

What is all this about?

In March 2010 two hundred of young activists met to work with each other and share their experiences. Students from **Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland** in Cieszyn (4-6.03), and **Lithuania and Poland** in Augustów (18-20.03) improved their skills of project method working, local diagnosis, communication and cooperation within a group. The **European School Activists' Meetings** project is organized by Center for Citizenship Education Foundation in partnership with Gemini os. (Prague), Gymnasium in Medzilaborce, I LO im. Grzegorza Piramowicza in Augustów and Simon Konarsky Secondary School. Workshops were co-financed by the European Union within the programme "Europe for Citizens 2007 - 2013".

This publication is a brief compilation of essential materials used during workshops, which can be useful in local activity, project planning and implementation.

We hope that our workshop and this publication will be a great support for all of the participants - young local leaders - in their further activities.

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Making projects - changing the world

Nowadays, maybe even more than ever, young people have the chance to change the world around them and make it a better place - our generation has access to a wide range of possibilities including technical ones, which our parents and grandparents would not have even dreamt of... Suffice to look around and think together what we want to change or improve, plan our work well, find allies who are going to help us, get to action, and - change the world!

This is probably the shortest definition of the project method work.

The project method work is very open and capacious: working this way we can lead to getting park benches painted, renovating an animal shelter, organizing a system of micro-loans and adopting a UN resolution!

It is supposed to be only a question of good work-organization - but surely, it is good to graduate the 'adventures' with projects and gain experience from smaller, more local activities which will lead to more effective activities on a larger scale.

The fact that your project has a local scope does not mean it has to refer to local issues. The subject you choose may be local and national, European or global. Well, you can organize a campaign encouraging friends (or their parents) to take part in the elections. So it would be both a local project, as well as national or European one.

The project method is a useful tool in citizen actions: it helps to organize the work over complicated, multi-aspect and long-term tasks. We would like to present shortly five main

stages of project - knowing them make it easier to plan and execute effective local project.

Step 1 - Needs and resources diagnosis

No matter if the problem you would like to tackle is the lack of green areas where people can walk their dogs, the lack of knowledge of consumers' rights among your peers, the need to create a local online newspaper or the desire to protest against the introduction of paid-for education in the European Union . **In order to decide about a solution you have to know as much as possible about the problem.**

Identify your situation. Recognize the environment in two areas - **needs** (find out what services or facilities are missing or are necessary to provide in your school or what your classmates would like to do at school) and **resources** (think of what you already have - skills, time, materials). Before taking action or planning your project, try to reach the greatest number of students or citizens to learn about their needs and listen to different opinions. Such diagnosis will give students from your school a notion of importance and purposefulness of your project. Being given a chance to express their opinion on issues that concern them, they are more likely to join your projects!

A good diagnosis of the problem will help you with:

- Identifying the needs of beneficiaries properly;
- Planning your project better;
- Using available resources in a more effective way;
- Completing common actions;

The 6 questions method:

Try to get information which let you answer these questions, according to your problem.

What? What is the essence of the problem?

Who? Who is affected: students, teachers, a particular class of students?

Where? Extent of the problem: find out whether the students are facing it during the classes or after school? Does the problem concern your school or locality?

How long? How long does the situation last for? Is it couple of months or maybe weeks? Is the problem temporary or permanent?

Why? What was the cause? How did it start? Where is the source of the problem? Proposed activities will be more effective if they respond to the causes of the problem (e.g. lack of interesting proposals to spend free time) rather than their consequences (e.g. drugs taking by students),

How? How can we solve this problem? Find at least 3 alternative solutions; analyse their pros and the cons.

Methods of research

To get useful information you may use various methods - surveys (also Internet poll), interviews, photographic and film documentation, observation, analyze sources of valuable data, eg. Internet, newspapers, libraries, etc. Some of these methods will be introduced in second part of this publication.

Analyze the results

Once your investigation is finished compare your findings. Discuss with your co-workers what was the most difficult part of it, and what was the easiest one? Find out whether your co-workers obtained different answers from yours. Compare the answers and think why they are different. Think about new things that you have learnt and how the results differ from your previous assumptions. What are the main problems that arise from your diagnosis? Choose those which could be addressed.

Step 2 - Solution and the action plan

Thanks to information you have gathered some ideas of what can be done might have already emerged. The next step is to develop a plan of possible solutions based on information you obtained. You can start creating it once you know what type of action you want to take or what kind of an event you want to organise in order to achieve your goals.

Reaching to good solution

At first establish your main goal. Then think of possible solutions together. Think carefully about what you have to do now and where to focus your efforts. Do you and your friends feel personally involved in this project? If yes, you have a great chance to succeed. If not, find a subject that is more interesting for you!

How to find a good solution?

- Determine the main objectives / purpose of your activities - clear, understandable, which will become a reference point for finding solutions during the project
- Your goal should be specific and realistic - in the sphere of your possibilities. For example:
problem: teenagers do not have a proper place where they could meet after school so they hang out on streets, doing nothing;
unreal solution: everyone will find a hobby;

real solution: you can try to organize activities such as acrobatic bicycle or graffiti classes that will attract some of them;

- More so, your goal should be attractive enough to spark enthusiasm and arise curiosity and willingness to act. Set up a deadline for an execution of each task - it will certainly keep your team alert!

Now you need a plan!

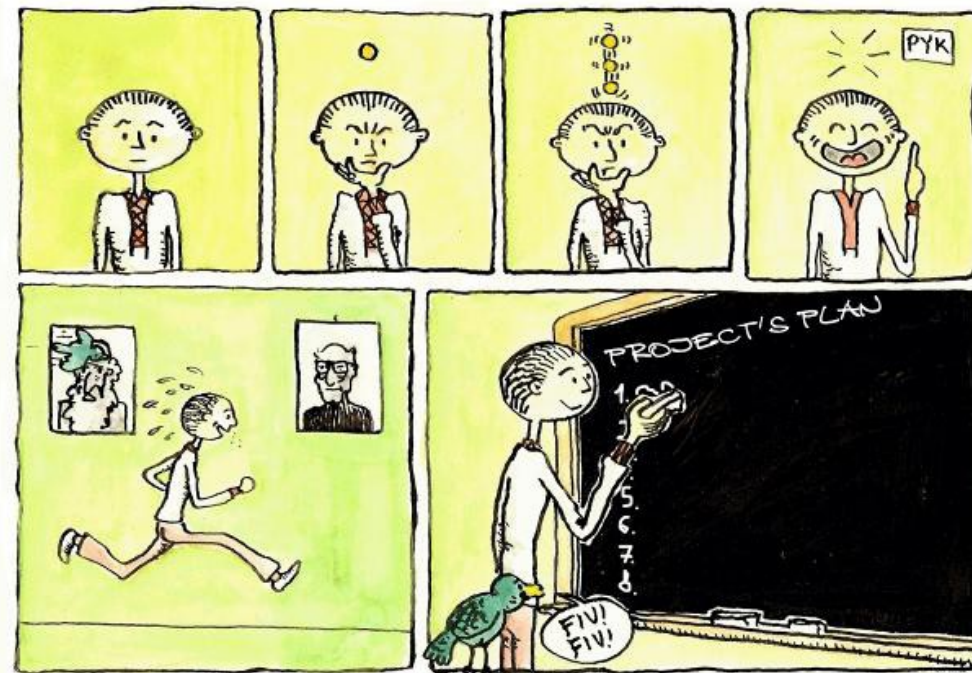
A good plan is half the battle. It facilitates the work and mobilizes the efforts of all members of the group. Once you decide, what you want to achieve, you can move on to another stage - **project management**. This is very important step as it shows you how to manage the project. You might find it necessary to dedicate an entire meeting for the project planning.

Gantt's chart - easy to plan

To plan your project effectively you may use a table called **Gantt's chart**. In this table there are four main columns to be filled:

- **tasks** - smaller segments of your project;
- the **resources** needed for the task;
- the name of the **person responsible** for it;
- the **time of start and deadline** for completion;

When planning, assume that a task will take you up to 20% more time than you initially planned - the reality can often play tricks.



Remember to leave some extra space under the table in case you forget about something or come up with new ideas. Be flexible and don't hesitate to alter your plan. Very often, in the middle of the project, some unexpected circumstances occur which might affect the structure of your original plan. **Remember: you cannot predict everything!**

Step 3 - Looking for allies

Every project needs allies for its implementation. To implement your actions you will need licenses, in-kind support and even financial support. This is why you need allies!

Allies are all individuals, groups and institutions that may assist you with implementing the project. Depending on what type of project you are working on, you may need different allies.

Cooperation with an ally should be based on the 'win - win' principle so that both parties should benefit from the project. For an ally this may be a simple satisfaction, but he or she may also want a publicity or the possibility of obtaining your support for their own projects, etc. Think about an ally as a partner, to whom you offer certain benefits in the exchange.

Who can help?

In addition to parents, teachers and the Head-master, whose support for student activities is invaluable, you may also give a thought about the following persons and institutions:

- school councils in other schools, non-governmental organizations, local Youth Council, local government, youth clubs and organizations, small and medium size enterprises, local media, cultural institutions, colleges, etc.

Before you meet with potential ally

Remember to be ALWAYS prepared for the meeting. Think about the following questions:

- What do you want to ask your ally about?

- What might your ally expect from you and what can you offer in exchange for the support?
- What is so special about your project and how will the local community benefit from it?
- What are the benefits for your ally from taking part in your project?
- What sort of questions concerning the project might your ally ask during the meeting? Think about the answers too!
- Collect a data that might help to convince your ally: statistic data, fact sheets, opinions of teachers and students, research results, etc.
- Inform your ally what the consequences might be for the local community if the project fails;
- Plan your conversation: what do you want to talk about at the beginning and what do you want leave for the end?

A good preparation and presentation of your project is worth devoting some time as the outcome of this meeting might be you gaining a valuable collaborator. **Be professional:** at the end of the meeting leave the summary of your project printed on paper.

During the meeting with the ally remember about:

- being clear and concise while explaining the project.
- using the power words that will show your self-assurance: 'we are sure that...', 'we are certain that...', 'we believe that', rather than: 'I think that', 'I assume that', 'It seems that'
- self- promotion!!! - mention the most important achievements of your group

Step 4 - Let's do it!

You have already gone through all the steps, that will help you to efficiently implement your project and achieve a spectacular success! Now, we have the most exciting part before us: the ACTION - new challenges and fun!

Difficult moments

During the project there will certainly be difficulties and problems. That is why it is very important, that you meet in your group as often as possible, and talk about what is happening. During such meetings it is important, that everyone says what he/she has recently managed to do for the project, and what is the problem he/she is facing now. **Update your team about the progress of your work!!!** Always remember to reward all the achievements and think together about how to solve possible problems.

Photographs and films

Your action is worth being documented, and the best way to do that is taking photographs and making films. The more you have the better! Just make sure they show what your project was about, and who was involved!

Photographs are also a great way of documentation of the course and changes that have occurred (for example, during renovation of classrooms). You can use them when promoting action, seeking allies, sending information to the media, organizing the presentation of

the project ending. Videos of attractive events, posted on the school website or Youtube, can be a great showcase of your actions.

Market yourself

Show to your local community and school what you have done, and what effects of your actions are. Show off your group's achievements! It will help to gain new partners and volunteers for your future projects.

Think about different ways to present your achievements and results of your work:

- short documentary movie on the Youtube;
- interesting power point presentation;
- a poster;
- an official meeting for the project organisers and contributors;

Ask local newspapers to describe your actions. They might be more keen on doing so if you prepare a short info about your project beforehand.

Let's talk

Regular group meetings are important for good coordination of your project. During the meetings discuss the action plan again and reflect on the following points:

1. Do you manage to do everything on time? How good is/was your time management?
2. What did especially help in my work? What was most difficult task and why?
3. Which tasks you did not manage to complete on time and why?
4. Did you have to alter your plans for some reason? If, yes - why?
5. What should I do in the nearest future? Are changes in the action plan necessary?
6. Have we managed to promote our activities?



Step 5 - Evaluation

We encourage you to talk, after you finish your job - to analyze the various stages of the project. Discussions should help to draw conclusions and solve the problem. It is necessary to ask precise questions and stick to the topic.

The measure of your success

By managing your own project you may become a well-known person in your local community. In order to find out whether you achieved positive results at the end of your project, you must check if there are some visible changes in your local community. Remember -

the measure of your success is how much you learnt during the project. During a group meeting ask your co-workers:

- Did we gain new skills?
- Did we manage to be a good team?
- Did we meet new people?
- How many people did we manage to get involved in our project?
- Did we manage to have our tasks done on time?

If the answer is “Yes”, then be sure - you have achieved a lot!

It might have happened that despite the effort you had made, you had not managed to achieve all your goals. Remember: what really matters here is that you started talking about the problem. Important thing is that you showed to others, that this problem really exists in your community and you wanted to do something about it. You showed that you care. There is a strong chance that the local authorities won't forget about your project and sooner or later the change will come. **Achieving your goal is equally important as your participation in the project.**

How to check what has changed?

The best way to do that is to use the same methods that you used at the beginning of the project (diagnosis and data collection). By asking the same questions and looking for information in a similar way you will be able to compare how

the situation was before and how it is now. You can also find out what has changed since you started your project by students' questions such as:

- how did you benefit from this project?
- what can we improve next time?

I know that I know

When you finish work on the project already, every one of you should ask yourself a few questions to help determine what it was for him/her:

1. What have I learnt?

2. What was the most valuable experience for me in the whole project?
3. Have I learnt something new about myself?
4. Has the project changed my mind about something that we do?
5. What can I use my new skills for?

Diagnosis methods - interview

There are different types of interviews, but in all cases it is essential to prepare a **list of wanted information** which we want to gather. The task of a researcher is to get them during a conversation.

The list may include such issues as: what changes in school students want? What hobbies they have? How they spend their free time? How they could participate in actions of their school council? What ideas of future actions they have? Etc.

For each information needed you have to invent from one to few (4-5) questions.

What for?

The advantage of interviews is an opportunity to get more details while asking about issues which you may find interesting. For example, when you talk with a student acting in an amateur theatre, you can focus on it and talk for instance about his/her ideas of creating theatre club at school.

A well arranged interview may effect in more detailed information.

Most of all an interview serves as a source of information about **views, opinions, and life styles - about all complex issues which couldn't be presented briefly.**

The rules of preparing interview questions are similar to the ones in a survey poll.

Disadvantages

You have to remember that conducting an interview is more difficult than a survey - an interviewer has to be flexible and react spontaneously to answers of an interviewee.

This method is also more time-consuming. That is why a group of respondents should be limited and include persons from who we expect getting more specific information (for instance: a headmaster, students with a specific

interests such as scouting, film, sport, playing guitar - representatives of local organizations etc.). It is also harder to analyze the result of interviews, especially when we have to analyze more of them.

Diagnosis methods - observation

As students/school employees, you observe the school life all the time. An observation as a method of a diagnosis requires that an observer knows **how** to look and what to look at.

Similarly to conducting an interview, you should prepare a list of information you are about to search / you want to find.

What for?

An observation is useful to get basic information **about features of a person/groups and relations between them**. For instance: in what places particular groups spend their time between lessons, what are students' favourite activities, what are the school relations between students - what informal student groups, are there any conflicted groups, how many persons are rejected, not belonging to any group, what actions are taken by students (for example, painting graffiti, practicing different kinds of sports), which associations are active and interesting and which ones do not meet students expectations, what are relations between students and teachers, and many more.

Disadvantages

An observation is not satisfying as a self-relying diagnosis method, but it can provide a base for choosing problems with whom we want to deal, or persons which you could engage in your actions to benefit your project. Basing on an observation you can prepare more detailed questions of a survey or an interview.

Diagnosis methods - survey

A short survey and a poll are the methods which are most frequently used. The most basic is a short survey. It consists of one or two questions posed to a group of people. It is useful in cases when we are interested in just one issue. A short survey may be a good tool to gather opinions of a big group of people and count the results.

Conducting a poll requires questionnaire - a list of questions to which a respondent (a person being asked) answers or fill it by himself.

What for?

Surveys/polls are useful when we want to get knowledge about **facts, attitudes or opinions**. You may try to respond via conducting a survey or a poll to such problems: how pupils spend free time (respondents may choose among several options/answers), what are the dangers at school, how many student are interested in theatre, etc. An advantage of a survey is that its results are presented as the numerical data which may be quite easy to interpret. For instance we can learn from a survey that 15% of pupils have been robbed in a park near their school at least once or that 38 persons are members of various music bands.

Disadvantages

A disadvantage of a survey is that we do not analyze the results too deeply because the data is simplified. For example, it is hard to find out via survey individual reasons of these attitudes/opinions. In survey researcher can not ask respondent for further details, more precise answers, etc.

Questions

In both, a survey and a poll you can pose two kinds of questions:

Open - in open questions respondents are asked to express their opinion and formulate their own statement. For instance: "Write down what - in your opinion - your school is missing?", "What are the school extra-classes you would like to participate in? or „What is your hobby. Please, describe it”.

Closed - the answers to your questions is limited (choosing from a limited range of questions is called “a cafeteria”). There are many kinds of closed questions. For instance:

1. Do you play any music instrument?

- a) YES
- b) NO

7. What is missing in your school?

- a) a school canteen
- b) a school discussion club
- c) a well-equipped playing field
- d) something else - please, write what: ... [a respondent can write what she/he wants. It is so called a half-open question]

Diagnosis methods - analyze of existing data

Existing data are all the media that are available - newspaper and Internet, as well as documents. Local activists may archive local newspapers (in and the Internet), school web-of the town, social network. Such services as Facebook not only to ask opinions and laborators but also to inform activities. Remember also - they are containing the the neighborhood are often perlocal media as they collect of a very local character, ally cannot be found in the local media.

Analyze of dia may be a further re- may help you

late more precise question to interview or survey, or reach to the well-informed people.



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