

ANALYSIS OF YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL SESSION ON CONFIDENCE – BUILDING

GAMCON YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The aim of the training was to explore topics of trust and confidence on different levels – from personal self-confidence to inter-personal and inter-group relations. It combined individual work, discussions in small and big groups, which supported self-reflection as well as mutual learning. Core topics of the training were identity, community, stereotypes, communication and cooperation, which are central to understanding and enhancing both individual self-confidence and cooperative, trustful attitudes to others.

The training started with introduction of trust as a natural part of our lives, without which many of our everyday activities would not be possible. Trust allows us to build valuable and sustainable relations with others, despite existing differences. At the same time, it is becoming a scarce value in the disinformation age, when we are advised ‘to trust nobody’, what erodes social cohesion and relations.

At the beginning of the training, the participants were invited to graphically present their learning path in Gamcon project and to formulate the most significant learning moments, their visions for the future and potential obstacles on the way. Many highly appreciated study visit in Slovakia as the moment of realising the potential of every community. The participants generally feared lack of time and engaged people around to help them to work for their community. Their vision was mostly to create community of active citizens, to enhance personal engagement of young people in Gagauzia.

The first block was related to understanding of participants’ own identity, culture and community. We started with exploring our values: every participant was asked to draw him/herself and assign values that are most important to him/her. Participants then shared their pictures and learned about the values they have in common, or that differ in the group. We discussed how knowing what we care for might unite us, and how every participant brings something unique to the group.

In the next activity, we explored the multi-dimensionality of our identities through the model of ‘identity star’. We discussed how everyone has multiple identities, which is quite natural in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Gagauzia. We also talked about moments

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when we tend to emphasise particular identities, such as national, religious, etc. and how it strengthens or weakens our bonds with others. In the end, the participants were introduced to the concept of iceberg of identity on which we demonstrated how some dimensions of our identity are visible or invisible, given or acquired, changeable or stable.

The second part of the day moved the focus from the question ‘Who am I, what is my identity?’ to ‘How do I relate to others?’. It consisted of activities that triggered questions about our attitudes towards others, the underlying causes of stereotypes and the ways we can work with them. We also discussed the ‘cultural baggage’ of dominant norms and perspectives that everyone carries. Through activities and videos (Danger of a single story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) we further explored how stereotypes could be harmful to others and limit our mutual understanding.

At the end of the first day, I asked the participants to bring something they are proud of in their community. This was used for the first activity of the second day, when they created ‘the wall of greatness’ and shared what they value about their community. In participants’ perspective, this was related both to Gagauzia and Moldova, its land and natural riches. Looking at the map of Moldova they created, we then explored the ‘map’ of communities where participants live to identify the potential ‘holes of trust’. Interestingly, this included many actors - mainly state institutions (municipality, schools, hospitals, police), but also the media and NGOs. We then discussed how these ‘holes’ could be filled, what solutions the participants could take to solve identified problems. This opened an important debate about the circle of concern (which was rather wide) and circle of influence where participants can actively take action (rather narrow). This point represents a fruitful topic for further trainings – to invite participants to proceed from identification of the problems to drafting creative solutions that can strengthen trust in their communities.

Afterwards, I presented several civic initiatives from Slovakia that aim to reduce stereotypes and build trust towards different communities or minorities, such as homeless people, refugees, or the elderly (homeless porters from Nota Bene, civic association Mareena, Community cooking with foreigners, Soup festival in Kosice, inter-generational festival Old’s cool, etc.).

The afternoon was dedicated to the topic of communication, how we use different strategies to achieve our goals; however, not each of them leads to satisfaction on both

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sides. After trying the ‘orange experiment’, we talked about advantages of pursuing win-win solutions and about active listening as the precondition for understanding not only the positions and interests, but also the needs of others. The participants could then define for themselves the characteristics of a ‘good communicator’ and try active listening in pairs. This served as a personal experience of how listening can be the first step in building trust among people, through connecting and better understanding of one another. This is also important in ‘getting to yes’ – agreeing on common interests in finding solutions for the community.

From the feedback of the participants, they highly appreciated the opportunity to reflect individually, work in pairs and discuss issues that sometimes seem obvious, but that opened new perspectives when given space for deeper reflection. The participants would like to work more on communication issues – how to convey a message to others (who may not share their values, interests or are distrustful to their activities) and how to translate what they learned at the training into their context.

From my perspective, these are also the key areas that deserve attention in follow-up trainings: effective communication; building agreement and trust between people with different positions; developing potential of every participant to bring more trust in their communities through personal empowerment; drafting proposals for trust-building activities.

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