gave them **experience**, which they considered useful for their future leadership, and strengthened their self-confidence. *“The games, when you try them for the first time, you observe how it works, and when you play for the second time, you undertake the leader’s role yourself, and you can tell others how to do it better.” “All things that you do for the first time make you stronger.”*

Lectures about bringing together the community provided **new knowledge** for the participants, especially younger ones. *“Actually, I didn’t know what’s the use of this, but now I understand it.”* The participants agreed that knowledge, especially practical knowledge, gained through the games, contributes to their self-confidence, and has **inspired them to share** it with others. *“Teambuilding games that we had, I think that I have used all of them already in my society, it’s also a specific thing and I really liked it.” “I have realised how easy it is to learn things through the games, not some lectures, so now it helps when I want to teach someone something new, for example, at school or in trainings.”*

It is likely that the project will have a longer-time effect, because many participants **were inspired with new ideas and determination** to undertake some community leadership in future. *“After the project I gave up the idea of English-speaking club at the university [...] and understood that the thing that will work up and develop my leadership skills would be creating some students’ organization that would create and conduct some lectures or some workshops connected with the community-building or leadership and bringing up other topics as well, e.g. about people with disabilities, national minorities that are being discriminated. This idea emerged while I was on the plane on the way back. I understand that I need some knowledge about this whole thing, so I won’t be implementing this in the near future, but it’s the idea and I will definitely try to do this.” “[A visit to “Lobių dirbtuvės”] it made me think a lot after we left. But it was a good experience because I’m a future politician and I will try to include this problem into my programme or something I will have then.”* The project also had **unexpected effects**, like the inspiration to cook. *“After the project, I don’t leave the kitchen because I’ve got a great need to make food [..]. I’m inspired to experiment. It helped me understand what I like, and I’m grateful for that.”*

Finally, young people **had a lot of fun** together. *“It was a lot of fun, it was very useful, in such way that useful and fun are co-working, it leads to big things, it was really nice.” “I would really like to participate in such project again, I liked it very much, especially that we lived all together in one house, and this united all of us.”*