Solidarity among youth in Poland

Focus group report

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About

RadioKit Foundation is acting as a local partner in Poland on the project "Celebrating Solidarity" supported by"Europe for Citizens" grant. The aim of the project is to promote European values and evoke the ideas of solidarity in the times of crisis. Within this project the Foundation has undertaken the task of conducting a focus group discussion in order to understand how youth in Poland sees topics of solidarity. In addition, the project aims to:

1. To advocate and promote direct civic and inter-cultural participation of citizens,
2. To explore and document stories of solidarity in 5 European countries, creating the basis for the online "Museum of Solidarity",
3. To clarify how locals define solidarity in different times of crises
4. To promote solidarity worldwide through "Museum of Solidarity".

The term Solidarity is deeply embedded in the minds of Polish people due to the recent historical developments and the role of Solidarity movement in the country's transition from Communist to Democratic state. Polish society is predominantly monocultural but proud of its tolerant nature and historical values which makes it keen on multiculturalism in its very nature[1]. In some recent research, general population in Poland is increasingly becoming more tolerant to culturally diverse community[2]. However, the recent development on the geopolitical scene in Europe and the rise of the "European right" due to the increased number of refugees from the middle east affected Poland as well. A slight drop in the level of tolerance towards people of Arab descent was seen in the CBOS research.

To understand how young people percept and communicate about this subject the RadioKit Foundation has organized two focus group discussions. The goal of the discussions was to raise the levels of awareness about the different types of solidarity and its place in modern day Poland. Within this report findings, results and research methods will be presented.

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[1] EUI (2012). Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Poland and Its Limitations, prepared by MICHAŁ BUCHOWSKI & KATARZYNA CHLEWIŃSKA
[2] CBOS (2016). Stosunek do innych narodów, prepared by Małgorzata OMYŁA-RUDZKA

Methodology of research

In order to understand solidarity among young people in their countries, project partners used qualitative methodology research by conducting two focus group discussions (FGD). This method was used because it allows for participants to engage into a discussion which was considered positive due to the wide understanding of the topic. These types of research methods do not provide hard data such as statistical values but provide insight into eventual roots of the issues as well as potential socio-economic links within participants explanations. In a way one can claim that this method allows for the most of the thinking patterns to be revealed and thus expose participants and moderator to different opinions.

The FGDs were conducted in Krakow with participants who were young people who are currently living, studying or working in the city. Two groups were formed, one with participants from the age of 15 to the age of 20, and the other with participants from 21 to 30 years old. The division of two groups was agreed by all the partners and seemed logical in order to divide the younger group from high school from the older group who are dealing with more stressful lives and have developed fully their personalities. Both female and male participants were equally represented in the FGDs and both groups were balanced by the age of participants. Both focus groups were conducted in accordance with the rules of anonymity to protect the identity of all FGD participants.

Topics of the discussions were respectively:

- Understanding of solidarity
- Solidarity in Poland
- Solidarity and activism

Solidarity among Youth in Poland - Research Findings

Solidarity as a term in Poland is quite closely connected to the recent political history of the country. In order to avoid the confusion and biased opinions the research started by defining the idea of solidarity among the participants and building the discussion from there. Topics of crisis, poverty and vulnerable groups were covered in the first part of the discussion while in the second part, participants talked about their views on the topics of solidarity and activism, education and state.

Crisis

In discussion about the crisis, participants of the both groups showed different understanding of the term and pointed to various types of crisis. The younger group connected the term to wars and natural catastrophes, while the older group involved business and economy related crisis in the discussion as well. Both groups mentioned migrant crisis as the most recent example. On the personal level, crisis was mostly connected to mental health and medical issues related to use of substances, tobacco and alcohol. Younger group discussed crisis on the personal level mostly in relation to school and family, while older group had a bit wider understanding of the term and discussed the community crisis as well as crisis due to professional problems.

What is crisis for you?	
younger group	*older group*
"Having issues with learning in school and being depressed about it is a form of crisis." *"...earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters."*	*"Having no money is a crisis"* *"Crisis is an emergency state in which lives of many people are endangered."*

In analyzing the interviews and collected data, a different ways of comprehension of the term solidarity were outlined in two groups. Understanding of the term among the younger group could be observed as personal dissatisfaction with the current situation, something that is beyond their influence. The older group however, recognized the term rather as a continuous problem caused by systematic failures and something that demands efforts of the entire community in solving. The differences of the opinions were not specific to the groups nor did the single group

had the majority of the certain opinion but the patterns of thought of the younger group could be recognized among some younger participants of the older group and vice versa.

Poverty

After finishing with the topic of crisis the moderator started the discussion on the poverty in order to understand what is the view of the participants about the topic. Both groups focused on economic poverty, but there were some ideas in the older group about the cultural poverty in smaller towns and in the village areas.

What is poverty in your opinion?	
younger group	*older group*
"Being hungry and walking in raggedy clothes." *"If you live on the street you are poor."*	*"When there is nothing happening in your Town, the Town is culturally poor"* *"Poor is someone who is not able to provide economic security for his family."*

Vulnerable groups

After defining the terms of the first two topics, moderator moved the discussion on to the topic of vulnerable groups. This allowed the moderator to see how both groups understand the victims of crisis and poverty and how do they relate to them. What is their stance on the solidarity with vulnerable groups and to what extent.

Which groups would you single out as poor?	
younger group	*older group*
"Families who live in the rural and undeveloped parts of the world"	*"People with lack of education who work hard labour jobs such as factory workers"*

Somehow both groups recognized lack of education and poor infrastructure development as the main cause of poverty and connected the vulnerable groups to geographically underdeveloped regions of the world. In the older group one participant noticed that people who are employed as hard labour, such as factory workers tend to be dominant among the vulnerable groups. Education in both cases was seen as a solution of the issue and the importance of government and community involvement in providing education to everyone was a focal point in discussion.

However, there seemed to be more enthusiasm on the topic among the younger group. The impression is that the youth spirit they still possess encourages them to take action. The older group was more focused on the community as the driving force of change and did not rely much on the actions of the government.

The term solidarity

Given the local connotation of the word due to the recent political history, the term Solidarity and its meaning was researched in order to understand its relevance among youth today.

What is solidarity?	
younger group	*older group*
"Helping people in need." *"Knowing how someone feels and doing something about it to help them feel better"*	*"Understanding the situation in which someone needs assistance of any kind so they can overcome some issues or problems and acting on it."* *"Working together to achieve something better for everyone"*

Understanding, knowing when to act and helping others is how participants of the both focus groups would describe and summarize term Solidarity. Three main areas of solidarity would to some extent appear in both groups and were discussed by the participants: Physical help, Emotional help and Material help.

Younger group seemed more interested in the emotional and physical help as it seemed that they could have a clearer vision of the goal achieved through these means. In this group the participants were very keen on immediate actions while the older group focused the discussion on the topic of joint action. They would outline strategy as important factor in helping others. It could be understood that the older group focused on longer term solutions while the younger group expressed affection to immediate action.

Humanitarian actions

Further discussion wanted to understand youth's view of the current humanitarian actions.

What humanitarian actions you know?	
younger group	*older group*
"Caritas, Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy, Unicef, Red Cross"	*"There is this great action in Africa called Farm Radio"*

Many participants were able to name most the biggest humanitarian organizations that are active in the whole world and are familiar with their actions or material. Several participants within the older group noted that they are familiar with some interesting initiatives around the world for whom's actions they found out through the internet. Both groups recognized calls for helping, sick, children and poor as the most dominant on the national level.

Activism and helping others

Discussion started about the involvement of participants in activism and helping others to understand the scale of active solidarity among youth.

How do you help?	
younger group	*older group*
"We always give clothes we don't use anymore." *"Me and my brother give money to Szlachetna Paczka"* *"My whole family participate in Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy every year"* *"I am a volunteer in animal shelter"*	*"I helped in production of the Polish video game."* *"You can now set up a monthly amount and it will automatically transfer the money to the account of organization you support."* *"I help with coordination the local branch of Szlachetna paczka"*

Each of the participants of both groups participated at least in one activity in order to help someone. Most of them donated money and material goods to charities, popular form of activity in Poland is also volunteering in animal shelter. A smaller group of them helped in organizing smaller community actions (e.g. Szlachetna Paczka is an national action of preparing Christmas gifts for the poorest families) and volunteered for humanitarian causes. The change in the

banking systems and ability to donate money via internet and phone was praised as a big technological change that would allow for better results in the future. Also, some of the participants mention helping creative industry small entrepreneurs on platforms such as Polakpotrafi.pl (Polish version of Kickstarter). Sharing content on social networks was recognized as a form of action as well, but was considered ineffective by the older group, while younger group had no negative comments of this action.

Solidarity and Education

In order to comprehend youth's opinion about the importance of solidarity topics in education this topic was net in the discussion.

Should solidarity be taught in schools?	
younger group	*older group*
"Teachers could organize us kids and we could go and help someone together."	*"Gamified learning is the new thing, there could be an app for that."*

Both groups were unanimous about the importance of education and considered introducing solidarity topics among younger generations in lower grades of primary school beneficial for the whole society. However, they pointed out the necessity in alternative forms of education and gamification of learning as new models that drive the students to investigate further the topics they find interesting.

Solidarity and the State

Participants then moved to the topic of solidarity and the state in order to understand how youth sees the involvement of state in the issue.

What should the government do?	
younger group	*older group*
"Build more hospitals, invest in education"	*"Open more funds for organizations that are dealing with this issues"*

In the both groups a clear message was that the state needs to invest more in the education and

infrastructure as well as open up more funds for NGO sector that is dealing with this issues. However, in both groups a slightly negative attitude was shown towards the idea that the government will undertake any of these actions in the recent future.

Conclusion

Both younger and older group showed sufficient understanding of the term solidarity and interest in the discussion on the related topics. The concept of solidarity is connected to positive experience and often associated with traditionally good values. General attitude of helping those in need was that "it is the human thing to do". Both groups singled areas with undereducated population and undeveloped infrastructure as poor and recognized lack of education as the root of the problem.

New technologies and the use of internet in education was discussed by the participants which sparked ideas about new models of gamified education. Most of the participants agreed that new models of education could significantly improve educational system and spread good ideas in general public. Education is highly valued among the older participants and both groups recognize the lack of it as a cause of prejudice, poverty and crisis in the society. General opinion about the education level in the country is positive with some slightly more negative attitude among the older group. Investment in culture and its decentralization is considered as another positive method of solving some of the issues discussed such is poverty.

Government involvement in solving issues is agreed as necessary, however it is not expected and citizen, community and NGO actions are seen as more effective in solving problems.