

TAKE ME IN YOUR VILLAGE



EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES WELL-BEING YOUTH
COMMUNITY **COMMUNITY SOCIAL LIFE-LONG LEARNING**
KNOWLEDGE MEMORY INCLUSION LOCAL

1. Context

The project realizes in practice the concept that "culture takes on different forms, responding to dynamic models of relationship between societies and territories". In the local regional cultures are incarnated the informal knowledge, traditions and expressivity of the residents of this territory, created during their daily lives. The villages of the region are barely populated (5 800 residents), exclusively with elderly people and very few young people visit them occasionally.



The consistent trend of aging population, depopulation of villages and permanent lack of young people jeopardises the cultural heritage of the region, the traditional cultural achievements, accumulated in the natural environment of the rural atmosphere, which express shared communal perception of life and world, based on individual creativity. The richness, depth and diversity of this regional cultural heritage are completely unknown to the young generation, which lives entirely in urban settings and communicates predominantly via social media. Without purposeful efforts for affirmation of culture and traditions, these valuable foundations of the identity of the local people, cherished and preserved for centuries are nowadays endangered to sink into oblivion.

THE MAIN GOAL IS TO EXPLORE, PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THE LIVE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE RURAL SETTLEMENTS OF GABROVO, BY TRANSFERRING AND TRANSMITTING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, PRACTICES AS WELL AS UNDERSTANDINGS, PERCEPTIONS, SENSITIVITY FROM THE ELDERLY TO THE YOUNG GENERATION IN AN AUTHENTIC ENVIRONMENT BY DOING AND EXPERIENCING.

2. Gabrovo and culture

Gabrovo Municipality applies the principles and ideas of Agenda 21 for culture through a coordinated variety of cultural activities. The Municipality developed Strategy for culture 2014-2024; accepted and realizes Programme "Culture", applied for European capital of culture in 2014, became a pilot city under the Programme "Pilot cities" in 2014 and a member of the creative cities network UNESCO in 2017. The initiative "Take me in your village" with its goal to preserve and transmit the authentic traditional cultural heritage of the region falls entirely within the scope of the consistently applied policies.



The idea for the project “Take me in your village” belongs to a young girl from Gabrovo, who offered a model by which the existing problem of losing the authentic rural traditions and cultures could be tackled. The idea was first realized in 2013 and has been annually repeated since, expanded each time.

The villages of the Gabrovo region are increasingly depopulated and the few permanent residents live in partial isolation, untouched by the achievements of the technological world. On the other hand, people there are holders of invaluable long-lasting authentic traditions, skills and knowledge, related to their daily life activities, customs, traditions, regional cultures, crafts, rituals, dances, songs etc., that have been passed from generation to generation and which nowadays are endangered of being completely lost and forgotten by the younger generations.

The young people live entirely in urban settings, where the relation with the traditional culture is unattained. This diversion from the cultural heritage, the enclosure in one’s home and the communication exclusively via social media entail profound negative consequences:

- unfamiliarity with the traditional regional customs, produce, cultures, crafts, etc., leading to lost relation between generations, lost regional characteristics;
- diversion from the authentic cultures that have been the foundation of shaping the local identity;
- lack of knowledge for healthy life, leading to increasing immobility, obesity and deteriorated health;
- lack of communicative abilities, desire for participation and inclusion in a group/community, leading to personal isolation, technological dependence, high-consumption, which replace the desire for personal development.

3. Goals and project implementation

1.1. Main aim and specific goals

The main goal is to explore, preserve and promote the live cultural heritage of the rural settlements of Gabrovo, by transferring and transmitting knowledge, skills, practices as well as understandings,



perceptions, sensitivity from the elderly to the young generation in an authentic environment by doing and experiencing.

The project aims through provision of access to culture, the young people to be influenced and their identity to be moulded towards understanding and cherishing the cultural achievements of their own people and active inclusion in preserving and developing them, thus expressing themselves in relation with the others. The process of sharing cultures between generations and nations creates interest to the cultural aspirations of the others and respect to their achievements, active co-existence and contribution to the interculturality of the global world.

THE MUNICIPALITY DEVELOPED STRATEGY FOR CULTURE 2014-2024; ACCEPTED AND REALIZES PROGRAMME “CULTURE”, APPLIED FOR EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE IN 2014, BECAME A PILOT CITY UNDER THE PROGRAMME “PILOT CITIES” IN 2014 AND A MEMBER OF THE CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK UNESCO IN 2017.

Specific goals

- to research the regional traditional characteristics of the people’s daily life in the authentic environment of the local villages;
- to re-focus towards leading active, healthy, natural life, keeping and developing traditions;
- to realize and cherish the belonging to one’s traditions and culture and to search of ways to contribute to the development of the common cultural citizenship;
- to search for creative incentives for continuous building of one’s own identity, while keeping, developing and contributing to the traditional regional cultures and values;
- to realize ones’ responsibility for promoting the accumulated knowledge by the means of the modern technologies, preserving the local uniqueness and identity for the future generations.

1.2. Development of the project

Main actions carried out

The project participants are two main groups: children and young people (**“grandchildren to lend”**) and elderly people (**“grandparents to rent”**). They include: children (9 - 14 years) and young people (15 - 29 years) from the country, from Bulgarian communities and from Gabrovo twin cities and elderly



residents of the villages. The project has its impact upon the general community of Gabrovo region, who are its indirect beneficiaries.

Main actions

- Culinary heritage: the knowledge and skills of home cooking with ecological products; the traditional tastes, foods, meals; the cycle of cooking a meal; the favour of the home made meals of home produced products; making of ritual bread; traditional recipes;
- Folklore traditions: introduction with the folklore songs and dances; local customs and traditions, learning, experiences, enjoying and sharing them; research and gathering of interesting facts of the local daily life, traditions and customs;
- Traditional crafts: learning traditional crafts such as knitting, weaving, forging, making of baskets and souvenirs form natural materials;
- Rural daily life: cultivating of crops and plants, production of ecological and bio produce, processing the products (home-made butter, yogurt, cheese), preserving the produce;
- Natural environment: the specifics of the mountain, its inhabitants and the dangers of the mountain; to move/survive in the open, to make a shelter/offer first aid, the typical relief and natural phenomena (rivulets, lakes, mountain ridges etc.); getting acquainted with the wild herbs, plants, trees, game; preserving the mountain (installing bird feeders, picking mushrooms, plants, herbs properly, so that they still could grow); herbs, used as ointments, remedies and cures; the beneficial effect of the fresh, self-grown products upon human health;
- Cultural and historical artefacts – visits to the local museums, which preserve the historical and cultural heritage of the region and possess rich collections of items, that have been made for centuries by the local people

Phases

The project started in 1 village with 12 participants. The initiative enlarged and developed - the number of the villages and participants is increased A network of villages is established. Participants of various ages are involved. Different organizational variants are provided for the participants - youth groups,



junior groups, daily groups, youth exchanges, etc. Initially the participants were from Gabrovo municipality and later from Bulgaria, Belgium, Russia, Spain, Germany, Great Britain, etc.

Partner entities

The initiative was initially supported entirely by local businesses. Later, Gabrovo Municipality found various financial solutions, i.e. in 2015 - a Erasmus+ project; 2016 – co-financed by TELUS.

Valuable partners of Gabrovo Municipality are the community centers in the villages, where the local traditions, folklore, customs and cultures are kept. They introduce the “grandchildren to lend” with the folklore songs, dances, customs and traditions. Bulgarian citizens, who permanently live abroad, are genuinely interested in the initiative and support its realization, promoting it in the local communities.

STARTED AS A SINGLE INITIATIVE WITH A DOZEN OF PARTICIPANTS, THIS INITIATIVE TURNED INTO AN ANNUAL EVENT SOUGHT AFTER BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE REGION, COUNTRY AND ABROAD, ORGANIZED AND PROMOTED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

4. Impacts

1.1. Direct impacts

The local government

The local government provided initial and following support for the realization of the idea, for its sustainability and continuity. It discerned the project' potential for intervening upon some identified development challenges - jeopardised regional cultures; alienation of the young from the regional culture, that could lead to loosing of idiosyncrasies and blurring of identities; generation gap, leading to life in isolation, inability to communicate, depressions etc. The local government was convinced by



a practical example that alternative, new ways, ideas and approaches are full of potential and should be supported and that the existing situation should be given a new perspective.

Culture and the cultural actors

The realization of this project contributed considerably to the process of exploring and developing the local cultures. Through direct participation and involvement, the personal expressiveness and creativity of the young were provoked and incited under the guidance of the elderly, through their experiences and knowing. Being the main “cultural actors”, both main target groups were influenced by the project realization, benefitting by the provided opportunity to create, invent and discover, to experience and share the abundance of the rural life and the richness of cultural layers, hidden in the secrecy of this, endangered to lapse into oblivion, world.

The city/region and its population

Children/young people

- developed understanding of the culture and desire to contribute to it;
- formed new dispositions for local cultures, traditions, customs, folklore and rural life, acquired knowledge and desire to further explore, search, discover and develop the culture in all its aspects, to preserve, share and eventually transmit it to the future generations;
- built sense of belonging and participation, ability to communicate, co-exist and cooperate, to share, interact and create.

Elderly people

- overcame their sense of isolation by interacting and communicating with the young people;
- acquired understanding that they possess valuable knowledge, important to be kept and transferred;
- became “teachers” and mentors, guided, shared experience and skills in the mutual process of learning and creating;
- participated in a newly formed community, which revived the vibrant rural life and shared it with the young generation; learned the new technological ways of communication.

1.2. Key factors

Approaches of effectiveness

The young:



- direct encounter with the real rural life, impossible to be realized in another way;
- new way of learning – learning-by-doing;
- living in the homes of the elderly people in villages;
- participation of the young in the everyday life activities;

The elderly meets the young and benefit from the interacting: directly, being assisted in the daily life chores and indirectly, understanding the unknown world of this generation and learning to communicate with technologies.

THROUGH DIRECT PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT, THE PERSONAL EXPRESSIVENESS AND CREATIVITY OF THE YOUNG WERE PROVOKED AND INCITED UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE ELDERLY, THROUGH THEIR EXPERIENCES AND KNOWING.

Proves of the effectiveness

- constantly increasing number of the participants, villages, expanding the age limits of participants;
- the local culture being explored, appreciated;
- the personal identity development is contributed with new knowledge and unknown incentives;
- the local cultures are promoted and made popular worldwide (social media sharing);
- Bulgarians, living abroad, recognize this initiative as a means to preserve their national identity and as the only chance available for their children to sense and experience the Bulgarian rural life in its pure form.

1.3. Continuity

Started as a single initiative with a dozen of participants, this initiative turned into an annual event sought after by children and young people from the region, country and abroad, organized and promoted by the local government. The local government has recognized this initiative as a distinctive innovative achievement with a capacity to contribute not only to the local cultures/ people of all ages from the region, but as a means to promote the local cultural achievements worldwide and to contribute with the regional specifics to the world culture. The local authorities even undertook all the efforts necessary, so as this idea to be recognized as a brand, belonging to the city of Gabrovo (the ideas is a registered brand in the Patent institution).

5. Further information

Gabrovo was a candidate for the third "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (November 2017 – May 2018). The jury requested the Committee on Culture to promote this project as one of the good practices, implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

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