



RESEARCH ON SOLIDARITY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA

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Contents

- About the survey..... 2
- Methodology..... 3
- YOUTH AND SOLIDARITY: Research Findings..... 4
 - Crisis 4
 - Poverty 5
 - Vulnerable groups..... 6
 - The term / word solidarity 7
 - Invitations for humanitarian action 8
 - Activism and helping others 8
 - Solidarity and Education 9
 - Solidarity and the State..... 10
- Conclusion..... 11

About the survey

In order to contribute to the understanding of solidarity in Serbia, the Foundation Ana and Vlade Divac is implementing the project "Celebrating Solidarity", supported by the Programme "Europe for Citizens". The main objective of this project is to contribute to the understanding of European values and the importance of solidarity for both socioeconomic and political development. In addition, the project aims to:

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 and from national point of view,
4. To promote and advance solidarity within societies and on EU level.

Previous studies have pointed to a variety of problems in Serbia related, inter alia, the lack of tolerance and solidarity between people. A recent survey among young people in Serbia¹ shows that values such as human dignity, safety and tolerance are highly ranked in terms of desirable values among young people. However, the same research placed altruism as a desirable value only at the 5th position and points to the fact that 39% of young people in the last 12 months have been involved in some kind of voluntary activity². Most of these activities were related precisely on participating in actions to help flood-hit areas. Therefore, we can conclude that young people have the potential for the development of solidarity and therefore young people can be seen as the driving force for the development of solidarity in society.

To further examine the perceptions and attitudes of young people on this subject the Foundation has organized two focus group discussions through which the opinion of young people was heard directly, especially the young people who are turned towards the values of solidarity. In addition, the aim of the discussions was at the same time to raise the awareness of the various aspects of solidarity. In addition, the aim of the discussions was to raise the awareness of the various aspects of solidarity at the same time. This report will present the research methodology, then the results of the focus group discussions will be displayed and in the end, the main conclusions will be summarized.

¹S. Tomanovic, D. Stanojevic, Young in Serbia 2015-Situation, perception, beliefs and hopes, 2015, page. 77

² S. Tomanovic, D. Stanojevic, Young in Serbia 2015 Situation, perception, beliefs and hopes, 2015, page. 69

Methodology

Researching on solidarity among young people was conducted by a qualitative methodology. This method was used in order to identify ways of understanding and comprehending the concepts that are related to solidarity, such as crisis, volunteerism and humanitarian actions. It should be noted here that qualitative research methods do not provide statistics data which establish the regularity of the occurrence of certain phenomenon, but reveal possible causes and explanations. For this project, we used the method of focus group discussions (FGD), which represents the researching procedure similar to interviewing that encourages discussion among the participants. This method was chosen because it provides the best perception on the ways of thinking and therefore perceives different insights.

For the purposes of this research two FGDs were conducted with young people who are currently living, studying or working in Belgrade. One with youth from the age of 15 to 20, and the other with the elderly 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 college or work. It is assumed that participants from the older group would possess deeply built attitudes that would be the right way to look at a different way of thinking of both groups. Among the participants of the FGD both boys and girls were equally represented, as well as a balanced division by age. Both focus groups were conducted in accordance with the rules of anonymity to protect the identity of all FGD participants.

The main topics of these discussions were:

- Participants' perception of solidarity
- Perception of solidarity in Serbia
- Activism: Social engagement, volunteerism, shared values towards vulnerable groups.

However, it should be noted that this research method is flexible and that leaves plenty of space for discussion and topics that can be developed in the group. This was also the action research that made possible not only to hear different opinions, but also to raise awareness of the participants on the theme of solidarity.

YOUTH AND SOLIDARITY: Research Findings

Solidarity as a term represents mutual assistance and responsibility in moments of crisis. So, it encompasses crisis, responsibility, empathy and active assistance. In that way, the research itself upgraded on this and focused on topics such as crisis, poverty, empathy and various forms of activism. Special attention was paid to education and solidarity as well as the relation between the state and solidarity.

„Give a hand when someone is having a hard time, give a hand and be one of them. We are all the same.“(Young man, 20 years old, artist)

Crisis

In order to examine the notion of solidarity, it was necessary to start from the understanding of the crisis, namely on how young people understand the crisis. Focus groups have pointed to various aspects of understanding the crisis among participants. As the first association to the crisis both groups had mainly a crisis of an economic nature, in terms of lack of money and personal resources. In addition, participants in both groups also listed under the crisis the various social and natural crises, such as migrants, earthquakes in Italy and floods. The participants in the older group made a distinction between micro levels that characterizes the crisis at the individual level and "systemic" levels, which for them represents a crisis of the system, caused by natural disasters or a bad system. While crisis at an individual level are mostly abstinence crisis, younger groups mentioned tobacco and the elderly some other substances. Moreover, at the individual level nostalgia was mentioned as a kind of crisis at the individual level.

What is crisis for you?	
<i>The young 15-20</i>	<i>The young 15-20</i>
<i>„When we used to have something in abundance and then it suddenly disappears. (18-year-old girl)</i>	<i>It's a long-term problem, for which we do not have a solution.“ (21-year-old male, a blogger)</i>

There are also differences in the way young people understand the causes of the crisis. While some think its cause is the lack of something, others believe that is a long-standing problem. When we look at two quotations that show understanding of the crisis by several participants of younger group, and certain participants of older group of young people, we can see that younger

recognize a crisis as a lack of something, while older under the crisis imply something that has already become a problem and is not just perceived as a disadvantage.

Participants of older youth group have linked the crisis to "our country". They particularly emphasized that the crisis is a long-term problem for which "we have no solution."

"It is not necessarily a disadvantage. It's not the lack of something, but the system is not working properly "(Male, 25 years old, marketing)

*"This is no longer perceived as a crisis, it has become a commonplace!"
(Male, 30 years old, agriculture)*

Poverty

Beside the crisis, it was important to find out how they perceive poverty and solidarity.

What is poverty in your opinion?	
<i>young 15-20</i>	<i>young 21-30</i>
<i>"For me there are two kinds of poverty, superficial and a deeper one. Superficial poverty is what happens when one cannot afford to get dressed, when there is no money, when someone is just materially poor, while deeper poverty is when someone is greedy, crooked, and when one doesn't have good manners..."(boy, 18 years old)</i>	<i>"Poverty is actually an inability to contribute to get the money back." (male, 25 years old, marketing)</i>

At the first mention of poverty, both groups recognize poverty to a large extent as a lack of money. However, the discussion highlighted other aspects. The participants of both groups experience poverty on two levels: one is as they say "superficial level" and involves physical shortage of funds for basic needs while "deep poverty" represents qualities that make a man "greedy and corrupt "or as the older group's participants said "poor in spirit". Participants of the older group emphasize poverty as the inability to earn money. In particular, they were linking this inability with a long-term poverty, and the situation in which the poor are accustomed to the passive attitude, with no idea that they could change something. Some participants even showed a critical attitude towards the helplessness and manifest a very optimistic view on the possibilities of getting out of poverty.

Vulnerable groups

In order to have a better understanding of which groups the young people can feel the solidarity with, we examined which groups they recognize as particularly exposed to the crisis and poverty.

Which groups would you single out as poor?	
<i>The young 15-20</i>	<i>The young 21-30</i>
<i>The Roma, refugees, the homeless, people with low incomes and those whose countries are affected by war.</i>	<i>The Roma, refugees and people from villages.</i>

Both the younger and the older segregate the Roma and refugees among the poor. While the younger add the homeless and people with low incomes and those whose countries are affected by war. The older group considers people from the villages as poor.

The dominant attitude of participants of both younger and older groups is that poor people are those who are satisfied with what they have and do not progress further, in addition, they point out that it is mostly their individual choice. The poor are used to the situation in which they live, they find it difficult to change patterns of behavior and some participants point out that they do not even have anyone to see another possible model from. They emphasize that there are still some factors that they cannot affect and they distinguish the situation in the country, as one of those factors.

"All those who are the most successful people in the world are hungry for success every day, and some achievements, and they aspire to achieve something more, while the poor people live from day to day ..." (girl, 18)

"I think the important thing for the poor is just to survive the day, they live for today, not for tomorrow. They live to eat bread today and not to make some bread tomorrow!" (Boy, 18)

Participants of the older group have started a topic on persons with disabilities as a category that is in a difficult position. Despite that, during the discussion there was the impression that young people do not perceive PWDs as persons who are in difficult position since they are receiving social assistance, and because the country is working on improving their situation, e.g. the program of employment of PWD, the legal obligations of employers and adjustment of physical barriers.

The dominant impression from both FGDs is enthusiasm that young people manifest at the level of individual characteristics and the ability to take advantage of every opportunity, allowing each individual to come out of any difficult situation. In fact, several participants understand it is sufficient to give everyone a chance and in this way, everyone will be able to get out of a difficult situation. One of the participants even considers that it may be wrong to give away and donate.

"Someone who does not adjust, so to speak, someone who is not even able to make himself capable of earning money, he is really poor Therefore, I think they are the people who have no money initially plus they do not have the ability or possibility, or awareness to get out of it, it means that they are going to remain in that state. "

(Male, 21-year-old, blogger)

"But as far as concretely poverty is concerned, the only way that someone could help these people is giving a chance. Moreover, we have already talked about it, in fact, there are more and more chances, but I would not give anyone anything, because I would not want anybody to give anything to me, and I think that is not fair. I think it is fair to give everyone a chance. I think it is not fair to give away too much..."

(Male, 25 years old, marketing)

The term / word solidarity

What is solidarity?	
<i>young 15-20</i>	<i>young 21-30</i>
<i>"To give him what he needs at the moment" (boy, 20)</i>	<i>tolerance, unity, harmony</i>

The word “SOLIDARITY” is an association for assistance, compassion, understanding among participants of the younger group, while among the older ones that is tolerance, unity and style. They distinguish very clearly the difference between the fact that solidarity is not just about helping in the material sense, but also emotionally.

Participants of the older group particularly discussed the topic of connectivity in solidarity. Does the connection in case of solidarity arise based on absolute differences or based on one similarity among many differences? It can be noted that the participants of the group were quite divided by this issue, which suggests that the concept is not completely clear to them.

"For me, solidarity is when I feel good because I helped someone, but not if I helped someone and then I don't care about him. In my opinion, solidarity is some interpersonal sense, he feels warm, and I feel warm because I helped him, and that is something I cannot be taught at school."

(Boy, 18 years old)

Invitations for humanitarian action

All participants remember and cite the humanitarian action "For little Tijana" which was run in 2013, when many celebrities and athletes took part and they point out that this was the first successful action that launched the others. Although they can recall actions promoted on TV, some of them express doubts about their legitimacy, so they point out some other organizations that are closer to them and act locally, which is why they have more confidence.

They usually share various invitations for humanitarian action on the Internet and think that is a good way for "raising awareness" and sharing information.

They believe that sharing such invitations on social networks can contribute to the visibility of such cases among those who can help them. In addition, they are aware that the visibility on the Internet does not necessarily mean a real increase in patients suffering from various diseases, but greater access to information.

Some participants of the older group went a step further and suggested the idea of another kind of solidarity that would put pressure on the state, which would encourage the state to take responsibility for the treatment in such cases.

"As much as I would support most of those things, I also think it's bad. Because it is an indicator that we have no systemic solutions, and it is a shame to say that children are being treated through the messages. In fact, some higher level of solidarity would be not to send messages, but rather to push the state to solve this, because we would all stand on one side and demand our rights. Then we would really be solidary..."
(Male, 25 years old, marketing)

Some of the participants of the older group showed the awareness that society has become of greater solidarity in recent years, despite the fact that there are allocations for health insurance. However, they find that lately there are many calls for humanitarian action and due to this large number and variety of scandals, and expressed doubts about the verity of all calls.

Activism and helping others

All focus group participants were the benefactors. All of them have given money or clothing, sent SMS, or shared some news on social networks with the idea of helping someone. Some of them also participated in the organization of humanitarian actions such as the division of clothing

to migrants, actions during the floods, organizing a charity concert at school or participating in different actions.

Although the participants in the FGD had been very engaged in humanitarian activities, they also said that this was not a widespread attitude among their peers. They point out that their peers are largely indifferent to any humanitarian actions, following the idea of personal interest or perhaps general disinterest for any developments in society, which we can confirm by the fact that it was difficult to make such disinterested young people even just to attend FGD, despite calls.

Some participants of the older group somewhat distinguish between charity and humanitarian actions in the sense that charity is an individual act of assistance or something that comes from ourselves, while a humanitarian action is something that is organized by an organization. On the other hand, humanitarian actions demand setting aside some time and working on it, being active.

Speaking of their life and their personal crises, despite the fact that they are aware that they should help others, young people largely feel that if they were in trouble, families and friends would be the first to help them. There is still the optimistic attitude towards help by unknown people. Some had direct experiences while others concluded only based on their perception that they would help. In addition, some of the participants in the older group specifically state that getting help from strangers depends on the way it is asked. They find it vital if there is a well-known or influential figure behind the calls for help. They say for example in the case of little Tijana, whose campaign was successful because of the support given by the famous actor Sergej Trifunovic. Celebrities give some kind of confidence, as they say.

*“Unfortunately, everything is just a matter of good marketing.”
(25 years old, male, marketing)*

Solidarity and Education

Participants in both FGDs find it more useful to learn about solidarity through some examples, extracurricular activities, working actions, different exercises that would wake solidarity rather than through lectures. In addition, they point out that it would be better to start with the story of solidarity very early, in the first grade of primary school already, and perhaps even in preschool.

According to the opinion of the participants of the younger group, the school should be in contact with various organizations in order to gather resources. They also believe that solidarity is not developed enough and that each school should encourage this. They say it would be a good idea to have a story about it constantly, to introduce such topics in a school subject such as, for example, sociology or psychology. Some say that the solidarity is already taught through

sociology or psychology, but others claim that it is not taught, which indicates that the theme of solidarity allowed teachers to choose individually whether to teach it or not. They do not see other subjects, such as civic education, as appropriate subjects for studying this topic, but that is mostly because that subject is not taken "seriously" as they say. Classes are often not held because these are mainly the last ones. Moreover, as the most important aspect, they stated not getting marks from that subject.

"... now you have been taught, the definition of solidarity, be in solidarity, but I think we should encourage people to, i.e. the children through the educational system to learn as much as possible about people who are different from them, this now has to do with tolerance, we should impose this, not through an indoctrination as we should do this, let's be in solidarity in this or that way, and they actually do not understand it..."

"(Girl, 22 years old, political science)

Solidarity and the State

Both groups of young people believe it would be necessary that the state is more concerned with the problem of solidarity. That the state should be responsible for sick people seeking help, rather than to react after a media campaign. They point out that the health system is the one that needs to be concerned about the health of the population and not the citizens.

Some older group's participants concluded it is very important that humanitarian assistance be linked exclusively to the crisis rather than having steady calls for humanitarian action linked to health problems that occur on a daily basis in one country. So it is the matter of the ability of individuals how they will implement the action and provide the treatment or not.

"I think that humanitarian aid should be linked to the crisis we were talking about. So that humanitarian assistance is not something ordinary and should not be linked to the type of health problems, which really need to be solved in hospitals ..."

(Girl, 22 years old, political science)

"State administration is not solidarity with us"

(Male, 21 years old, blogger)

Conclusion

The research has indicated that solidarity is an important topic among young people and that the participants in our focus groups were very involved in this regard, they feel empathy with people who are in some kind of trouble. However, certain participants do not show essential understanding for people who stay longer in "crisis" status. They find it necessary to fight and get out of trouble, because there are always chances that should only be used. That can be understood considering their age. Despite that, some of the participants showed understanding for older people who are unable to cope with all the problems, especially in the later years of life.

When it comes to how they recognize the crisis, poverty and vulnerable groups, we can conclude that a great deal of these concepts is associated with a lack of money. Even when they break down the terms to "superficial" and "deeper" poverty, the crisis on the "lack of something" or "long-term problem" - in the end, they point out as vulnerable groups some of the poorest, and more meaningful-when they talk about possible solutions to the greatest extent they point out the possibility of doing any jobs, that again indicates the possibility of earning money.

Then, when it comes to direct actions which are related to other, their or institutional solidarity actions, we can point out that youth focus group participants are largely engaged and try to be involved to the extent their free time allows . If we look once more at the fact that 39% of young people have participated in some of the voluntary actions according to a survey conducted in 2015, we can say that youth is the potential for the development of solidarity in society. With an increasing number of invitations for humanitarian action, it is necessary to maintain this trend and continue to work on raising the awareness of young people on the theme of solidarity.

In order to raise awareness, it is important to show young people a clear interpretation of the word solidarity, especially from the aspect of common good. Considering the fact that vast number of focus groups' participants' perception of solidarity equals to individual stories, without the perspective that it should serve the common good of the society. Humanitarian actions should be reaction to crisis, not the everyday life. Solidarity should be part of everyday life and sent towards all the individuals in the society, with an emphasis on common good.