

CASE STUDY:

Youth Summer Camp with DigiPAC in Samokov, Bulgaria



Transforming young people into future active and responsible citizens





Executive summary

[HESED](#) implemented pilot activity “Youth Summer Camp” using DigiPAC methodology in Samokov, Bulgaria in June 2022 in partnership with a local youth organization. The goal of this piloting action was to transform young people into future active and responsible citizens.

The participants were a mixed group of 28 Roma and Bulgarian young people, aged between 14 and 17 years of age, from secondary schools from the municipality of Samokov. During the three days of the youth camp, the participants were involved in activities that encouraged youth participation and were familiar with the topics of active citizenship and participation in digital spaces. For this purpose, DigiPAC methodology developed by the nexus Institute was actively used. In addition to the topics of fake news, personal experiences with social media, and rights and responsibilities online, young people worked together during the training on the issues of discrimination, hate speech, ethnic tolerance, democratic and civic principles and cultural diversity.

During the youth camp, the participants offered youth-lead ideas for small projects on important topics related to improving youth participation in the region.

Case study

The youth camp in Samokov was attended by a mixed group of 28 local young people (Bulgarian and Roma). The idea of this youth camp was based on the identified challenge of HESED that local young people who do not know each other, or if they do, do not belong to common friend-groups. The work carried out with local young people aimed:

- to promote digital citizenship among young people
- to promote ethnic tolerance and cultural diversity

What the young people have in common is: their age, that they attend school, that they spend much of their time online, the place where they live (they know the specifics of the city), and that they all live in a democratic society. Young people, as citizens of a democratic society, need to know their rights and responsibilities online and offline. By knowing them and caring for them, they create a secure and safe environment for themselves and others. Thus, they promote positive ethnic tolerance and cultural diversity that will make them active and responsible citizens.

Outcomes, impact and sustainability

During the youth camp, the participants offered youth-led ideas for small projects on important topics related to improving youth participation in Samokov. The following project ideas were given and adopted during the youth camp:

- Improving the awareness of high school graduates about opportunities for continuing education at universities in Bulgaria and abroad
- Increasing the sensitivity of young people to children with autism / with special educational needs
- Creating a youth platform for culture – an online site presenting cultural events in the city





Currently/Ongoing: HESED has a close collaboration with the local administration from the Municipality of Samokov and plans to include youth initiatives in the Roma integration strategy.

Trainers' experiences using DigiPAC

Some of the young people that participated in a youth camp had no previous experience related to non-formal activities. With their participation in each subsequent activity, they began feeling more confident each day of the training. They expressed their opinions more confidently and participated more actively in discussions and exercises. Their feedback became more detailed and informative. They used their newly gained knowledge and made references from one activity to another.

The first day it was noticeable that the young people, who were taken out of their daily routine, were exploring the new environment in which they found themselves. However, this did not have a strong impact on their participation. They adapted quickly and there was no resistance to participating in any activity/exercise or discussion. They enjoyed working independently in small groups and then introducing their results to the larger group. Structured in this way, the exercises positively influenced their activity, both in the process of practical work and in the presentations and discussions.

From dynamic point of view, a pleasant surprise was in their efforts to distribute responsibilities by working in small groups and assigning roles so that each participant could feel comfortable and safe to participate. Additionally, the desire of some of the young people to create a positive atmosphere in which the more anxious participants could express themselves and participate equally. These efforts were made mostly to comfort the Roma girls who demonstrated an uncomfortable feeling for participating in group format due to a lack of previous experience and public-speaking skills.

A pleasant surprise was also the desire and willingness of young people to continue their participation and to work for their community as well as the development of youth-run projects and their willingness to contribute as volunteers. The outcomes of the training showed that the young people were not as rigid and indifferent to social processes as one would expect and that on the contrary, if there is adequate help and favourable conditions for participation, young people could be generators of valuable ideas and game-changers in their communities.

The topics that the young people chose for their projects clearly showed that they function through democratic values – empathy and care for those less fortunate, development of specific skills and competences, mutual assistance, distinguishing good will from malice.

A big advantage of the programme is that it could be provided as a whole training but also it could be provided as separate modules according to the needs of the specific group that is involved.

Competences acquired by young people

- Knowledge of which behaviour is acceptable and unacceptable in the online space - Netiquette
- Basic concepts related to media literacy – discrimination, hate speech
- Sensitizing the concepts of democracy, rights, responsibility
- Building social skills – communication, self-presentation, teamwork, active listening





- Promotion of cooperation
- Understanding human rights and children's rights
- Identifying false information and taking concrete action against fake news
- What is child and youth participation?
- Active participation in the community
- Introduction to the O.P.I.N platform
- The F.I.R.E. application

3 domains of digital competences were promoted for young people to act out democracy in the digital world by conveying both civic education and digital competences. In doing so, this enabled and empowered young people to become active **digital citizens the following topics that were covered:**

- **“Being Online”** includes domains that relate to competences needed to access digital society and freely express oneself
- **“Wellbeing Online”** refers to domains that can help the user to feel safe and engage positively in digital society
- **“It is my right!”** includes competences related to the rights and responsibilities of citizens in complex, diverse societies in a digital context.

Young people’s experiences

To present the experience of the young people, we made short interviews and produced video material. The videos are available in Bulgarian ([Video 1](#) and [Video 2](#)) and quotes from the interviews with three young people are available in English below:

Interview 1: *“The third day the lecture was very interesting and so were the exercises. The discussions and exercises we did are useful for everyday life. I liked the lectures very much, but it gave me pleasure to participate, because it is not like in school – to learn my lesson, then to go in class – to tell what you have learnt and everything to continue as before. Here we participate in the process itself and we do not learn by reading, but by doing. In fact, we are doing an exercise from which we draw conclusions, this is a much more effective way in my opinion of learning, and I think that not only for me but for others this method really worked.*

We studied a lot of different things, but the things that are not taught in school are things related to democracy. Since we live in a democratic state, I think it is imperative that young people know what democracy is, what it is made of, how it moves. In general, this is one thing, in my opinion, that gives us freedom, and it is a bit embarrassing that many people do not know what freedom they possess, besides we have obligations as citizens and obligations work in our favour. Some people my age do not know what democracy is, which is sad because we are approaching our coming of age and soon we will have right to vote and make decisions as citizens.





I've learned that a social environment can show different perspectives, and every perspective is important."

Interview 2: *"I think that everything I learned in the training will be useful someday on some occasion. For example, how to deal with violence online, i.e., if someone is trying to abuse me online - to know how to react and what to do or if I see that someone is also bullying somebody else -to know how to react in order to help him."*

Interview 3: *"All the things in general are quite useful because they are related to us as citizens, as individuals, but maybe the thing I will really use is how to deal with fake news. We live in a world where social networks are inevitable and they are quite a huge distributor of both news and fake news, so I'm very glad that I learned how to sift them out."*

