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PROJECT TOWNLAB-MEET

Report: Novo mesto Townlab_FINALMEETING

23-24 SEPTEMBER 2020

Participation via ZOOM Platform

Direct participants:

- Day 1: 141
- Day 2: 133

Workshop 1: Acts and interventions of inclusion

Mr. Jure Gombac made a presentation “Acts and Interventions of migrant’s inclusion”. Presenter explained the differences in motives, social attitude about migrants and migrations in the past and now, treatment of migrations as a social movements, relationship from the state services, media attitude, integration mechanisms used, etc. Presenter highlighted many differences in terms that migrations in Europe were found desirable and received as kind of personal advance in the past while today, we have strong opposition and today, there are many dramatic events with migrant groups involved. Also, new times, new social attitudes, moral and different public opinions demanded new solutions and presenter mentioned some projects from other EU countries related to applied solutions and learned lessons in integration of migrants. Presenter described the following projects:

1. **BicPop (Croatia):** The main idea of Biciklopravljajona is the strengthening of social solidarity through free exchange of knowledge and services and the promotion of sustainable transport.
2. **Choir (Croatia):** brings together lovers of singing who contribute to the music diversity of the Croatian society by singing songs from all over the world.
3. **“Next Door Family” (Czech Republic):** Under the concept "inclusive neighbourhoods", it relies on the interaction between immigrants and the host society and in the importance of strengthening social relationships as a way to contribute to a more effective integration, removing barriers and promoting cultural diversity.
4. **“Refugiados/Platform for Refugees’ Support” (Portugal):** The Refugee Support Platform (PAR) is a Portuguese network of organizations from civil society whose aim is to support hosting refugees during the current humanitarian crisis.
5. **Frauenloop (Berlin):** The organisation Frauenloop was founded in 2016 specifically with the intent to train and qualify women & women-identified persons (and in particular immigrant/refugee) women for the tech industry.
6. **“Stand 129” (Vienna):** Former vegetable shop (40 sqm + 20 sqm for toilet and storage room) in a small building right in the center of a market site in the 10th district (Favoriten), Vienna. The



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market is known for its cultural diversity and as such, Stand 129 provides room for events and workshops in a transparent and inviting (large windows) manner.

7. Con le mani mi racconto – Talking hand (Italy): project about engaging migrants in hand crafting of clothes, netting and sowing for sharing experiences, esthetic and skills among different cultures.
8. Migrantour Torino: migrants are invited to go around in organized visits to other settled migrants, they are supported to meet each other, share experiences and make contacts.

Question from Italian partner:

Many good practices were presented. Did you find differences in practices used in rural and in urban area so far?

Answer from presenter:

Very good question but I would like to highlight that in Slovenia the most of migrants are located in big cities, such as Ljubljana with 300.000 citizens. Those practices are not representative for the rest of the country but in Novo mesto we try to introduce new relevant practices. Migrantour is the practice existing in Torino and also, in Ljubljana.

Workshop 2: Slovenian practices of inclusion

Mr. Jure Gombac made the second presentation “Inclusion on the local level in Slovenia”. Slovenia has a state laboratory with 2 researchers. Number of migrants in Slovenia is relatively small, comparing with numbers in other EU countries. You can see that we have around 690 refugees in Slovenia, at the moment. We have 3 asylum homes. When you get a status in Slovenia, you move from asylum and switch to private accommodation. So, migrants are scattered all around in Slovenia. Mostly, they choose Ljubljana as capital and Maribor as a second biggest city. They find difficulties in solving complex issues but at the same time those issues are received as disturbing in the life of ordinary, host citizens. These issues are related with work of health department, rights on school and education, finding homes for people, issuing the documents, employment issues, etc. People felt alienated, they experience racist remarks on the street, so we started our actions with organizing **culinary workshops in Maribor**.

There was no intention to make it as traditional event but only for once, in a small kitchens donated by one NGO. They were preparing food and domestic people got an opportunity to learn how to make it. It was “learning by doing” event and at the end we all shared the food was made. On second year the event was made on the **Main Square in Maribor** and much more people joined, becoming more visible for competition in cycling. Mayor was in favor to allow that event on the Main Square and that was fantastic. We learned through these initiatives and borrowed some ideas from Novo mesto. They have organized similar events every year. Also, we learned that migrants experience difficulties when they try to enter the labor market, partly because of language barrier, partly because of employers who demand a driving license. People from Syria are obliged to obtain new driving license which is hard to do without knowing a language. They need translation and official one for passing exams. It is costly, so the Red Cross was contacted and covered costs for one group of people.



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Swimming course for children and adults in Maribor involved 12 refugee children from Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Syria and 8 adults from Eritrea (in coop. with local sport association “Philippines”). Again, this made people more visible, active, more open and friendly. Children learned how to swim. Water has therapeutic effects.

Complex Slovene language courses in Maribor were made two levels: gaining basic literacy and advanced, conversational course (in cooperation with Youth Cultural Centre of Maribor). People had some quality time spent together and learn every-day language.

Support group for women in Maribor, coordinated by licensed psychotherapist and experienced cultural mediator. People ate together, had a coffee and enjoyed together.

Students help learning Slovenian language within regular classes for seven pupils in Maribor (in cooperation with two elementary school in Maribor).

Trip to the seaside: where are we? Who are the people around us? We brought group of people on Slovenian seaside and we raised a lot of question in leisure atmosphere.

Political participation meeting was organized to ask migrants what are we doing wrong and to answer questions they might ask. Vivid discussion was realized showing these questions are also important to be answered and clarified from time to time. Special attention was dedicated to asylum seekers.

Next activity is cooking for guests from a migrants as hosts. Cooking and sharing of food create situations favorable for connecting of people. Kitchen will have different menu every day.

The last thing is **Factory of Rog: Autonomous zone** where people can meet each other to organize various events and it is out of asylum, out of streets, squares, homes, so people are free to behave naturally.

Q&A session:

Question from Italian partner: How do you decide which activity is needed to be organized?

Answer from presenter (Pr):

Unfortunately, these activities are organized but not in systemic way, only if we see the clear need. This creates gaps in activity and let people stacked in such kind of gaps. That experience we share in all activities that have been organized. E.g. need for language courses is recognized but were not planned in an optimal way and with clear defined parameters for successful learning and how to be successfully organized. Another weak point in this lack of system is that skills and diplomas of migrants haven't been recognized so people who are highly educated have difficulties in finding appropriate jobs. People find difficulties in finding apartments and place for living, which is the next issue to be addressed. Slovenian landlords hesitate to rent an apartment to foreigners, which is kind of racism. Part of the problem is illiteracy of migrants which creates difficulties to communicate even in their own language. Another challenge is related to difficulties of children to become integrated in children's environment and couldn't become class member when their advance is blocked.





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Intervention of the Society for the development of the welfare: employment of migrants in NGOs in Novo mesto, Slovenia; Week of Cultures - Best practice presentation

Tina Cigler made a presentation about our experiences in integration area. She highlighted how rarely people understand what integration really means and that this is 2 way process between new comers in the community and the host. They both have to make the adaptation which is the definition of integration. Most of us only understand the first part – the effort of migrants to fit in. But it is equally important for society to make an effort and actively accept migrants.

We need to provide people with information so, our association use to provide a lot of materials like publications, booklets in different issues, postcards, leaflets even DVDs with movie how to live together. We also, provided contests of the best postcard reflecting intercultural cooperation, etc. You can see postcards which are products of such contest. This how we actually sensitize our public.

Also, we organize workshops, roundtables, for example this picture is from high school when we invited people from different cultures such as Albania, Serbia, Roman’s communities, Bosnian, etc. We all had some nice communication where our students actually meet those people, they could have a conversation, ask questions and have first-hand information about their cultures to break their stereotypes and prodigies. So, this is how we provide information.

Then, what we need to do is to associate that information with the good vibe. In effort to gather other cultures at our own doorstep, the festival “The week of culture” was created. Every day a different culture represents itself through music, dance, art exhibitions, street shows, theatre, stand-up comedy, film production and, of course, foods and drinks. Sort of party of cultures. We don’t concentrate on differences as much as on those thing that you can bring to our society: the skills, the know-how, the ideas, the variety of foods, so this festival is win-win-win situation.

First it offers happening in the city center which is very well to our local community. Municipality supports the festival quite generously and it is the wisest thing to do especially if you run the municipality where several different cultures meet.

The second win is that the festival enables members of different cultures to perform their cultural heMs. Ritage, so they make the program and they perform with it.

At the same time the 3rd win is that this conveys the crucial message for future life in Novo mesto and Slovenia in general and the message is that migrations are reality and western societies, we invite migrants and we don’t realize that.

We keep sending out messages how nice is here on our TV programs and we say ‘it’s nice here in our western world, we have fancy houses, fancy cars, fancy nature’ so when people actually decide to come here, they don’t just bring their vital energy, they are coming with a whole package, they don’t come here for 8 working hours a day in our enterprises. They are here 24/7, they live here, they have families here.

Q&A session:

Question from Italian partner (IP):





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Tina, with our project Townlab, we can try to work in this way with art performative. Ms. Rita, if you can show what can we do in our project?

Answer from presenter Ms. Rita:

Two weeks ago, we went to Chiesanuova, we met 12 children age from 3-12 and we did a dance workshop in the front of the mountain because we choose to do it outdoor and on the terrace. We knew from the very first event in Townlab-meet project and they did altogether a kind of feast in open air location with playing and with dance on music. The community of Chiesanuova is very near the families they host and relations are initiated both, by municipality and social & cultural operators.

So, I was very interested in the presentation of Tina because of this very structured organization of volunteers and I think that now, in Italy, it is a little bit more complicate to find volunteers especially, if we think about younger people that could be volunteers in different organizations. But anyway, may be in small town it is possible, I don't know, I ask to analyze the way how to engage volunteers for different kind of activities for inclusive proposals.

Answer from presenter:

I would just like to add a comment about the volunteers. This all was done by professionals. The volunteers helped to some extent being just one part of our colleagues but the programs that we developed are run by professionals, employees of the association.

Ms. Rita:

I would like to understand more about the creative process, thank you.

Mitja Bukovec:

Yes, usually we cooperate with all our target groups and among them, also with migrants. We take the all the way: from the creation of the project till to the implementation of all the activities, they were part of organization as volunteers, they were helping in creation of videos, so they were present in all the phases of the project, more or less.

On second day, 24.9.2020, Townlab-MEET partners and participants meet at 10.30 and started the event at 11.00:

„Slovenia as a part of the Balkan Route: situation, influence, consequences...” presented by Dr. Jure Gombač – the researcher at Slovenian Migration Institute, Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts.

Migration is conceived as a dynamic force with the potential to instigate social transformation processes. »Migration in itself is an articulation of political and social struggles«. No victimization of migrants. Victimized discourse erases migrants capacity to subvert border controls, which in turn enables observers to ignore the fact that »migrants have a will of their own, one that lies outside of the hands of those who wish to help or control them. Today's border regimes follow a rationale of »differential inclusion“. Borders are conceptualized not as the impenetrable walls of Fortress Europe, but as dynamic sites of contestation and negotiation, where migrants' practices and tactics encounter the strategies and devices of control of the nation state (or the EU). With Hungarian migration politics becoming more restrictive, transit groups





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increasingly opted to take a route through Croatia during the spring of 2017. An increase in violence against people-in-transit attempting crossing through Croatia was observed by activists in the field, starting in the spring of 2017. During this time, observation from the field began to indicate a dynamic in which Slovenian authorities cooperated with Croatian authorities to carry out “chain push-backs”. In these instances, Slovenian police hands over apprehended transit groups to Croatian officers who then deport them back to Serbia. Violence, experienced by people-in-transit on Croatian-Serbian border resulted in the new developments. Towards the end of 2017, more and more individuals began opting to take a route through Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to move through Croatia and then Slovenia. The numbers of people-in-transit which have arrived to Bosnia since then has grown rapidly. Throughout 2018, practices of illegal and violent push-backs were observed along the Bosnian-Croatian border.

2020: Pushbacks expand during COVID-19 pandemic: The scope of pushback practices at the EU external border reached a zenith in 2020. One of the key catalysts in these changes has been the response taken by the EU and regional states towards the COVID-19 pandemic. The movement of armed forces into migration management, pushbacks from reception centers and the development of targeted torture like practices within the pandemic period have highlighted lockdown measures were used as a period to stage more aggressive rights suspensions against people-on-the-move.

After Questions and answers „5 Stories - Documentary films presenting different migrant situations“ have been presented to the participants. This opened several related questions and a good discussion.



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„Sharing the experience of the incubator for Roma youngsters“, the presentation made by Ms. Kristina Lovrinovič, Social expert worker at Association for Developing Voluntary Work Novo mesto.

The presenter listed initial goals: develop efficient utilization of Slovene language as the most important element of successful integration; provide learning of different skills; increase their own awareness of their human and other rights and provide help at enforcing them; develop their social and (inter)cultural capital; broaden their social network; promote intercultural dialogue in public spaces.

After implementation of activities of the incubator for Roma youngsters, some of results are achieved: better self-esteem; schools report on children bringing their home works; better social network—having friends among majority population; increased interest among children for schooling (also enrollment into high school); better concentration skills; following etiquette; better public representation (performance on the biggest stage of the central cultural institution in Slovenia).

After this part „POSITION PAPER AND SURVEY“ interventions by Ms. Cinzia Zugolaro and Mr. Roberto Aloï – Sferalab gathered all the partners and the representative proceeded to the Steering committee with the coordination of: Municipality of Chiesanuova (Head partner) and Sferalab (Ms. Cinzia Zugolaro and Mr. Roberto Aloï).