

PARTNERS ALBANIA FOR CHANGE
AND DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH ON
SOLIDARITY
AMONG
YOUNG
PEOPLE IN
ALBANIA

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Introduction

The project «Celebrating Solidarity» aims to explore the variety of turbulent times the countries and their citizens were/are facing, while celebrating and understanding the importance of solidarity and love to other human being in a word of conflicts and disasters. Moreover, this project will also take a look back at the European history and great examples of solidarity between people and nations, as a road map for future generations. In addition the project aims:

1. To improve conditions for direct civic and inter-cultural participation of citizens.
2. To explore solidarity on a transnational level, in different occasions and times, with focus on intergenerational solidarity.
3. To contribute to better understanding and discuss the value of solidarity in different times of crises, from a national point of view.
4. To promote and advance solidarity within societies and on EU level.

This is particularly important when it comes to youth and their perception of solidarity. This project aims to give to young citizens the opportunity to better understand solidarity through exchange of experience with elderly citizens, while fostering a mutual understanding of the past situations, and by creating common solutions for future challenges.

In Albania, there is a lack of studies in the field of solidarity, even though Albanians are recognized as generous and tolerant people.

To further investigate the perceptions and attitudes of young people on the subject of solidarity, Partners Albania conducted two focus groups discussions (FGD) in Vlora and Tirana. The aim of focus group discussions was not only to measure the perception of young people on solidarity, but also to track the existence of solidarity in Albania. Below in this report, will be presented the research methodology, the results of the focus group discussions and in the end the main conclusions of the research.

Methodology

To further the solidarity among young people was used a qualitative methodology. Partners Albania applied focus group discussions. Focus group is a form of group interviewing, but it is important to distinguish it from the interview method. Group interviewing involves interviewing a number of people at the same time, the emphasis being on questions and responses between the researcher and participants. Focus groups however rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher¹. Since the main purpose of the research was to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions on the subject, focus group was chosen as the proper research method.

Two focus groups were conducted in Vlora and Tirana with young people living in these cities. One focus group was composed by 5 youngsters (3 females and two males) from age 15 to 20 years old. The other focus group was composed by 8 youngsters (equally represented related to gender) from 21 to 30 years old. This division was necessary in order to detach the younger participants who are still attending high school or have just started college and the elderly who are already in tertiary education or work.

Both focus groups were conducted in compliance with the rules of confidentiality. The aim of the research was to gather different opinions by youngest, and to raise awareness among them on the theme of solidarity.

The main research questions were:

- Perception of participants on the topic of Solidarity.
- Existence of Solidarity in Albania.
- Activism: Social engagement, volunteerism.

However, it should be noted that this research method has its limitations. Firstly, the findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative analyses can. Secondly, the extent of subjectivity² is another limitation of qualitative methodology.

¹ Morgan D.L. (1997, 2nd Edition) *Focus groups as qualitative research*. London: Sage.

² Atieno P.O (2009) An analyses of the strengths and limitation of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms.

Research Findings

Solidarity, as a term represents mutual assistance and responsibility in moments of crisis. So, it encompasses crisis, responsibility, empathy and active support. In that way, the research itself focused on topics such as crisis, poverty, empathy for vulnerable groups and various forms of activism. The main questions used for the FGD were:

- How do the participants define and perceive poverty?
- Which groups could be considered as poor?
- Do they have stories of helping other people and showing solidarity?
- How do they or their peers perceive solidarity?
- Which are some examples of solidarity in crisis?
- Which is the trend of solidarity in Albania and how could be stimulated?
- Are there any differences between the girls and the boys regarding helping someone?
- What do they think about humanitarian actions and activism in Albania and have they been engaged?

Poverty

Firstly, poverty is a common phenomenon in developing countries and people relate solidarity with poverty. Thus, the participant were asked about their perception on poverty, which groups do they consider as poor and how do they distinguish them.

What is poverty in your opinion?	
15-20 years old	21-30 years old
<i>Poverty is the impossibility to fulfill the basic needs for daily living.</i>	<i>It is a relative concept, related with the lack of basic conditions such as: food and housing for securing the minimum of living.</i>
<i>Poverty is not related only to economical conditions, but exists also the spiritual and intellectual poverty.</i>	<i>Poverty varies from rural to urban areas. From my experience, youngsters in different areas have a different perception for poverty.</i>

Focus groups have pointed out different aspects of understanding the poverty. Firstly, both groups associated poverty with lack of money and impossibility to fulfill their basic needs such as food and housing. So, the first point of view was related to the economic conditions, but both groups emphasized that poverty is very interrelated with the lack of education and knowledge, as one of the main reasons that causes poverty. The younger group mentioned also the intellectual and spiritual poverty, which is associated not only with lack of information and knowledge, but also with lack of willingness to help others. The older group highlighted that poverty is a relative concept, which varies from rural to urban places and as a consequence, the standard of living is different. During the discussion, it was stressed that an official minimum cost of living lacks in Albania, one of the reasons which jeopardizes the understanding of poverty.

Vulnerable groups

In order to have a better understanding of which groups the young people can feel the solidarity with, Partners Albania examined which groups they recognize as particularly exposed to the poverty and that need help.

<u>Which groups would you single out as poor?</u>	
<i>15-20 years old</i>	<i>21-30 years old</i>
<i>Roma and Egyptian community; Ethnic minorities; People with disabilities; illiterate people; homeless people; people living in informal areas</i>	<i>Students; homeless people; people with disabilities; people that live under the poverty line (4 or 5 \$ per day)</i>

Participants of the older group started the discussion pointing out students as one of the vulnerable groups, since they are still attending the education. Thus, they went more in depth explaining that people, whose living cost goes up to 5\$ are considered as poor, according to the latest studies and data. Meanwhile, the younger group singled out Roma & Egyptian community and ethnic minorities, as vulnerable groups that are more prone to be poor. They explained that minorities are more likely to be discriminated, which leaves room for stereotypes and as a consequence diminishes their opportunities in the labor market. Another group distinguished by them was illiterate people, in particular youngsters, who have high potential to become poor. One of them underlined the fact that some youngsters are victims of prejudices, particularly in

rural areas and do not have the chance to attend the school. Both groups mentioned that people living in rural or informal areas are more likely to be poor. Also, homeless people and people with disabilities were distinguished as vulnerable groups inextricably linked with poverty.

On the other hand, the participants were asked about the vulnerable groups they are more prone to feel solidarity with. The older group explained that the public in general is more sensitive and prone to help people living in poverty. Although, they expressed unanimously the solidarity for violated women, since they are a significant community in Albania. Moreover, they state that poor people should not be helped only with financial aid, but also with information, know how, in order to find a job or occupation, which would help them to move out of poverty risk. This is perceived as longterm and more valuable support. The younger group mentioned the willingness to help more Roma people and people with disability. In particular, they would like to help more uneducated people and ex-prisoners, because they face many challenges to integrate in the society and labor market.

The term solidarity

Since the solidarity was the main subject of the focus group discussions, the participants were asked directly about their opinion on solidarity, where they have heard and learned about it.

<u>What is solidarity?</u>	
15-20 years old	21-30 years old
<i>Solidarity is financial and spiritual support – to help someone in need according to your possibilities.</i>	<i>Solidarity means being human, helping others not only with financial assistance, but also with moral support</i>
<i>Solidarity means inclusiveness – sharing responsibilities and mutual interest with others.</i>	<i>Solidarity means also understanding other’s emotional pain.</i>
	<i>Solidarity means being active empathic.</i>

The term “SOLIDARITY” is an association for assistance, support, generosity, understanding other pain, being empathic. The participants distinguish very clearly the fact that solidarity is not only helping people in need with financial and in kind support but also through emotional support. The younger group stated that people, who have experienced at least once economic

problems are those who donate or support mostly. On the other hand, the older group explained that generosity is a human feature, even though not everyone has it. People are more likely to help or feel solidarity with congenial people such as member of their close community/country, people of the same race, or religion than people who live in another continent. The reason why is that you can understand better people that live under the same conditions as you. One of the participants mentioned that if you are less tolerant you feel also less solidarity about others, arguing that people, who are open minded are more generous.

Furthermore, younger groups stated that they have heard the term “solidarity” firstly in their families, TV and in school. Meanwhile, the older group declared that parents and family was the first place, where they have heard about generosity and solidarity. Others mentioned school, in particular one participant told a short story in primary school, where together with his friends collected money and helped a friend, who was sick and in risk of life. Another participant mentioned voluntary work as a place, where she learned about solidarity, through supporting causes and people.

Activism and helping others

Participants of two focus groups discussed about real stories, in which they were involved and helped other people.

<u>Have you ever helped someone, who is in a difficult position?</u>	
15-20 years old	21-30 years old
<i>Pupils that cannot buy books.</i>	<i>I helped a very skilfull guy from the rural areas to find a job in capital city and now he is a project coordinator.</i>
<i>I have helped with my school uniforms other pupils.</i>	<i>I have supported with clothing and food children in orphanage and elder people of elderly house.</i>
<i>Me and my family have given food and clothing to our neighbors during the floods.</i>	<i>I work as volunteer and always visit the school of disabled children and try to cheer them up and to play with them.</i>
<i>We have helped a family in Italy during the</i>	<i>We made a surprise to the children of</i>

<i>earthquake.</i>	<i>pediatrics department in the hospital during New Year's Eve.</i>
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All participants in one way or another have helped others. Some of them have given money, clothing, books, school supplies to people in need. The younger groups said that they have helped their neighbors with materials and clothing during the floods in Vlora. Furthermore, they also mentioned their help and contribution even in other countries. Specifically, they supported with money a family in Italy close to their relatives in Italy during the earthquakes.

Meantime, the older group had more experiences of solidarity. They have contributed to the elderly house and orphanage with food and clothing. Also, their experiences varied from the school of disabled children to supporting youngsters to find a job. They had contributed not only in material sense, but also through spending time with disabled or sick children in hospital. Also was emphasized that support with free trainings, information and knowledge is more valuable than financial support.

One of the questions raised among the older group was to make or not these solidarity cases public. Some of them agreed on making these examples public, so other people can be informed and can be encouraged to do the same. Instead, the other part opposed with the argument that charity is very personal and should not be published in social media, because there are many people that abuse with such causes.

Crisis

In order to examine the notion of solidarity, it was necessary to comprehend how young people understand crisis. Focus groups pointed out various aspects of understanding the crisis among participants.

<u>What is crisis in your opinion?</u>	
15-20 years old	21-30 years old
<i>Crisis are related to natural disasters.</i>	<i>Crisis are massive situations of emergencies, or natural disasters.</i>

Both groups associated crisis with natural disasters such as: floods, earthquakes, tornados etc. Furthermore, the older group described crises also as situations of emergencies such as: civil wars, financial crisis etc. Participants of older group have linked crisis to "our country". They particularly mentioned some crisis that have happened in Albania: the influx of refugees of Kosova in Albania, the civil war of 97', floods in several countries in Albania. Each of the participants with his/her family had an experience of solidarity helping neighbors with food, clothing or through sheltering refugees. One of the participants was involved in a volunteer initiative to help Syrian refugees that were located in the cross border with Macedonia. One participant mentioned also as a solidarity action the protest against anti-chemical weapons. But, others clarified and detached this action, defining it as a citizen activism not as solidarity action.

Invitations for humanitarian action

Both groups showed that awareness using social media has become of greater importance recently. Many causes are published and people have contributed mainly with money. The humanitarian actions have been successful mainly in situations of emergencies such as floods these recent years. Some of the participants of the older group stated that publication of humanitarian actions are necessary in order to inform people, but sometimes people exaggerate and abuse for marketing purposes.

Existence of Solidarity in Albania

A part of the discussion focused on the existence of solidarity recently in Albania.

<u>What do you think about the existence of solidarity in Albania?</u>	
15-20 years old	21-30 years old
<i>When the causes are public, youngsters tend to mobilize and to help others. Solidarity exists, but is just issue of informing.</i>	<i>People are becoming more selfish and the solidarity is fading, mainly in urban areas and among youngsters.</i>
	<i>Recently, youngsters are less involved in volutarism.</i>

Participants in both groups find solidarity in Albania more prevalent when comparing it with other countries. However, when comparing with the past, the participants think that people have become more individualist and feel less solidarity. In the past people inherited the sensitivity towards others and equality because of the communist regimn, meanwhile among new generations solidarity has changed. This phenomenon deppens even more in urban areas, where there is less solidarity than in rural areas. According to them, this happens due to a different lifestyle, thus individuals in larger cities are more ambitious and worry less about other's problems around. In contrast, in small towns people in the community are more generous, hospitable with each other. One of the participants was working as volunteer at Red Cross Foundation. Based on his experience, recently youngsters are less involved as volunteers. On the other hand, some participants did not agree and stated that the reason why youngsters do not commit in such causes is lack of information. They justified with some examples such as: a huge accident, where people mobilized to donate blood for 20 girls that were injured or floods in Shkodra and Vlora. Also there many initiatives undertaken by youngsters and a successful example is „A different weekend“. This initiative is led by young people, who identify poor families, collect food and clothing and every weekend they provide food and clothing to these families. Another fact mentioned by all the participants is that poor people in Albania are those, who mostly feel solidarity and help others.

Solidarity related to Gender

In order to investigate further in the issue of solidarity, both groups were asked whether there are gender differences on this topic. Moreover, they were asked if they would help a boy or a girl in a difficult position.

<u>Who do you think would be the first to help to a person in a difficult position, a boy or a girl?</u>	
15-20 years old	21-30 years old
<i>Girls are more generous and feel more solidarity than boys.</i>	<i>It is the same. They are equal and have the same right.</i>
<i>I would help a boy, because boys are more grateful.</i>	<i>The person, who has the most immediate need.</i>
<i>If we are in such a dilemma, we would help girls.</i>	<i>We solidarize with the people of the same gender as us, because we are more likely to understand them.</i>

There are obvious differences in the perception of solidarity related to gender regarding two focus groups. The younger focus group was divided mainly in two opposing opinions. Boys expressed that would like to help girls, because they are more grateful than boys, instead girls would like to help boys for the same reason. All argued that girls are more sensitive than boys and they feel more solidarity in general. The older group explained that the choice would not depend on gender. They would help the one with the most immediate need. One of the participants insisted on the fact that people are more likely to help and feel solidarity for people of the same gender.

Improvement of Solidarity

„The awareness should be increased among families, which is the first institution, where a child can learn solidarity“.

„The primary education should be rearranged toward topics such as solidarity, since school is the place where children could transform into decent citizens“.

The older group was able to give some suggestions regarding the improvement of solidarity among people, but in particular among youngsters. There were two different approaches in the group: top-down change and bottom-up change. Firstly, some participants stated that the improvement should come from policies and the education system. They argued that if the policy makers become more responsible, accountable, ethic, sensitive, they will stimulate a positive effect of solidarity in the community. Furthermore, since the children nowadays spend much time in school, it is the education system that has the most important role. Until the third grade of primary school, education system should be focused more on topics such as solidarity, generosity, citizenship than classical subject such as: math, physics and biology. Meantime, others explained that policy makers can not impose solidarity, because it is the family, which engraves values like solidarity. They pointed out that the family should teach the basic values and lead youngsters to the right direction. But others opposed this approach arguing that there are also not decent families, so children should be led towards values like solidarity by society, friends and school.

Conclusions

Firstly, the participants associated the term of „solidarity“ with generosity, empathy, financial and moral support to people in need. Solidarity is perceived also as understanding somebody's emotional pain. Young people stated that they have heard about solidarity in their families, school and TV. Other youngsters have understood solidarity when they have worked as volunteers. According to some participants, people are more likely to help or feel solidarity with congenial people such as member of their close community/country, people of the same race, or religion than people who live in another continent. They argued that it is easier to understand people that live under the same conditions or have similar characteristics. Young people associate solidarity with poverty and crisis. All of them had at least one experience of solidarity with the victims of crisis such as: floods, civil war of 97', influx of Kosovar refugees. Youngsters identified several vulnerable groups, with whom the community feels more solidarity. In general, the community is more prone to feel solidarity with poor people. Although, the participants would like to help violated women, uneducated people or ex prisoners. These groups do not need only financial support, but also information, knowledge to integrate in the labor market.

Regarding the existence of solidarity in Albania, in general youth declared that the value of solidarity is fading comparing with the past. They argue that people are becoming selfish and individualist, due to the neoliberal system. This change is evidenced among generations, because youngsters are becoming impervious. Some of the participants that work as volunteers in organizations such as: Red Cross have noticed that recently youngsters are less involved as volunteers. Nevertheless, a part of the group opposed this argument mentioning that there are some solidarity initiatives undertaken by youngsters in Albania. Also, they stressed the fact that solidarity among people differs from urban to rural areas. Since the community is smaller in rural areas, people are more generous, hospitable and feel more solidarity with each other than in large cities.

In terms of activism and help, all the participants have donated or have had experiences of solidarity. They have contributed with financial, material support (food, clothing, school supplies), but also with information to find a job. Many of them had experiences in orphanage,

elderly house, school of disabled children, where beside financial support they have organized games to distract them from routine. There were different opinions regarding the publication of humanitarian actions in social media. A part of them declared that making these actions public contributes to inform people and in the same time to increase their involvement in such initiatives. But, some of the participants were sceptical, because in some cases people abuse for marketing purposes.

Meanwhile, youngsters gave some recommendations on how to improve the approach of solidarity in Albania. A part of them said that should be enhanced the awareness among families, because family is the primary institution where people form the personality and learn the basic values. Others argued that state should be an important actor drafting policies or making changes in the education system. A concrete recommendation was that until the third grade of primary education, children should learn more topics such as: solidarity, generosity, citizenship than classical subjects. They highlighted school for the important role it should have to improve solidarity approach particularly among young people.

It is necessary to underline the fact that among two different focus groups there were differences. The older group gave more detailed and comprehensive opinions and arguments based on their larger experience. Thus, the perception on solidarity and its components changed between two groups.