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The Role of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the Implementation of Glocal Education

Abstract

With regard to the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the beginning of 2018 the National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria launched a call for proposals under the Grant ‘Support of the Municipal Initiatives Related to the Local Dimension of the Bulgarian Presidency in 2018’. The Municipality of Kostenets proposed and implemented the project ‘Raising Awareness of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union’ with the participation of a team formed by students and teachers from ‘Georgi Sava Rakovski’ Vocational High School. The activities of the team included: 1) research of information about the European Union and the Bulgarian Presidency; 2) project based teaching, where students and teachers learnt together about the role of the European funds for the development of Kostenets Municipality; 3) active citizenship through students’ participation in discussions about global and local issues with a member of the European Parliament, the town mayor and municipality experts. The project gave opportunities to the students to understand and experience the dimensions of the glocal education, to appreciate the citizenship not only as consumers’ privileges but also as personal responsibilities, to raise their awareness for the global issues and to believe that each of them can contribute to the common good at local and global level.

Keywords: glocal education, civil education, active citizenship

Introduction

With regard to the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the beginning of 2018 the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria launched a call for proposals under the Grant ‘Support of the Municipal Initiatives Related to the Local Dimension of the Bulgarian Presidency in 2018’. The Municipality of Kostenets proposed and implemented the project ‘Raising Awareness of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union’ with the participation of a team formed by 12 students, 3 teachers and the director of ‘Georgi Sava Rakovski’ Vocational High School. The project aimed to demonstrate the importance of the Bulgarian EU Presidency for the country, enabling students to develop their civic literacy, communication and organizational skills and to increase their commitment and engagement on issues related to the future of Kostenets, Bulgaria and Europe. Although the project was not conceived as a project for glocal education, its implementation helped students to look glocally at the world we live in, and it included the three dimensions of glocal education: teaching, research and citizenship.

A good practice from ‘Georgi Sava Rakovski’ Vocational High School and Kostenets Municipality

The students from ‘Georgi Sava Rakovski’ Vocational High School participated in the municipal project on a voluntary basis mostly through extracurricular activities and succeeded in performing all project activities as planned.

In the first activity, the students organized a campaign to promote the role of the Bulgarian EU Presidency – they distributed 200 information brochures in the Municipality of Kostenets, communicated with familiar and unfamiliar people either skeptical or open minded. Later in March, the students conducted a survey among the citizens of Kostenets distributing 100 questionnaire cards related to the Bulgarian Presidency's messages and priorities. Through meetings with ordinary people, the students gathered their first impressions about the local way of thinking of the Bulgarian Presidency, the role of Europe for Bulgaria and the distance between local expectations and national and European realities.

As part of the project, it was held a meeting-discussion ‘United Europe – as we want it to be’ with the participation of a Bulgarian member of the European Parliament and the town mayor – representatives of different political parties, municipality experts, teachers and students. Before the meeting, the students researched the portfolio of the Bulgarian member of the European Parliament, the aims, structure and values of the European Union and formulated their questions about the opportunities and challenges of young people in Kostenets, Bulgaria and Europe. Some of the questions included: What helped you to evolve from a small town to the position of a member of the European Parliament? What should be the starting salary of the young people in Bulgaria? Could the EU Presidency contribute to the development of tourism in Bulgaria? etc. The representative of EU Parliament responded to the questions and gave his opinion on many current local national and European issues such as: for and against the Istanbul Convention, the advantages and disadvantages of the European market for Bulgaria, the opportunities for development of rail transport and shortening the travel time from Kostenets to Sofia and many others. The students were impressed to discuss these topics with political representatives in their small town, to see their own importance for the future development of the area and how local and global constantly interact between each other.

At the end of February, the ‘Georgi Sava Rakovski’ Vocational High School organized a meeting with teachers and experts from the Municipality of Kostenets. They presented information about the implemented projects at school and in Kostenets Municipality funded by different programs of the European Union in the field of infrastructure, tourism, young people and social services. The students could ask questions and give their ideas and proposals for future projects and took part in a mini-debate entitled ‘Advantages and Disadvantages of Bulgaria’s Membership in the European Union’. All these activities aimed to develop their skills in critical thinking, public speaking and active citizenship. The meeting provoked students to search for information and photos, showing the contribution of the EU programs for the Municipality of Kostenets and together with their teachers to prepare a presentation and a leaflet for an official event on The Day of Europe (9th of May) in the Municipality of Kostenets. The process of researching, gathering, selecting and presenting information enabled students to realize the local effect of the global

political and economic decisions as well as the role of personal decisions to exercise civil and political rights – not only with consumers’ attitude but also with conscience, responsibility and criticism.

As part of the municipal project activities, students visited the EU Information Center in Sofia, where they built up the knowledge they had had about the EU and the Presidency of Bulgaria, about the structure and organization of the European institutions and the European Union’s objectives.

The effective cooperation between ‘Georgi Sava Rakovski’ Vocational High School and Kostenets Municipality resulted in additional meetings where the students presented different ideas for development of the tourist sites in the municipality and the inclusion of additional attractions and programs to attract more tourists. The meetings had two main objectives. On the one hand, to examine the priorities for developing community tourism through the prism of young people and thus to receive fresh and alternative ideas. On the other hand, students expressed their civic position in front of the local authorities and realized that their opinion is important and taken into account.

Conclusion

Addressing glocal education was not the initial focus of the project ‘Raising Awareness of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union’ in the Municipality of Kostenets, but indeed, it made progress in the achievement of the glocal educational goals. The project succeeded to raise the civic awareness among young people and to show that the dimension of citizenship includes not only privileges, but also responsibilities. It made them believe that every one of them can contribute to the common good at a local and global level. In conclusion it could be inferred that the joint projects between schools and municipalities such as the one presented here, could be considered as good practices for promoting glocal education and active citizenship among young people and this initiative is worthy to continue in a larger scale and on a regular basis in the future.

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