

YOUTH COMMUNITY ORGANIZING HANDBOOK





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1.1.1 Introduction

1.2.1 Why the need for youth campaigns?

1.3. 1 Advocacy campaigns

1.3.2 Staro Nagoricane Campaign

- Short information about the place where the campaign is implemented
- Advocacy campaign

1.3.3 Technical High school Nace Bugjoni Campaign

- Short information about the place where the campaign is implemented
- Advocacy campaign

1.3.4 Gymnasium Goce Delcev Campaign

- Short information about the place where the campaign is implemented
- Advocacy Campaign

1.3.5 Lipkovo Campaign

- Short information about the place where the campaign is implemented
- Advocacy campaign

1.3.6 Gymnasium Sami Fraseri Campaign

- Short information about the place where the campaign is implemented
- Advocacy campaign

1.4.1 Challenges and Recommendations

1.4.2 Collaboration with institutions

1.4.3 School

1.4.4 Municipal administration

1.4.5 Young people (participation)



2017



Introduction

The “Center for Intercultural Dialogue” CID from Kumanovo, with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy-NED in the period from February 2016 until January 2017 worked on implementing the project “Youth Voice Macedonia”.

Youth civic activism and dialogue was promoted through the project in 5 multi-ethnic areas in Kumanovo and surroundings. The activities focused on encouraging intercultural and inter-religious dialogue which will enable the young participants to be the promoters of social changes in their communities. CID’s partner on this project is Partners Foundation for Local Development (FPDL) from Romania, which shared their experience in building the network of young people as promoters of social changes and development of leadership skills between the youth.

CID opened a public call, from which 20 young people from 4 multiethnic communities from the region of Kumanovo and Staro Nagoricane were selected to participate to 2, five day, trainings for civic engagement and advocacy. These interactive trainings were led by professional trainers from FPDL and CID, and they focused on developing the skills of the young participants which will result in positive changes in their lives and the community in which they live.

Through the training courses, the participants detected the main challenges in their communities and developed 5 advocacy initiatives, with an aim to promote their rights, activities for peace building and resolving conflicts from the young people’s perspectives.



2017



FDPL and CID monitored the young leaders during the process of sharing their acquired knowledge and skills to at least 60 peers, who were involved in implementing the project. The advocacy campaigns initiated a constructive youth dialogue in the communities where the project was implemented.

CID reviewed the already existing mechanisms for youth participation on local level, with a special emphasis on the marginalized communities. For this purpose, CID organized an event from a closed character, so that the participants and the local stakeholders can share the results of the project and initiate a debate in the direction of developing future mechanisms for youth participation in the local communities.

CID also, closely monitored the progress of all activities and in which context where those implemented. CID, together with FDPL conducted impact evaluation to recognize the changes, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of these campaigns. Based on this process, CID printed this handbook for youth community organizing, with an aim to promote human rights and peace building activities, and for its development we used specific participation tools for strengthening civic activism in multi-ethnic and multicultural areas.



Why the need for youth campaigns?

The need for active young people involved in civic society asks for active participants who are familiar with the principles of youth activism. What is important is that the young people need the necessary knowledge and skills which they will know how to implement in the process of building a society where young people play an important role.

Through the training courses, the participants detected the main challenges in their communities and developed 5 advocacy initiatives, with an aim to promote their rights, activities for peace building and resolving conflicts from young people's perspectives. Through leading the local youth advocacy campaigns by the young people themselves, they acquired a first-hand opportunity to get familiar with the challenges of developing a detailed action plan, mapping of local stakeholders who could be potential partners in the process, the implementation itself, securing logistic and technical support for it,

as well as determining clear guidelines for achieving set goals.

In this respect, in the frame of the project Youth Voice Macedonia, 2 five day trainings were organized in June and August, whose main purpose was to enable the young people with skills for designing and implementing an effective advocacy campaign which will unite the young people from different communities to work on common interests. Both of the trainings, held in Mavrovo, were called Youth Civic Engagement and Advocacy. 20 young leaders from Kumanovo, Lipkovo and Staro Nagoricane were selected to work together on preparing the local advocacy campaigns. The training courses were led by experienced facilitators from CID and FDPL. On the second training in August, the local stakeholders from the communities in which the advocacy campaigns were to be implemented, were invited. In this way a connection was established between the young people who are supposed to implement an organized advocacy campaign and the institutions who are supposed to serve as partners on them. For that purpose we focused on:

Main goals:

- Promoting youth civic engagement and dialogue in multiethnic communities
- Reaction from the local communities and local government to this project or including the young people in the decision making process, will be assumed as an indicator of success.



2017



ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

STARO NAGORICANE CAMPAIGN

Short information for the place where the campaign is implemented

Staro Nagoricane is a rural municipality, 16km northeast from Kumanovo. The population of this municipality is mainly engaged in agricultural activity. The population is of mixed character. 80% are Serbs, and 20% are Macedonians. The teaching, in the only primary school in this village, is done in Serbian language. Staro Nagoricane, together with Kumanovo and Lipkovo, are part of the northeast region which is the least developed region in the Republic of Macedonia.

Advocacy campaign

During the training course in Mavrovo, the participants from Staro Nagoricane pointed their campaign towards the "so-called" Youth Center in their municipality and towards the lack of awareness of the students about their rights and opportunities. What was identified as one of the main challenges was not having the physical space that the young people of this municipality will be able to use for their needs, where new forms of youth organization would come out, which on the other hand would add to greater youth activism.

The Youth center in Staro Nagoricane, except the name, has nothing else in common with the young people. Namely, the center has a few working rooms which serve for the needs of the municipality, but not even one of them is designed for the young people.

The Youth center is also not an independent legal subject, but is led and managed by the Municipality. The fact that the Youth center does not have a director or manager, but instead it is managed by the mayor of the municipality Staro Nagoricane speaks volume.

The school building, the youth center and the municipality building where the administration is, are all 500 meters apart.

After the end of the training course in Mavrovo, where the participants acquired

the skills for lobbying and advocacy, as well as team building skills, they passed on to developing the campaigns and their implementation.



2017

During the first weeks after the training course in Mavrovo, there were meetings held between the project team, the participants from the training and representatives from the municipality and the school administration, that resulted in signing a memorandum of cooperation, which enabled one working room from the Youth center to be used for activities organized by young people from the local environment. Having that in mind, the experience that CID has with youth work and working with young people in the youth center MultiKulti in Kumanovo, it was concluded that there should be themed workshops held in the youth center, from the reason that they will attract the young people to participate in the same. CID's experience with the youth center in Kumanovo showed that the young people are far more interested for participating in the work of the youth center if there are concrete organized activities, rather than the youth center to serve as place for non-formal gathering only. From that aspect, first a research between the young people of the primary school Svetozar Markovic was conducted, and this resulted in most of the young people showing interest in participating on workshops for studying English language and creative workshops. These workshops were held once a week, in the period of 2 and half months. The workshops were facilitated by experienced youth workers from abroad, who with their knowledge and skills helped better the quality of the workshops. The main idea was to connect the Youth center with the school Svetozar Markovic in a way that the young people would find the youth center as a place where they can be free from the frames of formal education, and in a creative and more free way would express themselves about the challenges they face, and would offer ideas and solutions for the same. If we take under consideration that the students who study in this school, are young people from different village areas, separated by a decent amount of kilometers, then the youth center also becomes the only place for their non-formal gathering outside of school.

After these workshops finished, we moved towards the second part of the campaign, and that was to find a way to bring the children's rights closer to the primary school students of Svetozar Markovic, in a friendly and easily understandable manner. After a few coordinative meetings, involving the project team of Youth Voice Macedonia, the administration of the school and the representatives from the students,

as the most soothing solution was chosen that the school hallway be used as a gallery for different parts of the Convention for Children's rights.

In compliance with this, they came up with a solution that will be both interesting and appealing to the students. Namely, on the school hallway, in length of 30meters, were shown panoramas of world famous cities and to them were added quotes from the Convention for Children's rights. According to the floor plan of the school, this hallway is located on the second floor where the students from 6th to 9th grade study. It should be kept in mind the fact that the "painting" is planned to remain on the walls for many years to come, so many generations following will get to see it. In this way the young people of the primary school will have the opportunity to get familiar with their rights from the convention. It is especially important to say that in this way the awareness of the meaning of the universal children's rights, as well as democracy practices of action in a society is greatly raised.

TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL NACE BUGJONI CAMPAIGN

Short information for the place where the campaign is implemented

The technical high school Nace Bugjoni in Kumanovo, is one of the oldest high schools in town. The school started working in the year of 1960. The school is located in an urban area close by a park called "Sokolana". After the conflict in 2001, the school was separated by ethnicities, and now in different locations in the town there are separate school buildings from this same high school, where students study in Macedonian language or in Albanian. The ethnicity around the school is mixed, mostly from Macedonians and Albanians.

Advocacy campaign

From the high school Nace Bugjoni there were 6 young people who participated on both of the training courses in Mavrovo. During these training courses, especially on the second one where the main focus were the campaigns themselves, the participants from Nace Bugjoni were interested in youth organizing inside their school. Namely, the student parliament, which is supposed to be a tool for the students to use for representing their rights and interests in front of the school administration,



2017

has not been functioning and it has not been able to deliver its tasks, neither efficiently nor in good quality. If you take under consideration that having such organized structure such as the student parliament on their disposal, led by the students themselves, a tool they can take in front of the school administration, and democratically and transparently represent their interests, it makes sense that the participants would focus on advocating for the functionality of this body in their school. The dysfunction of this body, in the past few years has contributed to disorganized young people, who do not have an organized way to channel their interests and needs, and the same have almost no experience in active participation in a democratic youth structure.

With an aim that within the process of renewing the student parliament the democratic principles are followed, and for as many students possible to be involved in its creation, it was extremely important to be very careful in the way the whole process was ran. A focus group was formed for that purpose, which consisted of about 20 students, who worked together on establishing what the student parliament should look like in an ideal case, in terms of: the goals it represents, the organization structure of the student parliament, the challenges it would face during working, potential partners and collaborators. For each of these subjects, there was a smaller working group created, which worked on developing the subject, as well as had the task to initiate a debate in the school for the role and meaning of the student parliament. Important was that the focus group consisted of representatives from different ages, and was gender balanced. One of the main conclusions from the working groups was that, in this process of development there should be as much students involved as possible. For that purpose, the "Day for Ideas" was organized in the school. The main goal of this event was for as many possible young people to get involved by suggesting their ideas, locating the problems and challenges, as well as suggesting solutions for the same. In the hallway of the school and in front of the main entrance stood panels where more than 200 students had the opportunity to write down their opinions in multiple categories, such as: My idea for better youth organizing; My suggestion for a better school, and I want more information about my opportunities. It is remarkable that the teachers and the representatives from the school also got actively involved in the process, and gave their contribution. If you take under consideration the fact that this is the first event ever

organized in the school by a third party (Youth Voice Macedonia) where such a large number of students got involved, it gives more weight to the reach of this campaign. In this way it was expected that the students would be more open and honest in their suggestions/responses, because they would be free of the strong hold of the teacher-student relation.

After the event, the working groups summed up the results in a document, and the same was presented in a panel discussion held in the school. Present on this discussion were representatives from the students, the school administration, as well as the coordinative team of Youth Voice Macedonia. It is important to mention that on this panel discussion was debated, after a significant amount of time, by all parties involved, about the school parliament; its reactivation, its role and goals that should be reached. One of the main conclusions was that the school needs an organized youth organization who will be a relevant partner in the decision making process. For this purpose, it was necessary that the young people gain knowledge and skills which will be useful in the frames of creating a structure based on democratic principles.

For that purpose, a one-day workshop was organized in the youth center MultiKulti, where 35 students and representatives from the professors gained basic skills for organizing an internal democratic structure, the decision making processes inside the student parliament, as well as the advocating and lobbying for their interests. The training was led by the coordinators of Youth Voice Macedonia.

After the training, the initiative, as a whole, moved in the direction where the young people over a few meetings, organized and facilitated by them, chose the management of the school parliament and approved the documentation for its work, which lead to it developing into a self-sustainable youth organization.

GYMNASIUM GOCE DELCEV CAMPAIGN

Short information for the place where the campaign is implemented

The gymnasium Goce Delcev is one of the oldest high schools in town. Established in 1948, the gymnasium Goce Delcev is located in the town's central area. This high school has the highest number of students in Kumanovo, with over 1100 students in each of the 4 grades of high school education.

According to the information from the Ministry of education and science and the State Educational Inspectorate the Gymnasium Goce Delcev is on the 8th spot from the top in the list of best high schools in the Republic of Macedonia.

Advocacy campaign

The youth (un)awareness arose as an activity that the group from the gymnasium Goce Delcev concluded should be the focus of their campaign. This school was represented by 6 students during both of the training courses in Mavrovo. In order for youth organization to rise up on a higher level it needs to be able to use both online and offline tools. The conclusion of this group was that the young people in Kumanovo do not have access and do not know how to get to information which could be useful for their future education and professional development. In that way, the young people miss out on a lot of scholarships, youth exchanges, training courses, professional trainings, etc. where they could potentially build on their capacities and spend their time outside of school in a quality manner. The young people use more of their time spent on the internet for fun, rather than for searching for opportunities for professional development. The internet itself, or more specifically the social networks, were used as an online tool to bring the advocacy campaign closer to the young people. In that direction, we created a Facebook page called "Youth Voice Macedonia" which was foreseen as a channel through which the young people will receive information useful for them. The page was firstly foreseen to be used for the high school students, and later for all young people from Kumanovo, and because of that the page is managed by the young people who participated in the trainings in Mavrovo. The Facebook page is self-sustainable in the context that it is frequently used for posting different opportunities for youth activism, from the young people themselves, which also gives them a sense of responsibility for it.

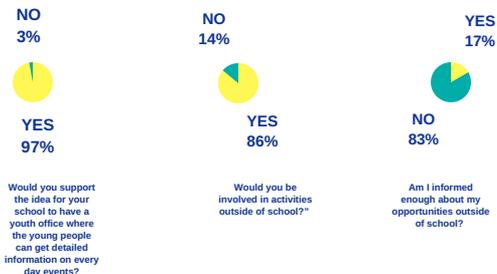
In order to get a more precise picture for the interests and needs of the young people, we conducted a survey on 70 subjects at the school. The survey consisted of 10 questions in total, out of which we singled out 3 questions and their answers.



2017



For the question “Would you support the idea for your school to have a youth office where the young people can get detailed information on every day events?” 97,22% answered with YES, and 2,78% answered with NO. For the question “Would you be involved in activities outside of school?” 86,11% answered with YES, and 13,89% with NO. For the question “Am I informed enough about my opportunities outside of school?” 16,67% answered with YES, and 83,33% with NO.



From the survey you can clearly see the difference between the (un) awareness of the young people and their desire to change that, or to be active participants in their communities. The results showed the need to establish a tool through which the young people will have access to more information. The results from the survey were used in order to organize a panel discussion in the school, where it was discussed about the forms of youth organization and how to better the availability of information for the young people. One of the conclusions from this panel was that there is a need for a place in the school which will be used as a space the young people can use for their needs. The idea of forming a youth office that would function in the school itself came up, and it was suggested should further potential arise, it would be used as an office also benefiting young people who are not part of the school. Namely, the function of this office would be twofold, firstly to serve as a place where the young people can hold meetings, gatherings, presentations for a smaller number of people, etc., and second to be a place where young people would get information about youth activities outside of their school.

In collaboration with the school administration, we used a space close to the main entrance of the school for the youth office.



.The long-term goal of this youth office is to be managed and sustained by the students and to grow in a place that will be able to answer to the needs of the young people, not only from this school, but from the whole town.

LIPKOVO CAMPAIGN

Short information for the place where the campaign is implemented

Lipkovo is a rural area in the Northeastern region of Macedonia. With an unemployment rate of 89%¹ Lipkovo is ranked as one of least developed municipalities in the country. The underdevelopment has reflected in all spheres of the life of the citizens and communities including the young people.

The young population in Lipkovo of age 15 – 19 is 29962.

Advocacy campaign

The high unemployment rate affects the standard of living and opportunities that the youth have to be engaged in their socio-political life. This can be seen through a lack of infrastructure and facilities for young people to engage in social life. Driven by these problems the Youth Voice team in Lipkovo starting from their competences in community organizing in the two Training Courses on “Youth Civic Engagement and Advocacy” identified the key actors in their community, as well as problems and issues that young people are facing. The group decided to focus their campaign towards actively engaging young people and raising awareness about Human Rights and youth activism in the community through sports activities.

Once the trainings were delivered the core group for Youth Voice Lipkovo was formed and included high school leaders and volunteers of the youth council. The initial action plan for the campaign was to organize a sports event which will mobilize young people and besides the sport event engage them in an activity that will raise awareness about Human Rights. For this a ping-pong tournament was organized with the motto “Let’s Serve for Youth”. The event gathered more than 70 young people. Besides being part of the game the team of Youth Voice organized side activities during which the young people engaged could express issues and problems that concern them as young people. Moreover campaign materials were handed out on how to engage and be part of Youth Voice Team



2017



2017

and information what are basic human rights. In this way also the team grew and was more visible in the community. The collected information was analyzed and as main challenges were identified the lack of activities for young people in the Municipality, the lack of accessibility and lack of public transport. . Also very concerning for the group was the fact that there was lack of participation of women in the event in general and this issue was also stated in the conversation with the young people at the event. This issue gave an idea to further focus on the specific issue and advocate for gender equality as an issue that concerns the community in Lipkovo, especially the young people. To be able to give space to engage young people in discussion about the issue the team of Youth Voice Lipkovo organized an essay competition on the topic Gender Equality and gave space to young people to engage in discussion. The idea about the essay was spread among different high schools where the young people from Lipkovo region study. Once the essays were gathered the Youth Voice Team organized a panel discussion that included youth, teachers and experts on the topic. The panel discussion also gathered youth from different working teams of Youth Voice Macedonia who participated and discussed on the Gender issue among youth which concerns all youth regardless of that in which community they belong to.

During the discussion recommendations that could change the situation were drafted and the same were later developed into a document, which was proposed to be delivered to the local institutions that work with young people.

GYMNASIUM SAMI FRASERI CAMPAIGN

Short information for the place where the campaign is implemented

Gymnazium Sami Frasher is the newest high school in the city. The creation of this school is a result of the ethno- linguistic segregation of the schools that happened in the period 2001-2003 in Kumanovo. After tensions followed with several interethnic incidents a segregation process started and students that were following lectures in Albanian language were relocated to temporary improvised facilities far away from the previous building where they were having lectures together. This division led to further social segregation among young people. From the 3 schools segregated, only the Economical school

with studies in Albanian Language got reallocated to a new proper facility, although this did not solve the problem of having a divided city, the Gymnasium was given a statute of an independent school operating in an improvised facility. The lacks of facilities created a feeling of unjust among the Albanian population and further deepened the division on ethnic line.

Advocacy campaign

Having a community organizing group in this school was a big step towards reactivating the young people and promoting them as change-makers in the community.

Driven by these problems Youth Voice Sami Frasheri group as main goal of this campaign set to raise awareness about the importance of having joint activities among young people that are from different ethnic backgrounds, since little has been done in this regard coming directly from the youngsters from the schools. It is important to note that this also came as an inspiration from the training where young people realized that they actually have common problems regardless of their ethnic background and that they could work together with joint aim, at the same time also tackling issues that are of great importance for young people in the school, such as having a clean studding environment. These goals were reorganized to specific objectives and activities. Among the proposed activities were to organize an advocacy campaign on the issues of hygiene in the school and a campaign that would promote joint activities between youngsters from both Gymnasiums of the city. Concerning the issue of hygiene Youth Voice Sami Frasheri organized a survey in which they assessed the stand points of young people on the issue as well as their opinion on how they could engage in changing the situation. The survey had an impact on young people and opened a debate on the issue among young people on the situation about hygiene. Among other issues raised from the survey was the lack of a functional library. The Youth Voice Sami Frasheri started campaigning and advocating this issue among the young people and the school administration. This process triggered the attention of the Student Union at the school, who joined their campaign of having a library in the school. Teamed up with the student union, the young people negotiated in front of the school administration about the issue and managed to get a small space to turn it into



2017

a library even though the school is in an improvised building and has a lack of classes. Once the library was arranged the Team organized the space and in an open event officially started the use of the library. It is important to notice that until the school administration can get an employed librarian; the Team of Youth Voice will run the library voluntarily. The space of the library will serve also for meetings for the Youth Voice Team and the School Union.

On the opening event, besides presenting the library, there presented the results from the survey in big charts around the school. The event triggered the attention of a lot of young people that showed interest in joining the Youth Voice Group in Sami Frasher.

Once the Library was open the Youth Voice Sami Frasher created an action plan for future activities and together with the Youth Voice Goce Delcev discussed on activities that could be done jointly. Among the activities was to have joint book clubs of youngsters.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the implementation of these 5 advocacy campaigns in the northeast region the team of Youth Voice Macedonia came across a few challenges.

COLLABORATION WITH INSTITUTIONS

In the realization of this project there were two types of institutions involved, such as, the municipal administrations of Kumanovo, Lipkovo, and Staro Nagoricane, and the high schools and primary school: Gymnasium "Goce Delcev", Gymnasium "Sami Fraseri", Technical school "Nace Bugjoni", Primary school "Svetozar Markovic" and Gymnasium "Ismet Jashari".

SCHOOLS

From the start it was clear that the schools (high school and primary) with their logistics, expertise, and knowledge of the capacity of their students, who were direct participants in the realization of the advocacy campaigns, would be the main partners and one of the main pillars of the project. In order for the further collaboration to be on a satisfactory level, the teachers and school administration representatives were invited to the second training course in Mavrovo.





2017

For that reason specifically, we paid great attention to maintaining good contact with the school administration, precisely with the directors and experts, like the educators and psychologists, and of course to the cooperation with the teachers. We signed a memorandum of cooperation with which the schools positioned themselves as partners in the process, with their own rights and responsibilities. The contacts were mostly done through regular meetings, during which the schools were treated as equal partners and were involved in the decision making process. In that way the management of the schools gained trust and a sense that the final results will benefit the schools as well, as environments where the campaigns are implemented. It should be noted that the quality of cooperation from school to school varied, for example with some the collaboration was on a high level, but there was also schools where the collaboration was on a minimal level. Such example is the high school in Lipkovo, where the collaboration was on a minimal level, but the campaign in this municipality showed significant results, and succeeded in incorporating a large number of young people from this area. In such cases of lack of communication, it is important to note that you should take into account the other stakeholders, such as the local youth councils, or the municipal administration. CID's long-term experience in the youth sector, as well as the acquired trust of the community stakeholders, also added to the contact and collaboration with the schools to be on a satisfactory level.

MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION

The project Youth Voice Macedonia was implemented in three municipalities in the northeast region: Kumanovo, Lipkovo, and Staro Nagoricane. These three municipalities have different financial and personnel capacities. The only urban municipality – Kumanovo, has a much larger financial capacity than Lipkovo and Staro Nagoricane, as rural municipalities.

In the rural municipalities we were faced with the challenge of public transport, which either does not exist at all or is limited to certain time intervals throughout the day. The participants in the project, mostly the young people, had difficulties in using the transport from their areas to Kumanovo and back, and a number of meetings and activities in the frames of the project were held in the local areas of the participants.

We should mention that in the frames of their possibilities, all three of the municipalities were involved in the project. We signed a memorandum of collaboration, which clearly showed their desire for cooperation and involvement in the project. Of exceptional importance was the involvement of the representatives from the municipality during the second training course in Mavrovo, which allowed the municipal administrations to get involved in the advocacy campaigns from the beginning, to be a part of their whole creation process.

During the realization of the project the municipalities contributed in securing a space, under their jurisdiction for the needs of the campaigns, and in some cases even further, for their continuous use by the young people.

YOUNG PEOPLE (PARTICIPANTS)

Young people, aged 13-18, from the northeast region, participated in this project. The number of participants at the training courses in Mavrovo was limited to a number of 20 young people, from different ethnicity, with the idea of that number to rise significantly during the course of implementing the advocacy campaigns, which was also achieved. Important to mention is that the collaboration between the young people was achieved in the process of creation of the campaigns, with mutual support in implementing the same. The young participants, who were a part of both advocacy trainings in Mavrovo, were the core of the implemented campaigns. The motivation between the young people was quite noticeable, but it is also important to mention that not all 20 participants got equally involved in implementing the campaigns. One of the recommendations for working with smaller groups is to give enough time during team building activities in order to strengthen their sense of team affiliation. On the other hand, a lot of young people who were not a part of the trainings, but familiar with the work principles and the aimed goal, got actively involved during the implementation of the campaigns, and with their work contributed to successful advocacy campaigns. The young people from the rural areas showed a high level of motivation, which once again confirmed that these young people should be involved in as much activities as possible, solely for the reason that their rural communities do not offer at all or offer very minimal opportunities for youth activism.

Youth Organizing Community

During the campaigns, the young people for the first time in their life faced the institutions in an organized way, and in front of them advocated for their rights and interests, and we should especially take under consideration that those rights and interests were a unifying factor, despite the different starter view points on a lot of them.

The general assesment is that the young people have a desire to be actively involved in creating youth policies through youth dialogue, but it is important to note that during the process it was proven that they feel more secure when there is someone "standing" behind their actions.



2017

