



Impact evaluation of Agora projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Moldova



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1. Executive Summary

This summary represents the key findings of an external evaluation focused on several projects implemented by Agora CE in Moldova, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last five years. The countries were selected as Agora CE's presence there has been particularly consistent in the recent years of several projects and the organisation is interested in continuing and possibly expanding their work in these countries.

There were two thematic areas of focus that the evaluation followed: 1. Participatory budgeting and 2. Improving civic education and civic participation of pupils and students. These themes were identified as they are standard area of expertise of Agora and the organisation can offer consistent and innovate support.

Participatory budgeting (Bosnia and Moldova)

Relevance

- Projects were relevant to needs of the municipalities – they represent financial resources and opportunity to strengthen the trust of local citizens.

Effectiveness and Impact

- Improved trust of the citizens towards the municipality at the time of the project
- Increased level of civic participation following the first round of participatory project in Moldova (increased petitions from citizens to the municipality) and currently higher number of applications in the second project
- Key challenge is low capacity in the municipalities (especially in Bosnia where implementing partner organisation was constantly present. There is need for further training and involving a larger number of people who are not already overwhelmed with other functions at municipality level
- Key takeaways are especially visible in participating students in Bosnia where the experience supported their personal confidence and improved their understanding of the active role they can play in their community

Sustainability

- Very low in Bosnia as only one municipality continues to apply participatory budgeting and this is thanks to funds from another donor.
- In Moldova, sustainability could not be assessed as there is currently a follow-up project being implemented.

Points to consider for future strategies

- There is a need to lower intensive involvement of the local partners in the process and perhaps intensify the preparatory period (e.g. by training more members of the community) so that the municipalities function more independently in the process itself. Planning projects on longer term basis and longer term cooperation with municipalities should also be considered.
- Do not limit the scope of student involvement by focusing on the needs of marginalised groups, especially if the funds available are low . Another option is to explain clearer that in this case, students, youth and children are also among those marginalised and it is ok to focus on their own needs and issues.
- Consider whether feasibility aspects should be more emphasized – if all projects are admitted to voting and are not feasible to implement, it could lead to a sense of discouragement. In the case of Moldova, one municipality mentioned that they struggle with feasibility assessment and this is also an issue when evaluating the projects. In Georgia – participatory budgeting component of education projects, commitments of local municipalities were at times not upheld, it might be worth it to think of other options, including small crowdfunding youth initiatives.

Improving civic education and civic participation of pupils and students (Bosnia and Georgia)

Relevance

- High relevance in both countries as the projects aimed to address the lack of practical experiential learning available for young people and also introduce and/o strengthen youth-led approaches.

Effectiveness and Impact

- In both countries, all interviewed teachers continue to use the project methods and tools
- An effective approach working in both countries was connecting the school activities to the local community as well as taking students out of the school and creating a safe environment nurturing youth-led action
- Challenges connected to low student motivation were reported in Bosnia. In Georgia, teamwork, respectful dialogue and active listening skills were identified as a problematic area by the teachers involved.
- Key takeaways for students in Bosnia were connecting and networking with other young people and importance of teamwork. These takeaways were also apparent in responses of Georgian students.
- Increase in personal confidence and sense of civic responsibility is apparent in students in Bosnia as well as Georgia.
- Youth for better future project in Georgia was a determining factor in further civic engagement of some of the participating students.

Sustainability

- Tangible and long-lasting outcomes identified for both teachers as well as students involved.
- Strong need and appetite for continuous professional development among Georgian teachers namely in the areas of facilitating teamwork, active listening skills and respectful dialogue

Points to consider for future strategies

- Focus on facilitating opportunities for young like-minded people to network and share experience – this is a great motivating factor for young activists worldwide.
- Consider introducing cooperative (not competitive) simulated debates – this could be helpful in strengthening teamwork and active listening skills.
- Continue to provide ongoing professional development support to teachers trained in prior projects

2. Introduction

This evaluation report presents the findings of an external evaluation focused on several projects implemented by Agora CE in Moldova, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last five years. The countries were selected as Agora CE's presence there has been particularly consistent in the recent years of several projects and the organisation is interested in continuing and possibly expanding their work in these countries. The key area of interest was longer term impact of the projects – the evaluation did not look at criteria such as efficiency. There were two thematic areas of focus that the evaluation followed: 1. Participatory budgeting and 2. Improving civic education and civic participation of pupils and students. These themes were identified as they are standard

area of expertise of Agora and the organisation can offer consistent and innovate support. The findings of the evaluation should be used as the basis for developing further country-specific strategies for Agora CE.

The report is based on desk research of data and materials collected throughout the implementation periods of the projects, combined with interviews of key stakeholders identified and one online survey.

3. Overview of evaluated projects

Georgia

Improving the quality of civil society and youth involvement in decision-making processes in Georgia

Project objectives:

1. Development of civic competencies of civil society and general public and enhancing the ability of local civil servants and self to involve citizens into decision making
2. Implementation of obtained experience, support of young people and their involvement into public life, education to active citizenship and dissemination of obtained results to target groups

Project outputs: Civic Academy, Participation of Citizens, Shadowing of the Assembly, Dissemination of the project results

Project implementation period: 01/2017 – 12/2018

Youth for better future

Project objective: Promotion of participatory urban development and youth engagement into the process of policymaking in Tchiatura, Tkibuli, Tsageri, Rustavi and Surami

Project outputs:

1. Young citizens are empowered with knowledge and skills about urban development, local policy instruments, advocacy, civic activism and project proposal writing
2. Urban development concepts and projects
3. Collaborative and effective cooperation among youngsters and representatives of target municipalities
4. Sustainable, easily replicable and functional mechanism to clone participation activities to other regions

Project implementation period: 08/2019 – 04/2020

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Participatory Budgeting – an opportunity for effective civic engagement 2017-2018

Project objective: To involve citizens into decision making processes at local level.

Project outputs:

1. Participatory budgeting plan approved in 3 municipalities
2. Projects for support selected and approved
3. Selected projects implemented and evaluated

Project implementation period: 01/2017 - 12/2018

Participatory budgeting for inclusive local governance in BiH

Project objectives:

1. To increase participation of youth and other socially marginalized groups in the decision-making processes on the local level in the four chosen municipalities.
2. To increase number of municipalities which use participatory budgeting for involvement of socially marginalized groups of citizens.

Project outputs:

1. Youth PB agents trained - they are informed and motivated to take part in participatory budgeting in the four municipalities.
 2. Young people are actively involved in the participatory budgeting in the four municipalities.
 3. The needs of socially marginalized groups of citizens are reflected by the project proposals for the participatory budgets.
 4. Ordinary citizens informed and involved in PB
-
1. NGOs that advocate the needs of the socially marginalized groups are informed and lobby for PB in the municipalities they work in.
 2. New municipalities are using the PB with respect to the needs of socially marginalized groups in their budgeting procedures

Project implementation period: 01/2019 - 12/2019

First Time Voter – Go Out and Vote 2020

Project objectives:

1. To increase participation of first time voters in BiH national elections in 2020.
2. To increase the quality of civic education in BiH.

Project outputs:

1. Students are informed and motivated to take part in elections and be more active citizens in BiH.
2. High school teachers know the methods for civic education
3. Authorities of BiH recognize the necessity and utility of the changes in civic education

Project implementation period: 01/2020 - 12/2020

Active citizens' school and systemic changes in civic education teaching in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Project objectives:

1. Increase active participation of young people in public life
2. Increase the quality of civic education in BiH

Project outcomes:

1. Students and teachers are informed and motivated to be active citizens in BiH
2. High school teachers know progressive methods for civic education
3. Authorities of BiH recognize the necessity and utility of the changes in civic education

Project implementation period: 01/2022 - 12/2022

Moldova

Participatory budget – effective tool for citizen participation in Moldova 2019-2020

Project objectives:

1. To increase citizens' involvement and better cooperation with public authorities in municipal budget decision making in three Moldavian municipalities
2. To increase the recognition of PB and its usage among the Moldavian municipalities at least five times by the end of the year 2020

Project outputs:

1. Competences of local partners in promoting PB concept increased
2. Suitable conditions for PB implementation is created
3. Awareness about the PB among local communities is increased
4. Local communities actively involved in decision making
5. Communities gained an experience of solving local problems
6. Tested PB methodology recognized as best practice by the Moldavian local public administration

Project implementation period: 01/2019 - 12/2020

4. Evaluation

4.1. Evaluation objectives and evaluation questions

The objectives of the evaluation were:

- to identify key effects and short/long term impacts of selected Agora projects in participatory budgeting, civic/youth participation and education
- to draw key lessons learned from these interventions.
- to identify recommendations useful for creating new Agora CE five-year strategy for BiH, Moldova and Georgia

Reflecting the above, the following evaluation questions were developed separately for each focal area of the evaluation:

Participatory budgeting (BiH and Moldova)

Relevance:

1. In retrospect, what needs or interests of project municipalities were addressed by participatory budgeting/building civic participation competences?
2. How has the transfer of knowledge from one country to another worked?
 - 2.1. Were the premises on which it was built well identified?
 - 2.2. What were the missing issues to consider?

Effectiveness:

3. What main advantages of PB/civic participation building do municipalities identify?
4. What were the key challenges and solutions applied by the municipalities?
5. In retrospect, how well did the project training and support prepare the municipality coordinators/students for PB / municipality representatives for increased communication and inclusion of citizens in decision making?
 - 5.1. In what ways could this be enhanced in the future?
6. What is the key takeaway from the process for the municipality representatives
 - A. on personal and B. professional level?

7. What is the key takeaway from the process for the student participants?
- 7.1. To what extent has the experience built their personal confidence and confidence in political transparency?
- 7.2. How do they use the experience today?

Sustainability:

8. To what extent do the former project municipalities continue to apply participatory budgeting /support active civic participation independently?
- 8.1. Were they able to follow up on the suggestions/plans made during the project?
- 8.2. What are the key challenges experienced in this regard?
- 8.3. What follow up support, if any, do they need?
9. To what extent are the regional or other higher authorities a. interested and/or b. supportive of the PB concept today?
10. What further steps with regards to PB/civic participation should be taken in the country?
11. What other avenues/options concerning inclusive and active civic participation could be explored in each country?

Improving civic education and civic participation of pupils and students (BiH and Georgia)

Relevance:

1. What key gaps or issues regarding civic education and youth participation did the approach taken in country aim to address?
2. What is added value of the approach/methodology in the context of the country?

Effectiveness:

3. To what extent do the trained teaches continue to apply the methods in their work?
- 3.1. What elements work particularly well?
- 3.2. What challenges (internal/external do they encounter)
4. What is the key takeaway from the experience for the teachers as a. professionals and b. private citizens?
5. What is the key takeaway from the experience for the participating students
- 5.1. What added value do the following components present?
 - a. shadowing municipalities (Georgia)
 - b. summer school (Georgia, Bosnia)
 - c. participatory projects (Georgia, Bosnia)
 - d. simulated debates (Bosnia)

Sustainability:

7. What further support do the trained teachers need?
8. To what extent are the regional or other higher authorities a. interested and/or b. supportive of the civic education approach applied in the projects today?
9. What further steps with regards to civic education should be taken in the country?
10. What other avenues/options concerning civic education could be explored in each country?

4.2. Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation has primarily worked with qualitative research methods via interviews and group interviews, preceded by desk research of relevant project materials. The evaluation questions were co-developed with Agora, reflecting their learning expectations and priorities. Each local partner organisation was also consulted about their own learning expectations from the process. In Georgia and BiH, interviews were conducted by national evaluators, based on interview guidelines developed by the lead evaluator. The interview notes were then shared and discussed with the lead evaluator.

4.3. Data collection methods

The following data collection methods were used:

- **Desk review** of relevant documents necessary to provide sufficient evidence to answer evaluation questions (project applications, reports submitted, surveys and training evaluations, etc.)
- **Semi-structured interviews** with implementing partner organisations, representatives of target groups and other key project stakeholders (full list of interviews in Annex 2)
- **Evaluation online survey** for students involved in the Active citizens' school project in BiH implemented in 2022. In total, 40 responses were received, it is unclear how many students were asked to fill in the survey and therefore the response rate is not possible to calculate.

4.4. Methodological limits

- On overall level, there was limited time to conduct in-depth evaluation of all projects. Limited numbers of stakeholders were interviewed and therefore the findings are rather illustrative.
- In some cases, interviewees could not remember the particular project or activities as the projects were implemented several years ago
- In Bosnia, it was difficult to track all relevant stakeholders with regards to participatory budgeting – some of the contacts provided by the implementing partner organisation were not reachable, one municipality could not be involved at all due to lack of contact. The depth of the evaluation was also limited here due to large number of projects and limited data collection possibilities
- In Bosnia, the local evaluator at times had the impression that some of the respondents (many students, some of the municipality representatives) were not completely open and did not want to sound critical and thus questions the authenticity and validity of their responses.

- Questions on further steps to take and avenues to explore cannot be fully elaborated in this report as the data collection is still ongoing. The results will be presented in the country-specific strategy papers.

5. Findings and Conclusions

5.1. Participatory budgeting – BiH and Moldova

Relevance

Findings:

In **Bosnia**, there is already existing level of citizen participation in public policies. Approximately 50%¹ of local authorities in BiH organise either directly or via the community some kind of consultation with the interested parties on drafted budget. Public hearings on draft budgets are the most common forms of citizens' participation in the process. However, at city and municipal level there is no obligation to conduct these, and their impact overall is seen as limited. There is also lack of more proactive and inclusive approach from the authorities – there are few examples of authorities who independently offer opportunities for the public to submit their ideas and proposals.² There are also key limitations resulting from overall low level of citizens proactivity and participation in governance processes.

The interviewed mayors and coordinators described the key interests of the municipalities as solving smaller infrastructure or improving civic amenities which the municipality would not have funds for without a similar project – it seems thus that their motivation was rather financial than increasing civic participation in their municipality. Majority of the interviewees mentioned that young people leaving the municipality is a key problem which they also partly aimed to address via improving amenities for youth in the funded projects. Involving citizens in the decision making at municipality was also seen as important though mentioned by a lower number of respondents. From this perspective, the project was welcomed as it addressed all these needs. The evaluation did not identify any problematic issues in terms of transfer of experience, except for the training and preparation process of the PB coordinators and high involvement of the local implementing partner (see below.)

In **Moldova**, participatory budgeting is also a relatively new experience, first introduced in 2016 in Chisinau and Balti, a with the participation of activists from the Urban Civic Network, the Information Center for Local Authorities, the Polish Solidarity Fund, the European Endowment for Democracy and the representatives of the European People's Party of Moldova and further adopted by several rural municipalities. It is not yet a common practice though national legal norms on public finances and fiscal responsibilities require public budgets to be transparent – meaning subject to public consultations. Similarly to Bosnia, willingness of a large part of the population to get involved in a deeper way into the management of public affairs at the local level is limited. This is also influenced by the fact that quite often local administrations show a lack of interest to increase the degree of involvement of citizens in the administrative processes at the local level and general distrust of citizens in local as well as national level politics.

Stakeholders from both municipalities in Moldova did say that previous good experience in cooperating with IDIS was a very motivating factor in deciding whether to get involved in the project. Both municipalities were also visibly active in various projects

¹ BiH Handbook on Open Local Government and Public Ethics, Council of Europe, 2022

² BiH Handbook on Open Local Government and Public Ethics, Council of Europe, 2022

involving international partners – according to one mayor, presence of a foreign partner leads to better trust from the public and it is also easier to convince the local council to co-finance the project. They both saw advantages in inviting the public to take part in decision making in the municipality as it strengthens their mutual trust and is seen as very transparent. Financial motivation was also implicit in their responses. No major issues with regards to transfer of experience were identified other than lack of trust of some citizens in electronic voting which is why both physical and electronic voting was made possible.

In both countries, it seems that while importance of civic participation is acknowledged at least at formal level, the local priorities revolve around very basic issues such as local employment opportunities, building and improving infrastructure or creating incentives for young people not to migrate to larger cities or abroad.

Conclusions:

In both countries, the projects were quite relevant to needs of the municipalities though it seems that the financial factor was of greater importance rather than increasing civic participation in their municipality. Municipalities however appreciated the opportunity to strengthen the trust of the local citizens. One difference noted by the evaluator was that the in Moldova, the local implementing partner chose rather well-developed municipalities based on previous cooperation on other good governance projects, in Bosnia, the municipalities seem to be less developed with a lower level of trust among the citizens, which might have affected their experience of the project.

Effectiveness and Impact

Findings:

Benefits of the concept

When asked about greatest benefits for the municipality in retrospect, four of the six interviewed **Bosnian** municipality representatives mentioned direct involvement of the citizens and creation of the culture of trust in the municipality at the time of project implementation. The other two representatives expressed a level of disappointment over the lower numbers of voting citizens and also the fact that the participatory budgeting is not continuing in the same way in their municipality. Trust and respect of the citizens was also the key benefit identified by the local implementing partner – in the context of Bosnia citizens were initially very suspicious about the concept.

In **Moldova**, where the experience is a bit fresher as there is currently a follow-up project and municipalities continue to be involved, municipality representatives were especially speaking about concrete projects implemented and the citizens benefitting from these (new equipment for the kindergarten playground, improved sports field etc.)

Key challenges and solutions applied.

In **Bosnia**, some of the respondents mentioned that only low numbers of citizens participated in the voting and expressed a level of disappointment about this. They were not aware that in the Czech Republic, the standard voting participation rate is about 10%, comparable to their own situation. No specific challenges were reported except confusion about the voting system among some citizens which the municipalities solved by strengthening the organisation of physical voting. From the perspective of the implementing partner, the key challenge was the need for their strong involvement. They shared that significant efforts in terms of awareness and PR were put into the project to increase the participation rate. They also reported that though PB coordinators were identified in all except for one of the municipalities, they did not really have the time for the project and majority of the responsibilities were placed on the shoulder of the implementing organisation.

In **Moldova**, similarly to Bosnia, some of the municipality representatives also referred to low participation from citizens as a challenge, which was, however, comparable to that of the Czech Republic. They also stated that it was necessary to keep the possibility for paper ballots as citizens tend to be reluctant to share their data on mobile phones. From the perspective of the implementing partner, the need for more time to prepare the process as well as more in-depth training of the PB coordinators in e.g. updating webpages with the status/results of the voting process would have been advisable. Another point mentioned was the need for better feasibility check of the submitted projects from the working group as no projects were rejected. The evaluator

also found that there was very little technical expertise available at the municipalities and the need for improved feasibility skills was mentioned in one of the municipalities. These issues were reflected in the follow-up project currently implemented where e.g. the municipality in Ialoveni asked a double number of people to be trained in PB (8 compared to the initially discussed four) and for the training process to be more intensive overall.

Key personal takeaways

Bosnian municipality representatives reported diverse range of key takeaways from the process which involved:

- Learning to listen to the needs of young people.
- Citizens need to be given the possibility for involvement.
- The voting system should be simple and personal data should not be asked.

I learned that when you want to achieve something, there are no obstacles. At the beginning, there were sceptical people among the citizens, but we put in a lot of effort and got to the end. I learned about the participatory budgeting procedure, which was unknown to me, and that sometimes you can also volunteer for your community. I also learned how to pass on knowledge to other people. Now the problem is, who will volunteer to do some similar projects as most of us did?

Municipality representative, Bosnia

For two **Bosnian** students involved (four students with experience in PB were interviewed), the key takeaway from the process was the importance of teamwork and the possibility to achieve greater things in a team. A clear increase of personal confidence was apparent in all answers. There is also a trend in increased sense and understanding of personal responsibility and role as a citizen. Some also mentioned the newly acquired skills in identifying and writing a project. It is unsure to what extent their confidence in political transparency was strengthened – only one of them stated that he learned useful information about decision making processes at municipality level, others did not list this as key learnings for them. Two students stated that they are in contact with the network created via this project and would like to continue working with them in the future.

I realised how much basic things are needed in our school and that all the students agreed on those problems. I also realised that I am even more creative than I thought and that I can actually give more of myself.

Student, Bosnia

I learned that I am clever and that I have enough capacity to come up with ideas for a project. I also learned that we young people don't study enough and are not trained enough. In the future, I want to educate the youth and go to the next level.

Student, Bosnia

Now I am surer that we young people are the ones who are responsible for our future, and I hope we will manage to change what is currently wrong. I got great wishes and motivation to continue doing this. This project was an additional strength to get involved in similar projects. I think we can make some progress.

Student, Bosnia

From the perspective of the Bosnian implementing partner organisation, there were many student projects focused on youth issues and very few targeting marginalised community members, which was the original condition. An explanation provided by the partners was low budget available – 1500 EUR (3000 in total) whereas the needs of the marginalised were thought to be greater than the budget available and it was difficult to find an idea that would benefit a larger group of marginalised citizens.

For the **Bosnian** adult project authors, the key takeaways were about the need for persistence and also possibilities for civic action.

I learned that you have to be communicative, listen to others around you and that there is always that person who will help you with what you do. I also learned that you have to be persistent with people, to fight for what you want. That is why, during the project, I was not ashamed to talk to unknown people on the street to try to persuade them to vote for my project.

Citizen author of winning project, Bosnia

In **Moldova**, the key learnings for the municipality representatives revolved around the entire process of participatory budgeting. The project also strengthened their (already established) understanding of the importance of working in partnerships. In Ialoveni specifically, the municipality representatives also described some of the lessons learned from the first round being implemented in the current project. (see above, namely with regards to more in-depth training involving a larger number of people). Some of

the municipality representatives were also authors of projects (some won, others did not) – these representatives also spoke about project writing skills as an important takeaway from the process. The authors of the winning projects were in both cases already previously active members of the community and also held public posts (director of a kindergarten, art teacher at a youth centre). Aside from project writing skills, they also stated public presentation and managing volunteers as important skills further strengthened.

Conclusions:

In Bosnia, improved trust of the citizens towards the municipality was the key benefit identified though it is hard to tell what extent this is still true, given that in most of the municipalities the projects are not continuing. In Moldova, the municipalities did not seem to struggle with citizen trust issue as much as in Bosnia and rather welcomed the opportunity for investment and civic participation.

The key challenge in both countries seemed to be lower capacity at the municipality level, perhaps more severe in the case of Bosnia, and higher involvement needed from the local implementing organisation. There is need for more intensive training and perhaps training a higher number of people from the municipality, who are not already busy with other responsibilities in the municipality, which is currently reflected in the follow up project in Moldova. On another hand, lack of capacity of municipalities and lack of personnel potentially available for the training and more in-depth involvement in the process is a common challenge in other countries, including the Czech Republic.

The key takeaways for the stakeholders involved at municipality level differed in each country to an extent. While in Moldova, the municipality representatives spoke about the process as such and strengthening their cooperation with foreign partners, in Bosnia, it seems that the key takeaway was about persistence and overcoming obstacles. For Bosnian students, the experience mainly supported their personal confidence, improved their understanding of the active role they can play in their community and also importance of teamwork.

Sustainability

In **Moldova**, both municipalities are now involved in a follow-up project therefore it is not possible to fully evaluate sustainability of the project here. However, in the case of Budest municipality, some of the project ideas collected in the first round were later financed by the municipality from different resources, including cooperation with local businesses. The municipality representatives also reported that they now have a higher number of project proposals and in Ialoveni they also noticed increased civic participation overall, judging from the increasing number of standard petitions they receive.

In **Bosnia**, only one of the municipalities (Breza) continues to use the full model of participatory budgeting in the framework of other projects co-funded by other donor organisations. A former representative of another municipality stated that the municipality now uses the concept to a certain extent but was unable to provide further details as he now works in a different municipality. Another representative expressed disappointment as there was no continuation of the practice and also no follow up from the implementing partners. One citizen reported that that following the project, the municipality helped her to implement another project idea which she ascribes to the positive experience from PB. When asked about future support, none of the interviewed stakeholders provided concrete ideas except for one, who would welcome higher funds. Higher level public institutions are not very interested in the concept as per the experience of the local partner whose explanation is that this may be because the municipal level is not so attractive for regional or state level authorities. A suggestion for a wider level campaign focusing on the benefits of PB could partly stir their interest. Equally, it could be worth further exploring cooperation with settlement committees – local institutions gathering active citizens with a certain budget available to boost sustainability of the practice.

Conclusions:

The sustainability of the project in Bosnia is low as only one municipality is continuing in the concept and that with the help of another donor. No factors affecting the sustainability were directly identified. However, there seems to be low capacity of the municipalities to run the process alone considering the high level of involvement of the local implementing partner, reported earlier. Lack of funds and potential political changes could also be a factor.

In Moldova, sustainability could not be assessed as there is currently a follow-up project being implemented.

5.2. Improving civic education and civic participation of pupils and students – BiH and Georgia

Relevance

Findings:

In **Bosnia**, all interviewed teachers asserted that there is generally not enough space for civic education in schools and the curriculum lessons are too theoretical, not attractive for the students, with very few opportunities for experiential learning. They all identified key added value of the concepts introduced in the different Agora CE projects. Compared to other projects, the teachers especially singled out the connection to the local community, taking students out of the school environment and allowing them to come up with their own actions.

I appreciated the practical work where students are brought to the sites to apply everything they have learned. This was a complete hit and they enjoyed it. They saw how much they conquered that theoretical knowledge. Sometimes adults are not aware of how many ideas students have to solve problems. They just need to be given a chance and put a wind in their tails so that they can progress.

Teacher, Bosnia

The students in Bosnia especially welcome being able to network with like-minded young people, frequently referred to the new ability of writing a project on their own, which they previously did not experience. High majority of the students surveyed from the last implemented project also felt that the project was unlike anything else they experience before as it aimed to be youth-led and practical.

This experience differed from the others because we had complete control over the implementation of the projects and because we ourselves managed to improve our living environment and make others satisfied.

Student, Bosnia

This project was really different from many youth activism projects because it offered students concrete steps to solve youth-friendly problems.

Student, Bosnia

It was much more interesting because we had the opportunity to do something ourselves that will help all the students of our school

Student, Bosnia

In **Georgia**, teachers identified similar issues – namely lack of experiential learning, little emphasis on practical involvement and too much theory. In addition, some of them also stressed the need for more localised approaches using local languages spoken at the community, need for developing and/or translating materials. The added value of the Agora projects was described on the non-formal approach, emphasis on practical activities and some of the teachers also stressed very professional approach of Civitas. Majority of the students shared that the project assessment/writing trainings and the actual possibility to implement a real project in their community was a unique experience for them.

Conclusions:

In both countries, the projects aimed to address the lack of practical experiential learning available for young people and also introduce and/o strengthen youth-led approaches – a need identified by the stakeholders interviewed. In both countries, this is also where the added value of the projects was found, combined with the emphasis on youth-led approaches, connecting with

the local community and project-based work. It is thus further advisable to continue working in the sector, specifically in connecting schools with local communities and offering opportunities of experiential learning.

Effectiveness and Impact

Extent to which trained teachers continue to use methods from the projects.

Findings:

In **Bosnia**, all interviewed teachers stated that they continue to use methods introduced. What is important to note though is that all but one of the interviewed teachers were also trainers at the summer school activity and presumably are more active as teachers themselves. The examples varied but all involved allowing a more active role for the students in the class. Other mentioned methods/tools used:

- Using project handbooks, namely those on critical thinking skills
- Allowing more time for students' reflection in class
- Using communication components, debating topics
- Using ballot papers
- Using presentation methods

Furthermore, approaches that were thought to be especially useful were connecting community level issues with the student activities, bringing students into out-of-school environment with relaxed atmosphere and no judgement which made students open up easily.

A key challenge, reported by three teachers, was the issue of involving all, not just the usually active students, and also addressing a certain sense of hopelessness among the students who reportedly sometimes question the point of being part of these projects. This is also illustrated in testimony of one of the students:

I'm a little bit disappointed because the youth have no goals. They don't try hard enough. They only say that it is better in other countries, and they don't try to make it better in their own. In the summer school, I noticed how special we are and how much we can do, but at the same time I realised that we just don't want to do it. I don't know if it's due to our educational system because it doesn't try to bring out the best in us. It just keeps us from expressing ourselves.

Student, Bosnia

One teacher also said that continuity was a key challenge and that he had to constantly keep in contact with the other teachers trained to remind them about using the materials. Another teacher noted that a 45-minute lesson was too short to give students meaningful space to express themselves.

In **Georgia**, all interviewed teachers also asserted that they continue to use the methods from the projects – interactive teaching techniques and student-centred approaches were the connecting elements. In particular, the teachers gave examples of the following techniques/tools they use:

- Simulated debates (reported by a number of teachers)
- Try To Be In My Skin activity (reported by teacher who now works with children with special needs and finds this activity also very fitting for this context)

Majority of the teachers find lack of sustained projects and professional support available to them as a key challenge and would highly appreciate opportunities for continuous professional development. Two teachers furthermore specifically mentioned managing and facilitating teamwork in the classroom as challenge due to diverse views and personalities of the students. Lack of time was another challenge reported by some of the teachers.

Conclusions:

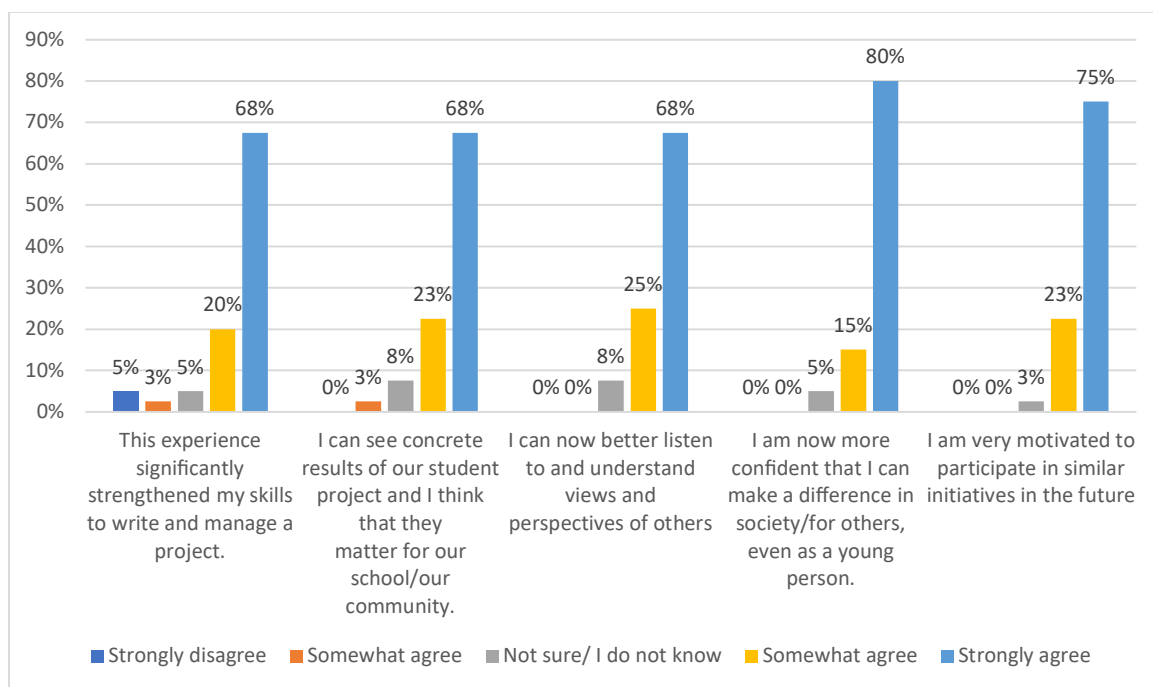
In both countries, all interviewed teachers continue to use the project methods though a notable difference is that all Bosnian interviewees were also project teacher trainers and thus likely to be more active. What has worked well in both countries was connecting the school activities to the local community as well as taking students out of the school and creating a safe environment nurturing youth-led action. A common challenge for both countries was lack of time for such activities in a standard 45-minute

lesson. Lack of motivation from some of students resulting from a certain sense of hopelessness was also seen as challenging by several teachers from Bosnia, while including teamwork in the lessons was seen as challenging in Georgia. There is certainly space and need for continuous professional support for the teachers previously involved.

Key takeaways for the participating students

Findings:

In Bosnia, an increase in personal confidence was already identified in the students participating in PB. The same is also apparent for students participating in the most recent project, who were surveyed as part of the evaluation. The graph below shows notable increase in personal confidence among the students as well as motivation to participate in similar projects in the future. It also shows that project writing and active listening skills were acquired or improved by strong majority of the students.



Similarly, to the students participating in PB, this group of students also reported creating personal connections and networking with other like-minded people as a key takeaway from the experience (mentioned by 21 students from the 36 who responded to the question)

In **Georgia**, all interviewed students participated in the most recent project ending in 2020 and were thus a bit older than students in Bosnia and able to reflect on the project experience with some distance. Similarly, increase in personal confidence and sense of civic responsibility was apparent in the students’ responses. Another key learning was persistence and resilience to difficult situations. The impact seems to be quite strong as demonstrated in some of the testimonies below:

On a personal level, it made me realize that while I have the drive and determination to make a positive impact in my community, the reality of slow development and limited opportunities in Gardabani can be disheartening at times. I see a significant difference between the youth from Tbilisi and myself, as they seem to have more exposure to diverse experiences and better resources to pursue their goals. This contrast has sometimes left me feeling like I am at a disadvantage.

Regarding my community and country, the experience has shed light on the challenges we face, especially in smaller towns like Gardabani. The lack of adequate transport and living conditions may contribute to many young people leaving their hometowns and moving to bigger cities like Tbilisi in search of better opportunities.

However, this realization has also strengthened my determination to bring about positive change in my community. I recognize that even though the progress may be slow, my efforts, along with those of other like-minded individuals, can gradually make a difference. By participating in projects like the one I was involved in, I hope to contribute to the development and improvement of my community.

First of all, I would like to emphasise the friendships we made, which still last, even after a year. This is one of the biggest benefits of this activity, because it brings together young people who otherwise would not have common points of contact. A lot of things were new, like learning how to properly write a project. This definitely upgraded my knowledge. The interaction that the organisers achieved with us was at an enviable level. There was no pressure, which is crucial in projects like this, because if the atmosphere is tense, then neither freedom of expression nor creativity can be achieved.

Student, Georgia

Before this experience, I might have been more inclined to abandon projects or goals when things became difficult or obstacles emerged. However, the project's journey taught me that having a clear goal and a strong sense of purpose can drive me to persist and overcome challenges.

Now, whenever I encounter obstacles or difficulties in any project or goal, I remember the experience from the student project. It reminds me to stay focused, remain resilient, and keep pushing forward to achieve my objectives.

Student, Georgia

Firstly, this project helped me recognize my leadership abilities. Planning and organizing activities for the project allowed me to step into a leadership role and take charge of important tasks. This realization has since encouraged me to seek leadership opportunities in other areas of my life as well.

Secondly, designing brochures for the project was a significant contribution. The experience of creating these materials myself proved to be valuable input for my future career. It enhanced my skills in graphic design and communication, which have been useful in various aspects of my professional life.

Additionally, working on this project and writing bigger project proposals with other people has honed my collaboration and teamwork skills. Learning to work effectively with others and communicate ideas clearly in a group setting has been beneficial in my academic and professional endeavours.

Student, Georgia

Through this experience, I discovered my passion for civic engagement and my ability to take on a leadership role in initiating positive changes.

Working on the project allowed me to see the support and encouragement that exists within my community. Collaborating with others and witnessing the 600+ people who showed up to vote during the competition demonstrated the power of collective activism. It reinforced my belief in the strength of communities when they come together to address shared concerns and aspirations.

After this experience, I helped others in the Svaneti region to write similar projects after our successful initiative in Gardabani taught me the importance of knowledge-sharing and supporting other communities in their endeavours. It showed me that our actions can inspire others to take action and create a ripple effect of positive change.

Student, Georgia

best consistent takeaways
impact of the Youth for
better future project seems to be quite profound – in some cases the project was a determining factor in further civic engagement of some of the students. Similarly, to Bosnia, sense of teamwork and power of collective action were also among the key takeaways.

Sustainability

Further support needed by the teachers

Findings:

Teachers in **Georgia** unanimously expressed the need for continuous professional development opportunities. In particular, they stated the following areas where they would like to develop further pedagogic competencies:

- Facilitation of teamwork
- Techniques to facilitate active listening and respectful dialogue
- Further resources encouraging students to work towards common goals
- Cooperative learning strategies
- Creating inclusive environment in class
- Networking opportunities and sharing experience with other teachers of civic education

In **Bosnia**, teachers did not identify any particular further needs in terms of their own professional development or support needed. This may be due to the fact that the interviewees were teacher trainers at the same time. They did stress the need for further projects which would provide practical opportunities for young people to be actively involved and ideally youth-led.

Interest of public authorities in the project concepts

The education authorities in **Bosnia** are reportedly very interested in introducing similar concepts at younger age, these ideas were also expressed by some of the students and teachers interviewed. No representatives of national authorities were however interviewed to confirm. As per Agora CE, this opinion was also confirmed in a meeting with a representative of an association of primary school teachers. The implementing partners shared that there is no unified approach at national as each canton has its own ministry of education and they reportedly cannot identify joint priorities.

In **Georgia**, no representatives of national authorities were interviewed either as they did not respond to requests for interviews. However, interviewed experts confirmed the need for introducing and deepening the concept of experiential learning and also stressed the need to work primarily in rural areas, which are generally underserved. They also mentioned that fostering cooperation, networking and resources sharing among local NGOs would be highly desirable.

Conclusions

There is definitely appetite for further similar projects in both countries. Findings above show that the projects yield tangible and long-lasting outcomes both for teachers as well as students involved. In Georgia, interviewed teachers provided concrete areas where they feel the need for further professional development while Bosnian teachers were rather speaking about the need for more similar projects (this was also confirmed by Georgian teachers) It is unclear to what extent public authorities support the concepts introduced by the projects.

6. Points to consider for future strategies

Participatory budgeting

- There is a need to lower intensive involvement of the local partners in the process and perhaps intensify the preparatory period (e.g. by training more members of the community) so that the municipalities function more independently in the process itself. Planning projects on longer term basis and longer term cooperation with municipalities should also be considered.
- Do not limit the scope of student involvement by focusing on the needs of marginalised groups, especially if the funds available are low. Another option is to explain clearer that in this case, students, youth and children are also among those marginalised and it is ok to focus on their own needs and issues.
- Consider whether feasibility aspects should be more emphasized – if all projects are admitted to voting and are not feasible to implement, it could lead to a sense of discouragement. In the case of Moldova, one municipality mentioned that they struggle with feasibility assessment, and this is also an issue when evaluating the projects. In Georgia,

commitments of local municipalities were at times not upheld, it might be worth it to think of other options, including small crowdfunding youth initiatives.

Improving civic education and civic participation of pupils and students

- Focus on facilitating opportunities for young like-minded people to network and share experience – this is a great motivating factor for young activists worldwide.
- Consider introducing cooperative (not competitive) simulated debates – this could be helpful in strengthening teamwork and active listening skills.
- Continue to provide ongoing professional development support to teachers trained in prior projects

7. Annexes

7.1. Sources reviewed

- Bilateral cooperation program 2018-2023 – Czech Republic and BiH
http://www.czechaid.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/3932490_2350969_BaH_revidovany_program.pdf
- Bilateral cooperation program 2018-2023 – Czech Republic and Georgia
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- Bilateral cooperation program 2018-2023 – Czech Republic and Moldova
http://www.czechaid.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Programme_Moldova_CzechAid_2018_EN.pdf
- BiH Handbook on Open Local Government and Public Ethics, Council of Europe, 2022
- Local Government in Moldova - Responses to Urban-Rural Challenges - Viorel GirbuNALAS - Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe, 2020
https://www.academia.edu/85004733/Participatory_Budgeting_Process_in_Chisinau

7.2. Stakeholders interviewed

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Teachers/trainers

- Dragana Kartal
- Amra Ajdin
- Alma Mahmutović
- Igor Smiljanić
- Alma Ahmethodžić
- Aldina Zulum Džanko
- Elvedina Mujezin
- Đuldina Kurtović

Students

- Adnan Hadžić
- Admir Đonko
- Amila Kulović
- Amila Oglečevac
- Merjem Šehić
- Arna Mekić
- Lamija Salkić

Participatory budgeting coordinators

- Nedica Bjelica
- Edita Islamović
- Dejan Stekić
- Alen Smajić
- Boso Bošnjak

Mayors (current/former)

- Vedad Jusić
- Mladen Misurić-Ramljak
- Zdravko Marošević
- Renato Pejak
- Dragoljub Gagović

Authors of citizen projects

- Azrudin Salkić
- Darijo Perić
- Mirijana Medić
- Malik Likić
- Daliborka Rankić

Georgia

Experts/trainers

- Irakli Melashvili
- Kukuri Kiguradze
- Davit Losaberidze
- Marina Muskhelishvili
- Levan Kurulashvili

Teachers

- Lela Tsurtsunia
- Nana Khizanishvili
- Larisa Avakhiani
- Lali Maisuradze
- Natia Devnozashvili
- Nani Bakuradze

Students

- Lana Vashadze
- Teona Kapanadze
- Salome Gafrindashvili
- Ioseb Gafrindashvili
- Temur Kurtsikidze
- Natia Oniani
- Nikoloz Gavashelishvili

Local partners/coordinators

- Irakli Merkviladze
- Revaz Egadze
- Misha Chitadze
- Ioseb Buadze
- Zaza Gochelashvili
- Magda Popiashvili

Moldova**Mayors/municipality representatives**

- Nina Costiuc
- Elena Zagornii
- Radu Chilaru

Members of working groups

- Proca Marcica
- Curchi Mihail
- Elena Palii

Authors of citizen projects

- Veronica Curchi
- Carolina Nofit

