BRIDGES

With co-financing from the Fund
of Asylum, Migration and Integration
of the European Union

EU BRIDGES PROJECT PARTNERS 05

NO TO RACISM YES TO INCLUSION 38

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BRIDGES PROJECT MANAGER VALERIA GHERARDINI FROM AICS AND HEAD OF THE CSIT PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE ABOUT THE IDEA AND INSTALLATION OF THE EU-BRIDGES PROJECT

What was the aim of the project?

Since migration flows became a couple of years an emergency and structural phenomenon at that time, AiCS decided to make a contribution by setting up a professional team and providing scientific support to the University of Padua and make a contribution with expertise. It was therefore a pilot project to promote social cohesion. Therefore, it was clear from the beginning that the goal could not only be the asylum seeker as a newcomer, but that the community as a whole had to be involved. So we had to prepare the local community to treat the project as a whole and use the newcomer phenomenon as an opportunity to strengthen social cohesion.

This is why we have started to accept asylum seekers who encourage the active participation of the local community (institutions, social associations, churches and citizens, sports-organizations, theatres and businesses) in order to provide newcomers with the opportunity to receive community reception tools (e.g. Italian language, administrative procedures for interaction with local institutions, job search) as well as to participate in community-based activities (e.g. voluntary activities, sports practices and cultural initiatives).

Instead of focusing only on migrants to provide these services, the pilot project focused on the commitment of the local community to involve newcomers and involve them as citizens, even if they were not or are not legal citizens.

Was there EU support at that time?

The project was considered by the German Bundestag as one of the EU's best practices from which German asylum centres could draw lessons. This is why a delegation of the German Bundestag visited the centre in Florence in 2017 to gather ideas and exchange experiences and expertise.

Did the project also meet with national approval?

After first experiments, we as AiCS started to discuss it with other partners in Florence. With **COSPE** – an ONG dealing with international cooperation in Florence and in many parts of the world – and with **SOCIOLAB** – a cooperative partner dealing with participative approaches in communities – on the need to apply this model not only in the case of asylum seekers, but in all communities that can experience the presence of migrants (including third-country nationals) as a critical situation affecting the social cohesion of the community. After a period of experimentation and reflection, there was a need to spread, to transmit and reflect more.

When did you start thinking about an EU project?

After all the discussions, the decision was quickly taken to look for an EU Call (AMIF programme) that would allow a new model and role, the community organiser, to be proposed for all communities, with the aim of promoting social cohesion.

What were the selection criteria for the partners?

After strengthening cooperation at national level, we had the opportunity to reflect on the involvement of existing **AiCS** partners who could have joined us in this new pilot project. And each of us started to engage organisations that could have had enough expertise to carry out the tasks foreseen in the project application.

CMS (Croatia) was selected for its expertise in managing asylum seekers and refugee centres, as well as for its expertise in combating xenophobia and promoting peace processes.

UCEC (Spain) was chosen because it is the Catalan grassroots sports organization linked to many local authorities to offer sport as a tool to promote social cohesion in the communities. UCEC commissioned the Municipality of Tortosa (Spain) to acquire the expertise of the cultural and social sector from the project.

ANTIGONE (Greece) is an ONG that deals with social activities aimed at promoting social cohesion in the municipalities. In turn, they have decided to involve USB in particular for its expertise on the involvement of the local community in the design and organization of sports practices and cultural initiatives.

CSIT (Austria) as an international amateur sports federation, is the optimal organization whose basis can guarantee the international dissemination of the best practices carried out within the framework of the project.

BRIDGES

Building Relationships and Integration by Developing Local Groups and Enhancing Solidarity

BRIDGES is an EU co-funded project modelled on the CSIT member organization AiCS (Italy), which started experimenting with a first asylum center in Florence already in 2015. Since migration flows became an emergency and structural phenomenon at that time, AiCS, an association that has been historically involved in sports, cultural and social policy since 1962, decided to make a contribution by setting up a professional team and providing scientific support to the University of Padua. CSIT is as partner of the project responsible for dissemination of the content on all their communication channels.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this project is to create cohesive and inclusive local communities that foster participation and exchange between old and new residents. The project promotes active civic participation of 'new' and 'old' residents of neighbourhoods and local communities, encouraging dialogue, collaboration and intercultural exchange between them. Citizens will be mobilized and motivated to interact with each other and to make their skills and voluntary work available to the community. The active engagement of natives and migrants will foster a more positive perception of migration and promote the construction of a counter narrative against the "invasion" rhetoric that dominates public debate on migration and asylum in Europe.

PROJECT EXTENDED

The European Union co-financed project was originally scheduled to run for two years from January 2019 to January 2021. But Corona changed everything, also the timetable. The Pandemic has left the world in a state of shock and forced many projects to take an unwanted break. The EU social project **BRIDGES** for the integration of refugees and people from third world countries was one of them. BRIDGES made a request which was accepted by the EU. The Union agreed to a 6-month extension until June 2021 because of the Corona interruption. All important projects and ongoing activities of the involved organizations from Italy, Spain, Croatia, Greece and Austria can now be finalized without time pressure. The final conference of the BRIDGES project will be held in Italy in the framework of the CSIT WSG 2021 from 1st to 6th of June in Emilia Romagna (Italy).

METHODOLOGY

The project applies participatory and co-design methodologies to the facilitation of dialogue and collective action. The methodologies will allow the development of a fruitful community dialogue and will result in the co-creation and implementation of integration initiatives. The process will adapt and integrate a wide range of tools and methodologies from human-centered service design, collaborative practices and design thinking, to facilitate the active engagement of citizens to meet community requirements and to support capacity building in communities.

NEEDS AND ASSESSMENTS

Tortosa in Catalunya was host city for the second basic meeting of the EU-BRIDGES-Project for after the constitutional meeting in Florence at the very beginning. In the second meeting, the needs and assessments of the BRIDGES project were discussed and explained by using practical examples. Where is the need to work with the project, with which communities and which groups? Why is the project that important? What challenges brings the project? What tools, approaches and success stories from the best practices of the participating partners **AiCS**, **COSPE** and **SOCIOLAB** (Italy), **UCEC** (Spain), **ANTIGONE** and **USB** (Greece) and **CMS** (Croatia) can be shared and used to help to overcome the challenges?

CONTENT AND VISION

No matter which country, third country nationals are all facing the same problems. The biggest challenges for projects like BRIDGES are mostly the same: How can you reach the target group and create sustainable communities, how can the project raise positive coexistence of migrants and locals, bring convivence and community feeling and install the mixture of cultures as well as break barriers because of language problems. The tools and assessments for a positive solution are quite similar too: Music, Workshops, Dancing classes or cooking events. Bring people together and raise group feeling.

PARTNERS

ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA CULTURA SPORT

AiCS was established in 1962 as an Italian non-profit Organization of grassroots sport promotion with headquarter in Rome, 20 regional and 100 local committees, 12.000 cultural and sports clubs and approximately one million members. Sectors are culture, social policies, social tourism and environmental sustainability. AiCS is enrolled at CONI (Italian Olympic Games Committee) as National Provider of sport for all practices and it is recognized by the CIP (Italian Paralympic Committee). AiCS means sport and culture as social tools to develop active citizenship and to promote social cohesion into communities: sports and arts have the power to change perceptions, prejudices and behaviors, as well as to inspire people, break down racial and political barriers, combat discrimination and defuse conflicts (United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/73/24).

AiCS acts at a national and international level, through the delivering of sport and culture for all, to promote equal opportunities among people, health, education and social inclusion, to combat violence, to contrast racism and radicalization in any form, and to promote a change for a better world. It believes that the emergency of migration flows, all over the world, is a challenge that should be faced by engaging the community as a whole, strengthening local networks, though education, sport, arts, volunteering and community-based initiatives in order to provide an overall response. Beyond the Italian borders AiCS is active in Kenya, Morocco, Chile, Colombia and Russia providing the expertise and Education programs for the International managers and staff members. AiCS is also working in Capo Verde, Ivory Coast, Algeria, Tunisia and Central America to spread its vision, expertise and to launch new programs.

cospe

TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

COSPE was established in 1983, is a non-profit association operating in 25 countries around the world with about 70 projects alongside thousands of women and men for a change that ensures equitable and sustainable development, respect for human rights, peace and justice among peoples. COSPE works for the construction of a world in which diversity is considered a value, a world of many voices, where in the encounter we are enriched and where social justice passes above all through the access of all to equal rights and opportunities. A world with more rights and democracy, more social justice and environmental sustainability and where the achievement of equality between women and men and the elimination of all discrimination is a reality".

CMS

CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES

CMS was established in Pakracand in 1996 and formally registered in Zagreb the following year. It is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the values of non-violence, respect for human rights, tolerance and diversity through education, research and activism. CPS grew out of various forms of direct peace building in Western Slavonia (Pakrac Volunteer Project, 1993-1997). CPS works with three compatible programs: Asylum, Integration and Human Security, Peace Education and Nonviolence – Affirmation and Combating Inequality. CPS believes that by building a network of educated citizens who have peace-building skills and apply the values of peace building in everyday life, it contributes to the development of an active and influential civil society. By encouraging active and/or interested citizens, we aim to be a driving force in promoting a lasting and positive peace in the region. Through public events and actions we want to influence the public, the media and government structures to encourage them to participate in the processes of dealing with the past and formulating peace-building measures.

Antigone

CENTRE ON INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION
on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non-Violence

Antigone was established in 1993, is a non-profit organization with headquarter in Thessaloniki and the Information and Documentation Centre on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Nonviolence. The aim is to safeguard equal opportunities and equal treatment of all people without any discrimination on the basis of sex, race, national origin, social / economic / educational status, disability, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation... The organization holds a long and thorough experience in the use of non-formal education methodology

and experiential education through art. Such techniques and educational tools have proven to bring essential results in the activities ANTIGONE runs, such as workshops, seminars, participatory courses and events and carries out awareness raising activities, research, annual reports, surveys and essays on racism, xenophobia and antisemitism in the fields of employment, education, legislation, racist violence and housing in Greece. All activities are planned and carried out jointly with the targeted groups so as to run accordingly to their needs and expectations. They target to the coexistence, association and interaction of the different social groups towards common action that leads to equal participation in social, economic and cultural life.

sociolab
partecipazione e ricerca sociale

Sociolab was established in 2006 and is a cooperative and social enterprise and specialized in the fields of participatory development, co-design and collaborative practices, social research, training and communication. Sociolab works with a variety of partners in the public and private sector, as well as with civil society groups and international organizations. Sociolab designs and implements projects for the engagement and direct involvement of local communities and stakeholders in project design, implementation and strategic decision making; the promotion of social innovation; the effectiveness and inclusiveness of public and private communication; the production of in-depth field research to help policy makers better respond to the needs of communities. Sociolab works to promote meaningful engagement in a variety of fields including the management of the commons, social innovation in public policies, urban and social regeneration, health, education, gender equality, integration and social inclusion.

UNITED SOCIETIES OF BALKANS

United Societies of Balkans was established in 2008 and is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation based in Thessaloniki, Greece working in the field of youth, human rights and intercultural dialogue. It was founded by the inception of a group of active young people who wanted to address the social issues which affect the youngsters in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The vision and aim is the promotion of youth empowerment, participation in the economic and political life, youth mobility, voluntarism and human rights. Key areas concern the defence of human rights and the intercultural dialogue, the organisation of youth related projects such as youth exchanges and training courses, which can bring young people from Balkans and Europe together, and the organisation of local interventions, campaigns, researches, seminars and multimedia productions. It envisions a global and inclusive society, where citizens are equally empowered to contribute, in the shaping of a world with less prejudice, discrimination and other forms of injustice.

Ajuntament de Tortosa

Tortosa City Council is a public administration, which, among other things, has the objective and responsibility of working for the well-being of its citizens. In the framework of the social improvement of the city, the City Council of Tortosa, in 2009 promoted the beginning of a community process in order to strengthen community ties, social cohesion and promote coexistence. The community process brings together the work of technicians, institutions, entities, citizens and their associations. That is, people from different sectors, backgrounds and cultures who work together with the common goal of promoting the creation of unlikely relationships and breaking down existing relationship barriers between different population groups. Thanks to the joint and transversal work, the generation and empowerment of synergies, the coordination of actions, as well as participation, co-responsibility, sustainability and prevention, the aim is to promote a change in citizenship to transform cohabitation into coexistence.

Consells Esportius de Catalunya

UCEC is a non-profit sports association, created in 1994, that binds, coordinates and represents all sports councils in Catalonia (created in 1980 and 1981). UCEC has to look after the

correct performance of the sports councils and to guarantee that sport and recreational activities practised at school age are carried out with standards which will benefit a healthy and integral formation for all citizens. The Sports Councils are non-profit, private and legal entities of public and social interest. The 45 Sports Councils of Catalonia have as main objectives the development, organisation and promotion of physical activity at school age in their area. UCEC organizes sport activities for almost 250,000 children and young people from the age of 3 to 18 in Catalonia, in 63 different sports or disciplines. This represents 20 percent of the pupils enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Catalonia. In addition, UCEC organizes training and sport for all activities for more than 10,000 adults in Catalonia.

EU PROJECT

BRIDGES

PRESENTATIONS

VOLUNTEER FESTIVAL AS PRELUDE OF THE EU BRIDGES PROJECT IN Q5 OF FLORENCE

Associations of the partners of the European **BRIDGES** project organize a party on Saturday 12 October in the garden of Villa Pallini in Florence with shows and workshops as well as dances and moments of cultural exchange as a start of the **BRIDGES** project.

The party had two main moments to which everyone was invited: The party itself and the presentation in the Council Hall of the actions of the project carried out in the territory of Q5 together with associations representing foreign communities.

The staff of the **BRIDGES** project collected applications from all those who participated in the meetings, in which local associations were involved in the joint planning of sporting, cultural and voluntary events to be held in the Q5 of Florence.

REFUGEE WEEKS CROATIA

It took a while at the beginning of the project to explore and get to know all communities in Croatia. After the necessary analysis, CMS was more than ready for the first public BRIDGES event in Croatia. The organization of the Refugee Weeks.

June 20th is the World Refugee Day. A perfect date and for CMS a good and important reason to get the first Croatian project exactly on this day started. Since the integration process in Croatia is to be decentralized, municipalities throughout Croatia were involved, including Karlovac, Sisak, Kutina, Slavonski Brod, Split, Zadar, Zagreb, Kuterevo and Ježevo. The event was organized for a period of two weeks only shortly after the Covid-19 lockdown. Shortly after the Croatian society had gone through a strict lockdown, where most events were organized online and only few live.

The Refugee Weeks were organized in partnership with civil society organizations that are members of the informal network "Coordination for Integration". The Center for Peace Research, as a network member and coordinator, but also as the provider of the BRIDGES project, launched an online campaign with the aim of promoting the integration of refugees through everyday stories. The campaign included stories of refugees living in Croatia who have already found their place in the community. In short videos and a radio jingle, the five refugees Shazad, Melike, Juhana, Yazdan and Bongo told about their life in Croatia, what they do and what is important to them. They touchingly showed that Croatia is a place where living together is kept alive.

The videos were presented on social media and also shown on Croatian national television. In this way the stories of the refugees were brought closer to the Croatian population and BRIDGES was built from one home to another.

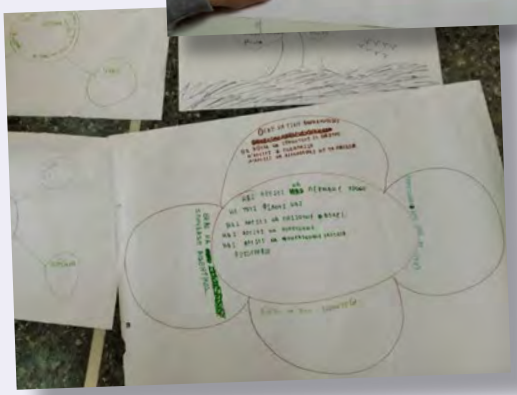
EXPERIENTIAL INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP

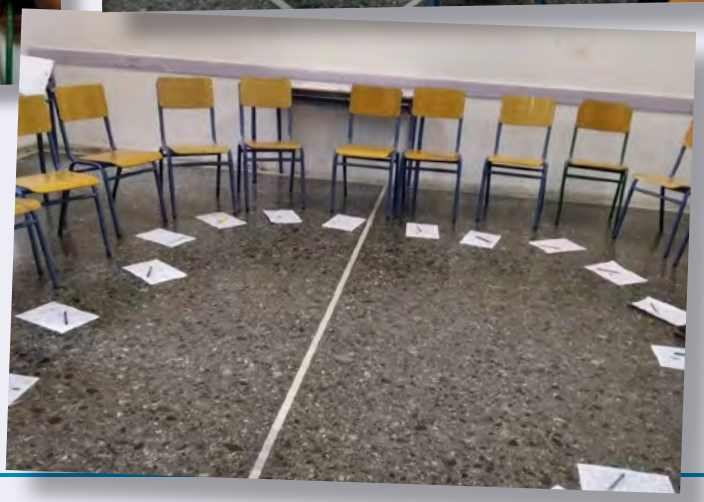
Teenagers of diverse backgrounds joined their creative energy together, within the BRIDGES Project. The ANTIGONE team carried out an experiential interactive workshop with a group of teenage students of migrants, refugees and national origins from Syria, Afghanistan and Greece. During the workshop,

35 students explored the change they can make in their neighborhood and community, by working together in cultural, volunteer and sports activities of their interest and came up with the next steps of their team.

The workshop's results were positive and promising and was repeated with the general population of the school. The school is located on Monastiriou Street, one of the biggest highways of the city in an industrial, rather disadvantaged neighborhood of Western Thessaloniki in close proximity to the regional train station. It is common that tensions and conflicts take place in that region, with the school forming a multicultural meeting space between Greek, Balkan and third country national students.

The workshop has been designed in an interactive way so as to facilitate participants perceive the potential of their cooperation that can lead to joint creative work leaving the boundaries aside. During the workshop, the BRIDGES Project has been introduced to the participant students and they were all invited to become carriers of peaceful and collaborative living together, being their community's dynamic core.





BEFORE COVID-19

CRO-AFRO PARTY AT THE BUENA VISTA CLUB ZAGREB

CMS organised an integration event in cooperation with the Afro Badinya Association. The CRO-AFRO party took place at the Club Buena Vista in Zagreb and consisted of two workshops led by dancers and musicians working at Afro Badinya: a drum workshop and an Afro dance workshop.

A Senegalese chef living in Croatia prepared tasty Senegalese food for the guests. After the workshops a Ghanaian acrobat living in Croatia performed a show, followed by a musical performance by Zbor Domaćigosti (Chor Homeguests), who sang together with members of Afro Badinya.

A percussion performance together with a musical jam session open to all concluded this culturally rich evening, which brought together new members of Croatian society and locals. An attempt to bridge the gap of our differences through cultural exchange!

Afro Badinya, which means African family, is an association open to all, consisting of both migrants and natives. Afro Badinya promotes the African cultural heritage through creative musical and artistic projects. The association emphasises that its aims are intercultural exchange, the promotion of equality for all and the prevention of racial discrimination.

The choir Domaćigosti (Homeguests) is an amateur choir consisting of old and new members of Croatian society, whereby it does not matter who is "native" and who is "foreigner". The choir was founded in 2016 and performs in various world languages with the aim of breaking down prejudice and xenophobia in Croatian society through cultural exchange. Domaćigosti and Afro Badinya have worked tirelessly together to prepare the songs they performed at the event.

SPORT, FUN AND SOCIALISING

The Centre for Peace Studies held the first BRIDGES event in Zagreb together with the Zagreb 041 football club. It was a football tournament with mixed teams, organised in the Dugave district. The teams consisted of men, women and children. The main goal of the tournament was to spend an active day in the sun, to do sports, have fun and hang out together!

The tournament took place on the home field of FC041 and lasted all day long until late in the evening. Besides football, there were many other games for children and a culinary team that made sure that nobody stayed hungry! The tournament was attended by a large group of different supporters of the football club, locals from the neighbourhood and people from the nearby reception centre for asylum seekers.

Ten teams competed in the tournament: **Are you Syrious?**, a team of AYS volunteers, women players of FC041 and refugees, CMS team consisting of workers and volunteers of **CMS** as well

as refugees, **Bicpop** team of bike repair volunteers, **FPZG**, a team of political science students, **MAZ**, team consisting of members of Antifascist Network Zagreb, **Klinci 041**, a team consisting of refugee kids of the junior team of FC041, as well as **Hanan**, **NUP**, **Motka** and **WAZ**.

In the preliminary round the teams were divided into two groups, which all competed against each other, after which the two best teams from each group reached the semi-finals. In the final Hanan and FPZG met each other. The very dynamic game ended in a 2-2 draw and was decided by a penalty shoot-out. Hanan was the better team and won the tournament!

The event full of positive atmosphere brought together locals from the neighbourhood, asylum seekers, refugees, football fans and club members who are active in the Dugave neighbourhood. They spent a casual day together, ate well and cheered each other on! After the tournament the main question was: "When will we do this again? Hopefully very soon!

VOLUNTEERING FESTIVAL AT VILLA PALLINI

This Community public event in Florence was one of the first projects of BRIDGES. Italian and foreign children were to play together to get to know each other. A perfect opportunity for BRIDGES to present itself to the city. The volunteer festival took place at Villa Pallini, the headquarters of District 5 in Florence. Together with all invited citizens and more than 27 non-profit organisations.

The project was co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and managed by AiCS. It was a perfect opportunity for the local community to introduce the foreign associations, to involve non-profit organisations in the BRIDGES project and to initiate interactions between the local community and migrants, and a perfect opportunity for adults and children to interact and forge new relationships.

BRIDGES had a stand that became a "showcase" for the foreign associations that have joined the project to enliven the festival with the cultural and sports initiatives they have prepared. Among the participants were Perù, Colombia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Senegal, and people of all ages. Children, young people, adults and seniors.

"Leyendo pinto" as just one example of perfect interaction

The workshop "Leyendo pinto" by "Colombia ES", for example, aimed to teach visitors the Spanish language by drawing and reading Colombian stories. Normally the activity is carried out in schools. In this case it was designed to involve all the children living in the neighbourhood. In fact, almost all children participating in the festival took part. Regardless of their families' country of origin. In some cases, children with different languages at the age of 4-5 years played together and "soiled" each other with colours to have fun and involve their parents and families.

Experiencing the workshop in this way was a way for the accompanying parents to interact with the other families and have fun as well. The visitors were very interested in the special colours and shapes of the carnival masks that their children drew and wore. Each mask had a meaning to be discovered in Colombian culture and a Spanish word to be used. A Colombian family and an Italian child with his mother and grandparents were particularly involved: It turned out that the children came from the same school, but it was the first time that both families spent their free time together!

Colours, pencils, paper, table, seating, some basic Spanish words and a garden were the simple ingredients of an activity to enable the involvement of a large number of people in a fun – interaction-driven – collective travelling exhibition. The children kept the masks on all day and rated themselves with theirs through the festival. This is just one example of how interaction and co-operation between different domestic and foreign associations can work.

DANCES AND SHOWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

A colourful dance event with typical costumes of many countries to promote social cohesion

The party in Florence, sponsored by the EU Project BRIDGES, was superbly organized and brought together more than 250 people in the parish of San Donato in Polverosa. The event, entitled "Dances and Shows from around the World", was prepared and co-designed by the Italian association AiCS in collaboration with 20 other associations for over a month.

Peruvian dancers in their colourful dresses moved to the rhythm of the spectators as well as Asian dancers from Sri Lanka, who made their costumes with rattles jingle. In addition, Senegalese percussion, typical Florentine songs and Italian dances from the Renaissance period animated the entire audience to dance. And finally, interactive games with the spectators, which showed that there are no limits to curiosity and that ethnic origin is not an obstacle but useful for getting to know each other.

The event has become a real celebration of cultures. Volunteers and organisers presented the objectives of the project to the audience: Reduce xenophobia, cultural barriers and social divisions and promote community cohesion. The focus was on the audience, who took part in the dances, applauded and clapped rhythmically, and accompanied the colourful parade in their typical dresses.

Among the visitors was Cristiano Balli, the Mayor of the 5th district of Florence, and Fabio Fanfani, the Philippine Consul and Dean of the Consulate in Florence. Both attested the event an extremely high and positive value, which aims to promote the encounter between people from different countries in a close living together.

The 20 associations that organized the festival with AiCS were "Piazza San Donato", "Teatro del Legame", "Colombia ES", "SMS Rifredi", "Insieme per Brozzi", "Laboratorio Permanente per la Pace di Rifredi", "SMS Peretola", "Viva El Perù", "Associazione dei Senegalesi di Firenze e Circondario", "Confederazione Regionale della Comunità Filippina", "'Confederazione Regionale della Comunità Filippina in Tuscany', 'Sin Fronteras', 'Libera Associazione dello Sri Lanka in Tuscany', 'Centro Età Libera Il Tabernacolo "Zero-Zero Firenze 5 onlus", the church "San Donato in Polverosa", "Il Colle", "Novoli Bene Comune", "Rete di Solidarietà Q5", "La Scena Muta" and "La Nuova Pippolese".

CARNIVAL TRAVELLERS OF THE WORD

The "Carnival Games from All Over the World" in Florence was an intercontinental travel game with a very special passport to combat xenophobia and promote cohesion. Getting to know other cultures through their typical and traditional games, travelling between continents with a special passport and a tour with games aimed at making new friends between children. All enhanced with fun and curiosity: a special recipe for genuine social cohesion.

This was also the secret of the success of the initiative "Carnival games from all over the world", which colourfully decorated and animated Dalmazia Square in Florence. The festival, with multicultural games and more than 400 participants, aimed to combat xenophobia, cultural barriers and social divisions and to promote community cohesion.

The festival, which was attended by some twenty associations from the region, was aimed at children and their families. Once the origins of all the participants had been recorded, the volunteers and activists welcomed the young people along a play path between the five stands representing the five continents. For example, the children had the opportunity to play the "frog game" at the continent America stand. A traditional Colombian game in

which the children had to throw a coin into the mouth of the frog.

At the stand of Oceania the children could play the "Fishes on the wire", where pairs of children had to blow into jars to make Australian animals compete against each other.The children also liked the Giant Shanghai near the Asian continent very much. On the European continent, groups of children had to guess traditional items that came from European cities and put them in an EU magic box.

Each child received a special passport showing a map of the world.At the end of the tour of the five continents, all children received the certificate "World Traveller" and as a prize the yo-yo with the "BRIDGES" brand. During the trip, "Daniel the Wader" distributed balloons to the children who could have hit the "Pentolacce", the worldwide famous game. Cristiano Balli, President of District 5 of Florence, opened the event together with Chancellors Eleonora Pellizzon, Fabrizio Tucci and Edoardo Trallori.

About twenty associations had launched the event as "Event Builders" together with the AiCS: Cultural Association "Viva il Perù", "Confederazione Regionale della Comunità Filippina in Toscana", "Libera Associazione dello Sri Lanka in Toscana", "Colombia ES", "SMS Rifredi", "Gruppo 334 – Insieme per Brozzi", "Laboratorio Permanente per la Pace di Rifredi", "SMS Peretola", "Associazione Piazza San Donato", "Il Colle", "Gonzaga University in Florence", "Associazione Con lo Sguardo di Filippo", "Il Tabernacolo", "Associazione Zero-Zero Firenze 5 Onlus", "Rete di Solidarietà Q5", "Comitato Genitori I.C. Guicciardini", "Centro per l'Età Libera via Bini" and "Daniel Il Trampoliere della Sierra Leone".

PHOTO WORKSHOP IN THESSALONIKI

The project, designed and organized specifically for the students of the 12th EPAL of Thessaloniki, was implemented with the support of ANTIGONE and the United Societies of the Balkans.

Among the various interesting activities, the students also chose photography. The participants met in their school with accompanying persons who took them to the offices of USB where the seminar took place.

Already at the beginning of the seminar there was an extremely good mood. The leader of the workshop, Luiza, was first introduced to the participants and received some souvenir gifts from the organisation right at the beginning. This was followed by name games and ice-breaking activities to create a pleasant atmosphere and make the participants feel welcome.

Throughout the seminar, a member of the office staff was present to support the young participants and help them if they needed anything. The seminar was held in both Greek and English so that all participants could understand and follow the course of the seminar. In addition, all received booklets containing some basic photo rules for beginners to follow.

First the photographic material was presented and then the rules were explained. The best part of the seminar for the participants was the fact that they had about 30 minutes to explore the city of Thessaloniki and apply the rules to the photos they took. The students split into mixed teams of Greeks and third country nationals and worked their way around.

At the end of their mission, when they all saw the results of their photos together, they discussed whether or not they had followed the rules. The analysis was concluded with a lot of laughter and in general with a very pleasant atmosphere. The young people also expressed their wish for a second meeting soon, in order to get to know photography even better and learn more. At the end of the day the students were safely returned to their schools by office staff. All satisfied and highly motivated.

DECIDE, PLAN AND ACT TOGETHER

To develop hobbies and interests, to connect with each other, to create a cohesive and solidary society with a common space of expression for all. The 12th Community of Vocational School Students decided to organize a series of events themselves with the support of ANTIGONE and USB.

The young people decided to form three groups with football, self-defence and photography and to continue their education through workshops, training sessions, competitions and educational visits. All groups are mixed and consist of Roma students, natives and refugees from different countries like Congo, Pakistan, or Bangladesh.

Paschalis and Lefteris are two football enthusiastic Roma students from the Dendropotamos area. They want to succeed in football and believe that they will meet many different people and make friends. Lefteris choses football also out of love for this sport. “It is a team sport and it can bring us closer to other people. A great opportunity to get to know others and understand them better”.

Nader Ali and Abdoulaye from New Guinea played football as professionals in Thessaloniki and are thus closer to Greek teenagers. “We all play together, and I feel good. When I first came to school, I was the only African, so I was different for everyone. But I am glad that there is no more racism, but cooperation and teamwork.”

Anna breaks with clichés and has consciously chosen self-defence and football.

"Football is my favorite sport. I am glad that I am welcome here, where we form mixed teams. This brings us closer together, we will perhaps be able to make friends with some people we didn't like before and we will find a way to communicate with those who don't speak Greek well. We are often separated only because of the language".

In the photo teams the students learn the basics of photography and how to use the camera properly. There are also great activities such as city tours or visits to museums. They learn about the history of the city and its culture. They can exchange opinions and convey messages through their photos.

Tarik from Morocco has hardly participated in any extracurricular activities so far and is looking forward to spending his free time in a meaningful way. "I like football and self-defence, but I'm really looking forward to the photo group starting. I love that there is something different at school and we will all do it together."

Anna Maria believes that the groups will weld people together and friendships will be formed not only within nationalities. The pupils would not have any significant differences, apart from the language

George, unanimously called "President", has many interests. "I will be on all three teams. It's great for teenagers who are not financially solvent. We have the opportunity here to set the schedule together. This helps people who otherwise do not have much time and can hardly be there.

The children are happy to organize their own activities. In the BRIDGES project they build bridges of communication and overcome prejudices, stigmatisation and racism. They decide, they plan, they all move together.

DRUMMING WORKSHOPS IN TORTOSA

Promoting contacts and the mutual improvement of citizens through music. This is the benefit people derive from the drumming workshop. Integration, cooperation and social harmony. Thanks to the joint learning of percussion instruments, new friendships have been formed.

People who did not know they had a talent for music and who have now discovered it thanks to the workshop. Perhaps they will now continue to dedicate themselves to music. "Everyone has their own character, but in the workshop we all work in the same direction," explains Blai Batiste, a gypsy musician from Tortosa and teacher of the BRIDGES drum workshop. The workshop is one of the activities offered by the Centre for Artistic and Cultural Activities for Social Inclusion in Tortosa.

Participants are young people aged between 11 and 25 years old. Some of them also take part in other projects, while others have registered for the first time. From day one, feedback on the workshop was positive, interest was high and participants took the opportunity to learn instruments such as the cajón.

"The changes that such a project brings to local communities are significant. When we use music to interact, share and express ourselves, we convey feelings and above all encourage camaraderie as participants help and teach each other," says Batiste.

CLIMBING FOR INTEGRATION

The climbing workshop in Tortosa was one of the many sports activities in the BRIDGES programme. They learned how to climb on the climbing wall at the Rockodrome in Tortosa. Afterwards there were also climbing and hiking excursions to the local hills and mountains around Tortosa such as the Coll de l'Alba and the big cross on the summit of Coll Redó.

Climbing is one of the sports activities that are intended to promote and encourage intercultural coexistence within the BRIDGES programme. The climbing courses have met with a very positive and encouraging response from participants.

"Climbing is a versatile physical activity. Anyone who tries it will discover muscles they never knew they had. In addition, it also lets the mind work. When you climb, you can only think about it and not be distracted. It is a good mental exercise that helps you grow. Climbing means constantly overcoming obstacles and improving yourself, because you have to have complete coordination between body and mind," explains Manolo Navarro, who is in charge of the workshop.

Manolo is a climbing instructor for the Unió Excursionista de Catalunya (UEC hiking group) in Tortosa and also works for a social group in the city. The other instructor is Ismail from Morocco, who previously worked on another social activity based on climbing called Tamunt.

"This kind of activity is important for building relationships, otherwise we would never get to know each other. When you climb, you realise that we are all the same and that we can all do the same things. It does away with many stereotypes and labels that we give each other. Everyone should try an activity like this and create synergies with other people," says 20-year-old Sharay, one of the participants. She also says that she enjoys the trust and confidence you gain from your partners, which goes beyond the actual climbing activity.

An interesting fact about the workshop is that many girls and women between the ages of 12 and 20 participated. It is a mixture of immigrants (mainly from Morocco) and natives, some of whom have taken part in the workshop on the recommendation of other social groups, while others have registered individually.

Nawal and Maryem, 13 years old, came to Tortosa about two years ago. They heard about the climbing workshop thanks to the Atzavara Arrels Association and registered immediately. Doing sports, meeting people, learning new things, gaining self-confidence and making friends are among the reasons they give for starting climbing in the BRIDGES programme.

LIVING STUDIO ZAGREB

The Living Atelier Zagreb regularly organises activities in which everyone is invited to join and participate. A perfect institution for integration. Zagreb is Croatia's capital for the integration of refugees and migrants and can count itself lucky to have an integration centre like the Living Atelier.

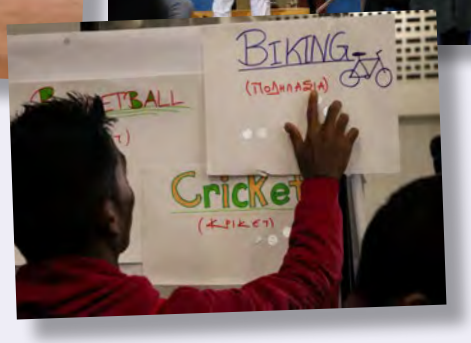
"Living" refers to a living organism that develops, communicates, adapts and shapes the environment. "Atelier" is a centre of creation, experiment, comradeship and cooperation. The collective that gathers around Living Atelier works on two levels: with vulnerable groups in a created safe environment; and with the local community, as in the Bazaar event.

The opportunity for women to participate not as recipients of a service, but as hosts, donors and participants helped to develop a sense of empowerment, dignity and connection with the wider community by sharing time together over drinks and snacks, exchanging words or learning/teaching sentences in different languages and listening to different music.

The bazaar gave various people the opportunity to come together, exchange ideas and strengthen the sense of community and belonging among the regular participants of the Living Atelier programmes. The feeling of community

building and connection to Živi Atelje DK among the different members was stronger in that more people volunteered to be at the bazaar during opening hours in different shifts and to do the different tasks. From setting up the facilities, serving drinks/snacks to new arrivals, ensuring a sufficient number of seats for some of the events, providing information about the art and craft products on display, to cleaning up and turning off at the end of the day.

Living Atelier has organised the third consecutive annual bazaar in 2019. This edition was by far the most successful in terms of the number of visitors to the events during the bazaar and the bazaar itself. The amount of art and handicrafts sold and, above all, the intangible and qualitative aspects of community building, especially with and involving the members of the No Borders: Women to Women Collective. The continuous participation and the amount of traffic generated in the social media contributed significantly to the success.



MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE WITH CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

ANTIGONE and USB have carried out an interesting interaction project with 90 young people from Afghanistan, Greece, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Guinea, Kourdistan, Albania and the Roma community with their teachers, the headmaster of the 12th Vocational School of Thessaloniki and members of local organisations.

Teenagers from the school were invited to engage in meaningful dialogue and to select creative activities in which everyone should participate. The results showed that this approach creates the basis for a communication bridge that contributes to mutual understanding and respect.

Lefteris is a boy from Dendropotamos, the largest Roma settlement in Greece with a population of 4,000 and a wide range of problems from crime to illiteracy, school leaks and drugs. He was looking for a vocational school and joined the 12th EPAL because his friends and also his brother were there. He had also heard that the teachers and the school community had experience and knew how to help children with learning and language difficulties.

"It's a great programme because it helps us to get even closer to the children, get to know each other better and do activities together," Lefter said about his involvement with BRIDGES. "I have taken part in all the activities and meetings that have taken place so far. I would like to play football together because I grew up with this sport and I like it. And with music, of course, because I love music".

Paschalis also went to the 12th EPAL for the first time this year: "We have a nice atmosphere, the teachers are great, they help us to understand the lessons. We have refugees who are very friendly to us and we have a good time in the classroom. The BRIDGES programme is great because with this programme we will understand more easily what refugees like, what they can do, what they like to do, we will get more used to them".

Lazaros is in his second year at the 12th EPAL and is waiting for his high school diploma. "It's a very nice project. It is good that we are approaching the refugees. The Greeks and the refugees have to get rid of racism together to work together. Through these actions we are getting closer to them and they to us."

Abdul Khale and Amin, refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan, want to play football, boxing, swimming and cycling. That frees them from pressure. "This programme, the meetings and the activities that have started at school are great, perfect. They help us to get really close to the children from Greece, but also to the children from other countries. We are happy when other children take us in."

DURING THE LOCKDOWN

SOCIAL COHESION WENT ONLINE

In the weeks of the lockdown by Covid-19, BRIDGES also had to stop its public events. In almost all countries of the world social gatherings were forbidden. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced people worldwide into involuntary, but also partially voluntary isolation and quarantine. So social cohesion had to work online.

The Italian BRIDGES partner AiCS showed how it could: „We knew that people were still interacting online, and we believed that Bridges could also provide a platform for community building. Especially at the time of Covid-19, when people are physically isolated," said the AiCS project managers. For this reason, BRIDGES in Italy shifted its activities to online platforms to further promote social cohesion – even from a distance.

Starting in April, the project's official Facebook page was launched with video interviews with the organisers who participated in the project. In this way, everyone could share their own experiences and had the opportunity to feel like a community again.

The project, coordinated by AiCS, has from the very beginning involved more than 60 associations in District 5 of Florence, some of which represent the foreign communities of the area. Among them, dozens of volunteers and citizens have benefited from the network of events promoted in order to get to know better the area in which they live and the community of people living there.

In video interviews, participants in the local BRIDGES network told how they experience the project and the changes they are going through. How they see District 5, from a „place of residence" to a „space of encounter" and an active and participatory social life. From a place where several associations provide services to citizens, to a space of associations working together for the benefit of a common community.

On Facebook since April: @Bridges-progetto-europeo-aics-accoglienza-solidale-Firenze.

COVID-19 HAS CHANGED EVERYTHING IN FLORENCE

Participants and volunteers spoke everywhere about the changes in Florence caused by the Corona pandemic. "In the beginning, each of us worked for ourselves and each association worked alone. The situation was hardly manageable and District 5 was divided. After a short time, however, the whole community started to work closely together again, cooperating in many areas. We listened more and enriched each other with initiatives and suggestions", said Patricia, the president of the association "Colombia ES".

BRIDGES continued even in times of corona closure and developed new forms of interaction. This resulted in a new real social cohesion between the different groups in District 5 in Florence. BRIDGES continues to function despite the pandemic.

At that time, more than sixty Italian and migrant associations were already involved in District 5 in Florence. The experiences of the many volunteers and organisers of events were shared on the Facebook page @Bridges-project-europeo-aics-accommodate-soliday-Florence.

"We had already published six interviews and were waiting for others to be published," continues Patricia. "The purpose of these interviews was not only to tell stories about people from the associations and volunteers involved in the project, but also to show how the BRIDGES project has impacted on the community".

Among all these effects, Florence shows the value of diversity as a resource and the discovery of new interactions between the associations which together have a clear common goal: the promotion of social cohesion.

In anticipation of the physical participation in this experience, social participation will continue on the project's Facebook page. Also through the republication of content shared by the association partners. As reported in the interview with Annalisa from the association "Insieme per Brozzi – Gruppo 334", which is waiting to "turn a ring into a ring-o'rose around the world".

COMMUNICATION EVEN DURING THE LOCKDOWN

Although the quarantine situation prevented ANTIGONE from carrying out activities in physical presence in Thessaloniki, the young people remained in contact online during the spring and held regular weekly meetings.

It was not until the beginning of June, after the lockdown, that the group met again for the first time and went on a long walk together from the port of Thessaloniki for another photo trip. The participants shared their experiences in many conversations and once again managed to express thoughts and concerns, exchange feelings and ideas through the art of photography, thus strengthening the BRIDGES between them.

The task of the group was to take photos that express emotions and thoughts about freedom and being together with friends and family. The results were mainly photos of travel, freedom, socialization, nature and environment, which fulfilled the requirements very well. Pictures often say much more than words.

The event was attended by 26 young people and young people from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Greece, young people of Roma, Albanian and Russian origin, who worked together in mixed groups. The young people took advantage of this first opportunity after the lockdown and enjoyed the personal contact and exchange of experiences after they had not been able to meet in person for a long time.

This is how the BRIDGES project worked. Building bridges of communication and breaking down prejudices, stigmatization and racism. We decide together, we plan together, we get ahead together. We also invite you to become part of the action! We continue to shape our community and our neighborhood together!

HELP WITH HOMEWORK

In response to the situation caused by coronavirus and the fact of not being able to go to school during the corona lockdown, COSPE and IParticipate have encouraged the installation of a useful online service to support primary and secondary school pupils.

The service is designed to help them do their homework, find out about topics they have difficulty with and/or prepare for the intermediate level test. A staff of young people with a migration background made themselves available for this purpose.

The "distance learning" introduced by the Italian government during the quarantine period following the health emergency caused by the pandemic has revealed and unfortunately reinforced many of the existing inequalities in society.

Negative widening of the digital-divide!

Pupils with appropriate equipment and a stable internet connection were able to follow and benefit from online education, which was a huge advantage. Many other thousands of pupils did not, who lacked such resources and therefore could not benefit from adequate education.

In fact, a large proportion of the students were left behind in the study programme, they had no opportunity to research and also had difficulty doing their homework. They also lacked any support in their educational activities.

COSPE and IParticipate therefore decided to offer a service in which young people from a migrant background could make their language skills and cultural wealth available to those in urgent need. To help children from immigrant backgrounds whose parents have difficulty helping them with their homework. Or those who do not have suitable terminal equipment or do not have Internet connections. These are also those children who were most affected by the restrictions of "distance learning".

FROM PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION

In the meantime, a large network has formed around BRIDGES. With a lot of educational work, a large community has emerged in Florence, which continuously analyses and develops BRIDGES in many discussion groups. How has this network been made possible in the first place? From the statements of the participating associations and organisations it is clear that the methodology is a fundamental and important aspect of BRIDGES. It is considered to be of essential importance.

Paola Pivetta, Director con "Il Colle" and "Rete di Solidarietà del Quartiere 5" about her experiences with BRIDGES: "The project has shown me how these events can be organised efficiently in a strong collective. This is not a matter of course".

Annalisa Morali: "I am fascinated by the way BRIDGES events are structured. It is a very detailed and integrative method, where we are also protagonists and not just executors. Everyone says what they want and can do. And everyone has the opportunity to bring in their own particularities".

The construction of an event begins at the very moment when the invitation to participate is sent out to the associations. Afterwards, their representatives gather relatively quickly to discuss the implementation and to face the challenge.

"Each association makes its contribution in terms of skills and resources,"

says Patricia, director of "Colombia ES". Each person has a specific role. The criteria for co-designing activities are defined together, always with the aim of social cohesion".

"Each association makes proposals on how to get involved and everyone is aware of their role," says Maria Fernanda of "Columbia ES". Once an activity has been defined, the preparations begin. (material procurement, survey, definition of roles, etc.).

What has emerged from discussions with participants and what has been collected provides information on the extent to which the BRIDGES methodology enables efficient working. It was clearly stated that the BRIDGES methodology works perfectly in its implementation with the objective of social cohesion.

"We have learned how important it is to cooperate with other cultural institutions and their methods," says Anna Flamini from "Con lo sguardo di Filippo".

Annalisa Morali from "Gruppo 334 – Insieme per Brozzi" : "I think it is difficult, but it is a start for future projects. It has great value that we can share with others".

NEW PERSPECTIVES AFTER THE LOCKDOWN

As part of the EU's BRIDGES project, we as CMS have had the opportunity to reflect on, create and then support or implement many important initiatives in Croatian society. Before the lockdown, we worked intensively on planning activities that could be carried out together with local communities to build bridges within societies.

Just as the preparations and implementation for the Nowruz Party, the Afro-Croatian Congress and the Choir Festival were underway, the Covid-19 lockdown occurred. This caused a lot of inconvenience and above all fear in Croatia too. It took time to rethink the plans and the work, to reconnect and, if necessary, to restructure a lot.

Even though we were at a physical distance, care was taken not to create a social distance. In the online world there was the possibility to stay connected. The community shared their thoughts in Facebook groups, took part in dance courses that spontaneously appeared online and also in online choir rehearsals and the like. We did not stop. That was the most important feeling. Even if the online communication was sometimes overwhelming, it kept us moving.

June finally brought the old new perspective that revitalised the activities of BRIDGES. We returned to local community meetings, gatherings, activities. Nevertheless, we redesigned some of the planned activities online again. The bridges between us were never broken, we just found a new way to continue them.

In Croatia we started the month of June with a joint party by women for women, bringing together locals, refugees and migrants to celebrate all that was missed during the closure. And there will be some more actions until the end of the BRIDGES project.

AFTER THE LOCKDOWN

RAP MUSIC WORKSHOP

The production of an anti-racist RAP song was a project of BRIDGES in Tortosa. The workshop was interrupted due to the Covid 19 pandemic but was resumed immediately after opening at the end of June to finish recording the song written by the participants and to shoot a music video clip. It was a very successful project, and the participants were eager to finish the work they had started.

Anti-racism was the key message on which the participants wanted to build their song. A message that is common to them all. On an individual level, many participants said that the experience of being able to express themselves helped them to express feelings and sensations that they would not have been able to express otherwise.

"We dedicated the first sessions to generating mutual support because all the participants came to Tortosa under different circumstances and for different reasons. We decided that this was essential, and we learned to express this before we started writing the lyrics of the rap song," explains Aidan, one of the workshop participants.

We are all the same – whether black or white

During the lockdown, the group remained in close contact and continued to practice and rehearse the song through a WhatsApp group. "I am a person, not an identity number," is the title of one line of the song. "The song has a message for everyone to show that we are all equal, whether a person is black or white. Discrimination has no place in our society," says Aidan. Another participant, Imad, explains that writing this song has helped the anti-racism message reach more people and make them aware that we are all equal and that we can all learn from each other.

The day before the video was filmed, the BRIDGES rappers recorded the song under the direction of Joel, who led the workshop and set up a temporary recording studio in the Centre Civic social centre in Tortosa so that everyone could sing the lyrics assigned to them. Both Aidan and Imad agree that taking part in the workshop helped them to learn to listen to other people and to put prejudices aside. "When you write a song about racism, you have to set a good example. The song offers a different view of society than the reality we face, and this can help us to improve things".

INTERVIEW WITH AIDAN BEN HAMIDI ALONSO

How did you find out about the rap workshop?

Thanks to an email I received from Espai Jove, an information/activity centre for young people. I hadn't heard about the project before, but I liked the idea straight away, above all as an opportunity to get to know people.

What have you done in the workshop?

We have written a rap song with the help of all the participants. Being from different nationalities, we decided to write an anti-racist song as it is the subject, we all feel strongly about. We worked on musical notes and keys and learned how to organize a song with verses and a chorus. Basically, we learned how to write and sing rap.

When you had learned the basic concepts, what did you do next?

We started to work on expressiveness, especially for newcomers to the area who have arrived here and started a new way of life. Actually, the first sessions we carried out were devoted to generating mutual support. We have all come to Tortosa under different circumstances and for different reasons, and we decided it was essential to be able to express this before we started on the rap song. Finally, we wrote our anti-racist rap with the help of all the participants.

What has the rap workshop meant most for you?

The workshop has helped me gain much more confidence in people and reminded me not to judge people on appearances. Working together gives you confidence and a different point of view than that of those who just say newcomers are coming here to take our jobs.

What is the most significant change you have noticed after participating in the workshop?

I have learnt that there are people suffering, people risking their lives to fulfil their dream of having a decent and dignified life. I have also learnt that we are all the same at the end of the day. Two arms, two legs, and if people come here looking for help and a life, we should help them if we can.

Why are initiatives like this important for you?

Because learning something new is always a good idea, and even more so if you can help someone along the way. Also, just as they can learn something from us, we can learn plenty of things from other people, both the people from here and from newcomers.

Why do you think this experience is so rewarding?

Because you can see that we all have our own lives, and you can learn so much from the other participants. Through musical expression, we saw how people's lives can rapidly change.

After your experience in the workshop, what changes do you imagine it could cause?

If there is a change, it won't be a personal one, but for everyone. The song we have written together has a global message, stating that whether a person is black or white, we are all the same and discrimination has no place in society. This message could change things. If you write a song dealing with racism, you have to lead by example. The song gives us a different outlook on society than the reality we face, and this can help us improve matters.

What words would you use to define the rap workshop in the BRIDGES project?

Equality, the chance to pass on a message, and mutual help and support.

ASSISTANCE FOR VULNERABLE CITIZENS

"Parlamondo" was a so-called service activated by COSPE to assist access to economic subsidies and various local support services, following the announcement by the Italian government of some emergency economic measures. COSPE thus supported vulnerable households affected by the closure of non-essential activities due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Parlamondo was set up following a specific needs assessment and implemented in cooperation with a number of local grassroots organizations and civil society organizations (Accoglienza Non Governativa, Comunità delle Piagge, Le Curandaie, etc.). It was run by volunteers providing information and practical assistance in the procedure for accessing the economic subsidies provided by the Italian Government (such as income support, rent subsidies, meal vouchers, etc.) and other various support services offered at grassroots and local level.

To this end, a telephone number and e-mail have been activated both for civil society and grassroots organizations which have direct relations with the final beneficiaries, and for individuals and families. The impact of the closure mainly affected low paid workers and workers in the informal sector, including young people and women, who are often in precarious or temporary jobs and have no access to social protection, paid sick leave or support in case of loss of earnings.

In this respect, migrants are particularly vulnerable due to language barriers, social isolation and poor living and working conditions, as well as the lack of legal, regulatory and practical barriers to access public services. As in a situation of closure without access to offices, foreign families have great difficulty in understanding the requirements, content or modalities of access to government benefits due to language problems.

The services provided by COSPE usually included the translation of official guidelines, new regulations and other important information related to the economic measures taken by the government. Formula or information was translated into the languages spoken by migrant citizens, thus ensuring that people could easily obtain the information and support they needed.

To this end, two mapping exercises have been carried out to collect the available information in relation to the services available. One in relation to the services available on the territory of Greater Florence to support families in need (such as information services, provision of shopping vouchers or food banks, etc.). Another in relation to the arrangements for allocating government economic subsidies intended for households and persons in economic difficulty who have not received any other type of government economic subsidy, which are implemented by the main municipalities in the area.

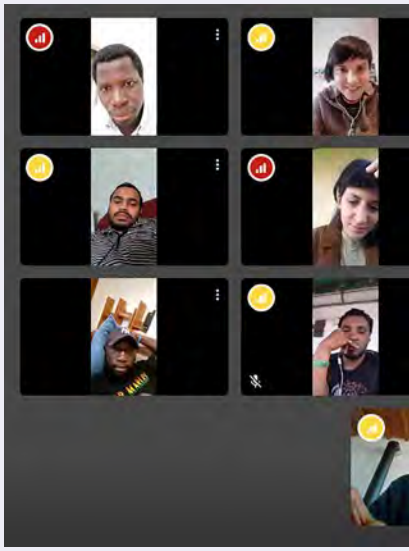
This activity responded concretely to the most urgent needs of migrants in a crisis and made it possible to establish a direct relationship between people who support each other. An important step towards strengthening community ties and solidarity.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SMALL SCHOOL

Young asylum seekers and refugees from the local reception centres and the surrounding area of Florence had been given the opportunity to continue to receive Italian lessons through the "Scuolina di Poggio alla Croce" (Small School of Poggio alla Croce), despite the restrictions caused by the Covid 19 pandemic.

What had previously taken place personally in class was moved by "Corona" to a virtual room with the help of the free platform "Jitsi Meet" and using the Penny Wirton method (individual lessons).

Thanks to the contribution of the BRIDGES project, the "Little School" has been equipped with computers to

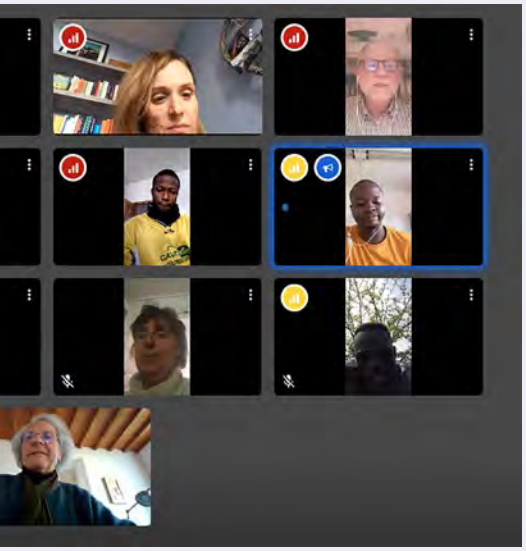


strengthen the tools of the teachers who work digitally with the students day after day. These computers will remain as a donation to the "Small School" when the live lessons are resumed and will provide basic support for the process.

The Italian volunteer teachers were first confronted with the challenge of "working online" by dealing with the use of the Internet on online platforms. The aim was to find ways to relate and work effectively with each other without losing social contact.

During the weeks of isolation and distance, Ramadan, for example, took place. This shaped and influenced the lives of many students of the Small School for a whole month. The lessons thus became a moment of deeper reflection that went beyond the mere teaching and learning of the Italian language. Instead, the language was used to exchange impressions about that special moment.

15 hours a day you don't eat or drink," says Yacouba, "and there are many moments when you stop what you are doing to pray. Boukhadry from Senegal told us about the Muslim pro-app he uses to help himself read or listen to the Koran and to organise his time around prayers. Mamadou instead teaches Sarah how to wish a happy Ramadan in his language: ''Ramadan Mubarak''.



During the Italian lessons, life experiences and daily struggles that teachers and students face are combined. The lessons thus serve as an additional tool to find a job or to obtain social assistance and economic subsidies. While at the same time Italian language terms are learned to better understand Italian bureaucracy.

These lessons also bring out common passions and interests. As Katherine explained, referring to her lessons with Yacouba, "I have discovered that he too enjoys walking for half an hour every day. He loves chicken with rice as much as I do. Perhaps what we have most in common is a passion for travel. Fueled by the ambition to discover new places and make new experiences that help us grow as people".

On his long journey to Italy, which began 7 years ago, Yacouba lived in many African countries, including Algeria, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya. In many of these countries he stayed for several months to work. In others he was only briefly in transit.

In this and other ways, the lessons continued and made it possible to cultivate a sense of community and closeness even during the enforced quarantine. This is due to the fact that the Small School is not only an Italian school, but also a space for the exchange of ideas, opinions and knowledge: the beginning of meetings and the building of BRIDGES!

2-PART PHOTO PROJECT

After the lockdown, two specific photo projects were organized in Thessaloniki for the second photo course. It was a 2-part photo project about nature. The initial team had grown further as the students from the first course brought their enthusiastic friends with them. Other young people joined in after seeing the BRIDGES activities in social media.

The group met in Xarchakos Park, the larger and most central park in Thessaloniki. After a short introduction, the photographic activities began. The team was divided into mixed groups of 4-5 people, in this way the young people worked together and strengthened their bonds.

Each group chose a different photographic method, such as focusing on shadows, symmetries, asymmetries or balance. The teams looked for images in nature that would give them a special result with the play of light and colors. Technical questions to improve photography, difficulties and solutions were discussed together and the following week the work was presented online to everyone.

For the second project, the group travelled by ferry to nearby Peräa to explore the marine world. The 28 young men and women were divided into groups during the cruise in which they knew no one. The group consisted of people who were neither friends nor spoke the same language. The "mission" was to learn as much as possible about their couple in the 50 minutes of the trip.

As in the previous workshop, they discussed and photographed moments of life by the sea, landscapes or objects that interested them. There were also many portrait photos that the young people liked very much and which they shared with each other through social media. Portraits bring people closer together – face to face – and provide opportunities for conversation and deeper interaction.

Before their trip to Peräa, the young people had the opportunity to find out about the activities of the General Secretariat for Youth, whose office is located in the port of Thessaloniki. Mr. Babis Papaioannou, the office manager, had already been informed about the BRIDGES project and, as the main actor in the youth activities in Thessaloniki, had a lot of useful information to share with the BRIDGES team.

At the end of the 2nd photo course, all young participants – natives, immigrants and refugees – stood in a large circle and talked about how they see their future. They talked about school, studies, the job they want to do and other goals. They talked about whether they wanted to stay in Greece, leave for other countries or return to their country of origin.

In each case, photography has proved to be a very good activity for promoting communication, teamwork and artistic expression. The Action also encouraged the planning of further joint activities. Photography helps people to work with others despite differences in language and culture.

Thanks to this first coexistence as members of the same group, the young people have gradually built relationships of trust and friendship. Far from any kind of prejudice, in the knowledge that they can live together harmoniously, create values and help each other.

CLEANING OF RIVERBANKS AND LOCAL BEACHES

A day of cleaning up the riverbanks and the local beach of Xiquina ended the series of workshops in Tortosa, which was interrupted by the Covid-19 lockdown. One of these activities was the study of invertebrates in the Ebro River in Tortosa and environmental measures to protect the river. Invertebrates thus became part of the European BRIDGES project and promoted intercultural understanding through environmental protection measures.

The environmental workshops examined riparian vegetation and carried out studies on juvenile fish and aquatic macroinvertebrates, which live in the Ebro and are bioindicators

of water quality in the river in Tortosa. During the project, participants surveyed, analysed and maintained a 650-metre section of the river, from the mouth of the Celio Gorge in the Ebro to Xiquina beach.

"In my experience, nature and its care are things that young people always love. They may show little interest in some subjects, but the protection of nature and the environment is close to their hearts. Especially when we talk about the local environment and they can gain practical experience and see real examples, instead of listening to an academic explanation of distant problems like the Amazon. As the participants are from different backgrounds and cultures, this activity is a perfect reason to meet and exchange ideas on new topics," says Viqui Carles, chair of the Graëllsia environmental group and coordinator of the workshop.

One of the last meetings was about collecting waste on Xiquina beach to raise people's awareness of the need to preserve local natural areas. Clean-up operations are necessary and work against daily deterioration. "I think the situation caused by the Covid 19 pandemic could help us to change our mentality. It is nature's warning that we are weak. The relationship between people and our natural environment must change. Even our cities. In the specific case of our workshop, the young people who took part in cleaning up the river had fun and had an experience that will remain in their memories," adds Carles.

SPORT AND CREATIVE GAMES TO LEARN ABOUT COHESION

In July the "Laboratori dal Mondo" ("Workshops from all over the world") were held in Florence's District 5: three afternoons of artistic, educational and sporting activities for children aged six to twelve, organised in the "Madonnina del Grappa" halls of the "Opera della Divina Provvidenza".

Italian and foreign associations from District 5 of Florence came together to live and experience together sports, educational, artistic and cultural activities from all over the world. The children again had the opportunity to travel "5 continents" and at the end of the day print out their "world passport". Each workshop took place in strict compliance with the safety regulations of Covid-19.

All the associations involved in this initiative planned their activities against geographical, ethnic-cultural and linguistic differences, thus creating new opportunities for exchange and interaction between the participants. For example, the use of the smartphone translator in the very amusing interaction between a little foreign girl and members of the association "La Città Bambina".

During the workshop "Orto Bimbo" all used their social media functions to make the activities accessible to everyone. BRIDGES made it possible to overcome cultural barriers and to reduce shyness and fear through the exchange and acceptance in the social media channels.

"I was amazed at the ease with which children can be inspired and also at their obvious superiority over us adults, as they adapted very quickly," said Giacomo Mei of the association "Il Colle", one of the people who accompany the children on their journey through the five continents. "Both girls and boys are very easy to inspire, even if they have and develop preferences by nature. They show us that prejudices belong more to the adult world and are very easy to overcome".

Apart from a few participants who had come with friends or siblings, unaccompanied children were mainly present. Even those who were initially insecure overcame the difficulties very quickly and integrated without any problems. As in the "Little Saviours Grow" action of "Misericordia di Rifredi", where participants help each other in simulated first aid procedures.

In the workshops some children tried their hand at sports activities such as tennis, rugby or football for the first time. Like a 12-year-old boy from Colombia who sees football as his big chance and was invited by the coaches to take part in the local training in September. The idea is to give him the opportunity to play the same sport as his father and uncle. The boy will be able to experience family traditions together with his friends from the neighbourhood. Other children had the opportunity to make new friends and have already exchanged contacts.

At the end the children were asked which part of the workshops they liked best. The answer was short but clear: "Everything!

COME TOGETHER AND MOVE FORWARD

Twenty-two-year-old Rabha Et Taouil is studying Business Management and Administration (ADE) at the Rovira i Virgili University in Tortosa.

She has worked for Atzavara Arrels, a community-based group in Tortosa focused on providing educational and emotional support to youngsters and children in Tortosa through different leisure activities. Rabha gave Catalan language classes there to elderly students and has finished her role as a volunteer worker at the summer camp Atzavara Arrels which was organized as part of the BRIDGES project.

INTERVIEW WITH RABHA ET TAOUIL

How did you find out about the project?

I heard about it at our local community meetings, through the Tortosa council social networks, and also thanks to the information Atzavara sent to our Whatsapp group.

Why did you decide to work as a volunteer at the summer camp?

I have always done voluntary work in my free time. For example, I help at Atzavara Arrels carrying out activities with young children and when I saw the chance to participate in the summer camp, I jumped at it. I have always been interested in knowing how these camps work and what activities they do. My objective was to get to know new people and gain more experience, to see new activities and games, and to meet people from other communities.

Why is it important to carry out a project like?

At the community process meeting where they presented the project, they explained that BRIDGES aims to bring together people from different social communities and religions, to set up links and communication among people and, thus, break down the prejudices and stereotypes that some of us may have. It is an important project to develop good communication between the different social groups here.

Do you think it is important to create these relationships?

Actually I decided I wanted to participate as soon as I saw that this is the aim of the project. I am keen on participating in projects to get to know people from other communities and to do away with stereotyped images of them, and I am pleased that the project has been able to continue, despite the current situation, with organizers and participants taking all the health and safety measures necessary.

What experiences have you gained after working as a volunteer?

It has been a great experience for me. We created a close-knit group between the volunteer workers and the camp monitors. We were all in it together and I felt as

if I was one of the monitors. They made us feel like we belonged. Also, any time I wanted to share my opinions about the activities, everyone was ready to listen.

What was it like getting to know other volunteers?

Great, now I know new people! I had seen the monitors before but at the camp I met volunteers like Haidam, Mohamed and Alba. They were all very friendly and keen to participate in the summer camp like me. We met up beforehand every day to share out the activities and we really enjoyed being with each other.

What were these meetings like?

The first day we were a bit shy but after that it went well. The best thing was that the summer camp was already well organized and so we knew what activities we had to do each week. After the daily meetings we had half an hour before the children arrived for us to organize material and groups. Then we checked who came and took their temperature as they arrived, following all the health advice we were given. Once we had finished the day's camp, and the children had gone home, we met up again, the monitors and volunteers, to talk about how things had gone and whether there was anything we should know about the next day's activities.

What was the most important thing for you about meeting new people?

Just that, meeting people. Sharing opinions, playing games together, spending time together. These projects are great, and in this case, they have helped people like me, to be able to do voluntary work. They are also a chance for children to get out and discover new things. The fact is that projects like this are essential.

What did you like best and least about the project?

What I have enjoyed the most is the fact that we were a group who worked well together and that the children had a great time, that's the most important thing, that they enjoyed it and wanted to come. What I liked the least is the simple fact of knowing that it would come to an end and we would no longer be together every day. But, the best thing is that now we know each other and we will get together again to do more projects like this.

Will you keep meeting the summer camp participants?

We have set up a Whatsapp group to keep in touch. We sent photos and other ideas about the camp to all the participants and now our aim is to stay in touch and keep participating in similar projects.

Would you like to give support to other activities like BRIDGES?

Projects like BRIDGES are necessary for a community to move forward, projects where we come together and communicate, where everyone shares something with others. A few days ago we did an activity with the children related to colours. Everyone had just one colour and to finish their painting they had to use the colours their companions had. The colours represented attitudes, culture, experiences, and if you wanted to colour in your picture, you had to ask your companions for the colours you needed. The idea is that we need to work together to move forward.

What do you think is of the importance for volunteer workers?

It is important for groups or organizations to have keen volunteers who can bring their own ideas. In our case, sometimes both children and volunteers have come up with ideas which have eventually become activities which weren't originally planned. As I said, being a volunteer is great because you enjoy new experiences, meet new people, and see new opportunities.

How would you sum up the activities you have participated in BRIDGES project?

These projects are excellent. Being a volunteer helps you enjoy them. In Tortosa there are many associations which you can join as a volunteer. The summer camp has helped me a lot and I hope to stay in contact with them.

DESIGN AND MURAL PAINTING

The Design and Mural Painting Workshop was one of the cultural activities in the BRIDGES Social Inclusion Programme, which takes place in Tortosa. The final activity of the workshop was the painting of a mural with aspects of Tortosa's cultural life in the old Samo factory – an unused building that is to be transformed into a centre for social and cultural groups.

Some thirty young people aged between 6 and 16 have been working on aspects such as relationships between people, intercultural links and solidarity through design work and mural painting. The first sessions of the workshop were theory-based and taught participants about artistic creation and graffiti around the world. In the practical part, the young people painted their artistic proposal on a large wall in the abandoned factory.

"We had to create images that relate to the cultural side of Tortosa, such as the huge figures known as 'gegants' who dance at local festivals, or the firework groups at summer fire festivals. When the organisers explained it to us, we were very excited, and when they told us we were going to paint it on a huge wall for people to see, we were even more amazed," says 12-year-old Martí, one of the workshop participants.

Martí explains that projects like this workshop are beneficial to the city "because there are many run-down areas or buildings that nobody uses, and this is a way to use them, make them more beautiful and improve the area". Colleague Mohamed, also 12 years old, said that apart from the opportunity to paint a huge wall with a variety of colours, the workshop was a great opportunity to meet people who are different from those with whom one is normally associated. People from different communities, and that this "means having more friends and less conflict".

Under the guidance of their tutor Paula, the young people demonstrated their talents with paint and brush and worked together to carry out this project which they consider important because many people will see it. "Thanks to this workshop we came here to paint this unused building and leave a memory of the BRIDGES project, which will be here forever," Mohamed added.

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW SURROUNDINGS

A **bicycle tour is often one of the best ways for immigrants in particular to relieve stress, get their bodies moving and get to know their new surroundings better, the latter being extremely important for immigrants when they are new to a city. It is important for them to explore their new opportunities and also make better choices.**

Within the framework of the BRIDGES project, COSPE, in collaboration with the association "Io Voglio Associazione dei desideri", has organised an interesting bicycle tour in the town of Scandicci with the "Gran Tour". A journey through the city's past, to get to know history in small doses and also to discover the present. To see how the social composition of the town has evolved.

A group of unaccompanied minors took part in the activity. Young people living in reception centres in the suburbs of Florence and near the town of Scandicci, which is just a cycle ride away.

The "Gran Tour" included 14 stops, some of which told the story of resistance to fascist groups, such as the bridge and Ponte Piazza Marconi (Marconi Square). Others led to the industrial district of the city, where many international companies like Gucci have their headquarters. Or Powersoft, who installed in Mecca the audio system with 4000 amplifiers,

which calls to prayer for the faithful five times a day.

At each station, participants were asked to interact with each other and exchange their opinions on the specific theme of the station. A very special moment was the stop at the house of Paolo Staccioli, a former welder and famous sculptor in Scandicci. Everyone had the opportunity to take a look inside his laboratory and admire some of the many sculptures that also filled his garden. One of the participants promptly replied that he wanted to become a welder one day, when asked about his career aspirations.

"With the Gran Tour, participants can make much better decisions about their future if they know what the area has to offer. Scandicci has one of the largest leather industries in the world. They just need to know that they have a wide range of options," said tour guide Francesco Gori.

TEENAGERS CLEANED THE CITY BEACH OF ARETSOU

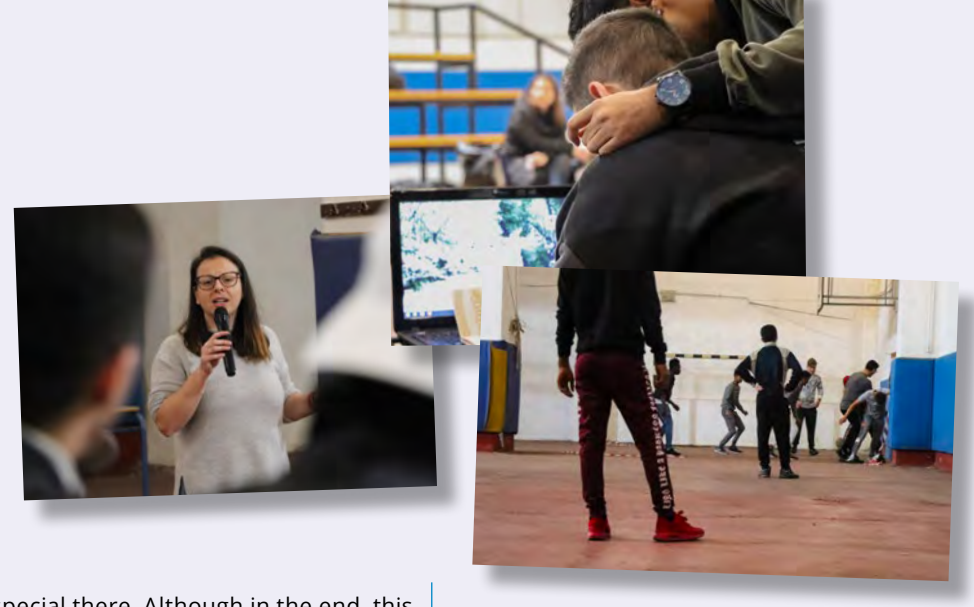
The youth group BRIDGES from Thessaloniki organized a voluntary action to clean up the beach of Aretsou. The young people involved were unaccompanied refugees and migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Roma from the Dendropotamos area and Greek youth from the western part of the city, where the poorest neighborhoods are located. The group was supported by trainers and volunteers from the NGOs ANTIGONE and ARSIS.

With this exemplary action, the group decided to go beyond the narrow limits of their own area and become active in the eastern part of the city. As the young people quite rightly pointed out, there is no such thing as western or eastern Thessaloniki, because the city is a unity and belongs to all. Everybody must pay attention to everything.

At the beginning, an environmental awareness game was organized in order to link the whole volunteering event to a sustainable lifestyle that must be adopted by everyone. The young people divided into groups of three and cleaned the beach of plastic and other light rubbish.

The original idea was to invite local youth and local authorities, NGOs etc. to participate in the event. However, due to the pandemic measures, only some representatives of the local community of Kalamaria were able to come and meet the young people. In fact, the Deputy Mayor for Cleaning, Green and Recycling of the Municipality of Kalamaria, Mr. Stylianos Matsaridis, visited the BRIDGES team, discussed with the participants, informed himself about the project and expressed his ideas for further activities also with the local youth!

At the end of the day the participants enjoyed the result of their voluntary action, the beauty of the clean beach. It was a great experience for them to take care of the city and its nature together, make friends and "build bridges".



A WONDERFUL JOURNEY

USB trainee Vasilia Tsampouri took part in a USB community meeting organised jointly with ANTIGONE and wrote down her experiences, especially with the BRIDGES project.

Before this meeting, I never seriously considered volunteering anywhere. Although I always wanted to be part of an association, I always had other commitments. After my studies I started looking for a suitable internship and decided to get involved in an NGO, the USB, in addition to the various companies. In the USB I was accepted and with that my journey as a volunteer began.

The USB informed me about their EU project BRIDGES, in which my participation was necessary. My supervisors Luiza and Chara, both members of the organisation, made sure that I received detailed information about the project and especially about the event. I thought it was part of my duties. But I didn't think that I would do anything special there. Although in the end, this event was more than just special.

On the day of the project, we met the colleagues from Antigone for the first time and drove to the school, which did not remind us of a school at all. The young people there are housed in an old building, without enough windows to let light into the rooms, and above all without a courtyard where they can spend their breaks. How is it possible for them to spend most of their days in such a place? It was immediately clear to all of us that together we had to create an environment that would positively change this bourgeois atmosphere.

We were also informed about the everyday life of the pupils there, which was filled with school and work. Somewhere there it became clear to me how important our project was and what we would do on that day. Because with our small contribution these children would have the opportunity for a big change in their everyday life.

Do you remember the excitement I did not have at the beginning? What you have done now!

On this day the children had the opportunity to say what activities they would like to do and when their programme would allow them to do them. We wanted them to show us their preferences and we did the rest. We started to decorate the room with pictures and made boxes with the names of the activities on which the children showed what they liked with stickers. The atmosphere was much better.

The children started to grow slowly. One of them even sang his own songs at the event and told us that he liked writing songs in his spare time, after work or after school. Some of them were very distant and shy, others came directly to us, but nobody showed that he was looking forward to what he was going to do.

We started to talk to them about their everyday life and interests. There were also three translators to help those who were not fluent in Greek or English. After a while the other children came with the teachers, looked at us in amazement but started to play and there was a lot of laughter.

I talked to a teenager named George who helped us distribute food. He has been working since he was 14 years old, and now at 17 he could not imagine what life without work would be like. It was more necessary for him to work than to study.

Later, Ahmed, who timidly tried to teach the others cricket, explained that it was a popular sport in his country, but that he had not been able to practice it since he arrived in Greece. As he explained, he began to feel more and more comfortable and the children watched him with interest and applauded to encourage him. When he was finished, he just sat there and smiled.

Somewhere there I felt deeply moved. These children live like adults, but much more intensely. I looked at John, a colleague from USB, and we both had a feeling of satisfaction.

GINGER ZONE – PAINTING MAKES EVERYONE FREE

Immigration is a pretty big deal. It is difficult for adults, but apparently easier for younger people because they adapt more quickly. But then there is the so-called integration process for everyone, where you learn the language, make meaningful friendships and have the space you live in.

Now the question arises, especially for unaccompanied minors, where to go. Most of them are boys running from one course to another, trying to learn and grow as quickly as possible in order to gain independence and perhaps find a job. But the most important question is still how and where to create belonging.

Cospe, in collaboration with the Scandicci Town Council, has obtained the free use of the Ginger Zone building, which was completely renovated last year. The aim with the space is to focus on young people, including unaccompanied minors, on their dreams, hopes and creativity and to host training courses, start-ups and innovative activities. The concept of the Ginger Zone is to be a space for everyone, where young people can feel at home, where they would like to spend time and grow.

Most of them have been introduced to the space and, thanks to the BRIDGES project,

have participated in street art laboratories called "Disegno libera tutti" (Painting liberates all). Four street artists have embellished the outer walls of the Ginger and dedicated a special part of the building to these minors to paint with the help of the artists.

Some of them marked their name, their country of nationality, others painted objects, flowers and pictures that were important to them. In any case, all participants were very enthusiastic to be part of the activity and to leave something of themselves on the walls of the Ginger Zone. They could paint, take pictures and make new friends.

RESOCIALISATION AT A SOCIAL DISTANCE

The current state of emergency has changed the habits of young and old and prohibits social interaction with friends, family members and colleagues. Although it is hard for everyone, it is mainly the youngest who suffer most from distance learning and lack of social interaction because they cannot spend time with peers.

At a time when the situation seemed to have improved and national measures were somewhat relaxed, Mr Cospe organised a second series of film events at the SMS (Mutual Aid Society) of Rifredi in Florence in September. The event brought together children and young people aged between 11 and 14 from the same neighbourhood to watch a film in the original language and consume food, drinks and snacks accessible to all.

The purpose of the evening was to create a safe space of socialisation for the participants and to help them overcome the fear of social contact that the global pandemic brought with it. While the atmosphere was positive, it was very different from the first event in February, where participants danced and chatted with their friends, ate popcorn while watching the film, and were simply their young, happy, energetic selves.

The challenges of this time are many and varied, but as part of the BRIDGES project we are committed to helping the youngest and their families.

GARDEZI SYED ANYAN ALI A PERSONAL STORY

Gardezi Syed Anyan Ali arrived in Thessaloniki as a refugee, and felt immediately comfortable with the city and the local community – BRIDGES works

Hi,

I am Gardezi Syed Anyan Ali, but everybody calls me with my nick name, Ali-Shahgy. I am 27 years old, and I am from Kashmir, a region situated in the extreme Nord-west area of India and historically contended by India and Pakistan. The big support in Thessaloniki helps me to work out the idea to start a new life in a foreign country with a different culture and language, even if sometimes I feel my heart and mind are still back in my hometown.

In Thessaloniki, I have met Intersos, an NGO, working to sustain groups of disadvantaged people. They assigned me a social worker and a psychologist to help me get integrated. They assist me daily, making me express my feelings and thoughts and speaking about my past and present life in the city. Their support helps me to work out the idea to start a new life in a foreign country with a different culture and language, even if sometimes I feel my heart and mind are still back in my hometown. They help me integrate into the new society, by making friends and connections, and, informing me about the activities and initiatives, which I can find in the city. Through Intersos, I have found out about the opportunity to take part in European projects.

I was involved in another project previously and I have participated in a workshop about social media at the organization United Societies of Balkans, and I volunteered at the Green Wave Festival. In the beginning, I was not interested in the activities since I thought it would not be useful for me and that I was wasting my time. However, I continued to participate, and suddenly, I realized that I was learning new things such as taking pictures, writing articles and working together with other young people. In November, I will volunteer at the Film festival, and I am very excited about participating in this event.

Now that, the activities that I have participated are almost finished, I am ready to participate in new project and to give to my community! I would recommend it also to my friends and other young immigrants and refugee, living in the same condition as me because the experience gave me something to work on during those days. I would like to be involved again in future programs since during the project I have been very busy, and for the first time since I am here, I felt I was doing something good for myself and the community.

THE STORY OF MIKE

Mike Okoh is a 28 years old Nigerian man who has been working for 2 years in the underpass of Cure, one of the residential districts of Florence.

Mike gets up every morning at 6, except on Sunday. He takes the train from Empoli – where he lives alone in a rented house – to get to Florence. From the early morning Mike stays in the tunnel of the underpass – that has been elected the reign of the city's street art – talking with the passengers and selling his goods.

Mike, who pays 300 Euros rent in Empoli, can afford to live modestly selling tissues and lighters from 7 am to 2 pm. He gets away from the underpass only to attend Italian lessons for five months now, which are improving his linguistic competences very much.

Mike talks to everyone he meets while working and he remembers perfectly their names, their jobs and their problems, if they've been willing to tell him. He is well known in the meanwhile and loved in the neighborhood. But in spite of that, on November 11th, he was assaulted by two people covered by a hood who kicked and punched him.

Mike, helped by a young writer, was treated at the drugstore of the district and then, accompanied by COSPE, he went to the police station to report what happened. The answer of the neighborhood's community to the racist aggression arrived quickly with messages of support.

Many people went to visit him after what happened and, thanks to some local organizations a pacific protest was organized a few weeks later, with workshops for children, writer's performances and dances in the main square of the district, to support Mike and to refuse violence, reacting in a wonderful way to the assault in the underpass and showing a big heart and solidarity.

Mike's story in Florence is a story of almost accomplished welcome but also of refusal and hate, and it tells us how important and necessary it is to create a network between the citizens, the institutions and the civil society, so that we can built BRIDGES and not walls.

NOBODY FEELS EXCLUDED

How the EU BRIDGES project changed the life of Mahamadou

Mahamadou is 24 years old, comes from Mali and now lives and studies in Florence. The Italian CSIT member AiCS proposed him to join the European project BRIDGES against racism and xenophobia. From the outset he has been actively involved as a volunteer in the organization of BRIDGES events which aim to promote social cohesion in the community between the various multi-ethnic realities of District 5 of Florence through culture and sport and work. Mahamadou is the first to report on the positive impact of the project, which has helped him to get to know his "neighbours" and develop his cultural background.

"BRIDGES has enriched me, my culture has grown, and I have discovered wonderful things about other cultures," Mahamadou said in an interview with AiCS. "The children's carnival and its games from all continents have given me the most. Nobody felt excluded, neither young nor old. BRIDGES enabled me to enrich my general knowledge about many things I didn't know before. Of the events in Florence, "Games from all continents" was the one I liked best. The participants were happy to participate in a game that excludes no one, regardless of age".

But the changes promoted by the project, says Mahamadou, are not just private. "The children had fun and they were curious when we would organize a similar event again. A sign of mutual curiosity and a sense of well-being that had not been noticed before. According to the young volunteer, the added value of the project lies in getting to know each other, but also in the awareness of different cultures: discovering – in Mahamadou's words – "wonderful things". I personally learned how to organize such an event. It was a great experience".

NO TO RACISM – YES TO INCLUSION

The EU's BRIDGES project was very successful in terms of participation in District 5 of Florence. "What has been built here will become a reference point for everyone", agreed Education Councillor Funaro and Welfare Councillor Vannucci. District 5 President Balli added: "Through this project, different cultures, territories and peoples can get to know each other: BRIDGES has become an important hub for promoting inclusive practices in the neighborhood." Over one thousand people took part in the project for social cohesion in District 5 of Florence. One third of them were third country nationals. 57 organizations, including sports, cultural and volunteer associations, publicly spoke out against all forms of discrimination.

In the multiethnic District 5 of Florence, the BRIDGES project is just over, yet it does not seem: the "network" has remained within the people and associations involved, a true friendship that will turn into new events and workshops that will be built together with the objective of fostering real community cohesion. These plans come from the participants themselves who have been involved in recent months in the European project aimed at breaking down social barriers and racism. A month after the end of the events, volunteers and operators met to tell each other what "BRIDGES" has left in their lives. "Richness and knowledge of different cultures: today we are more open and patient",

In Florence, BRIDGES was able to convince more than 40 associations – nine of them migrants – to participate actively in its public events on social cohesion. In District 5, people from over 20 different nationalities took part in a wide range of activities. The associations that make up the BRIDGES network co-organized and co-administered seven public events that brought together different cultures with different approaches.

The active participation in the organization and staging of sports events, cultural activities and seminars has made it possible to deepen mutual knowledge. Moreover, the project did not stop during the long months of the Covid-19 lockdown. On the contrary: in social networks, the volunteers and representatives of the BRIDGES network spoke about themselves in ten video interviews and described the changes the project has brought about in the community.

Praise and recognition from the highest political authorities

All the organizations involved took part in the final event, which was presented by project coordinator Valeria Gherardini. Education Councillor Sara Funaro emphasized in her introduction: "BRIDGES is a joint project that aims to create stable networks between the different actors in the area". Funaro and Social Councillor Andrea Vannucci added: "With this project we have committed ourselves to promoting the involvement of communities of third country nationals by supporting their leadership role. We will work to ensure that everything built and developed this year becomes a reference point for citizens". The President of District 5, Cristiano Balli, stated in his speech: "Despite the Covid-19 health emergency, BRIDGES has achieved its goals in District 5 and in the associations involved: cohesion, intercultural exchange and building networks of relationships".

Cosimo Renzi (AiCS Project Office) presented the results of the 22 months of activity of the project together with the official final video of the project. Here the leading role of the associations of the BRIDGES network was again emphasized. The organizers of the AiCS community, coordinated by Alessandra Vannucci, underlined once again the importance of the BRIDGES network, which was a complete success.

A "BRIDGE" BETWEEN PEOPLE: THE NETWORK BETWEEN VOLUNTEERS AND ASSOCIATIONS REMAINS AFTER THE BRIDGES PROJECT ENDS

BRIDGES was started at the end of 2019 in the District 5 of Florence and it was able to involve over 40 associations in the organisation – "democratic", Annalisa says – of cultural, sport and voluntary events that enable people and cultures to know in depth each other. "In my opinion, the most important change was the opportunity to collaborate with other associations and other volunteers: you can achieve much more by carrying out projects together than working alone", Anna says.

In conclusion, the network is the answer. The BRIDGES's legacy in the neighbourhood, that previously expressed a great number of associations, is the teamwork method through which the different entities of the territory now work: the associations can now share a strong network that will lead them to build together other events and other cohesion activities. It's the mutual knowledge the best recipe to tackle social barriers.

BRIDGES

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