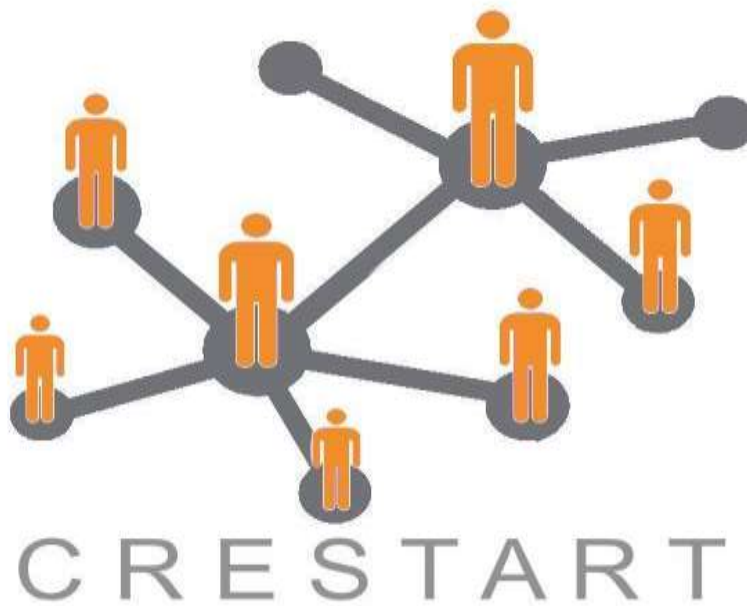


# CRESTART

CREATIVE RESILIENT LEARNING COMMUNITIES MEETING COVID



## REPORT PROJECT RESEARCH 1

**ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE COVID PANDEMIC  
ON COMMUNITY COHESION IN LOCAL SOCIETIES**

BASED ON ONLINE RESEARCH AND PERSONAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS  
2022.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Project

The COVID situation brought unexpected and new challenges for local communities in almost every field of their lives. We selected local cultural activities as subject for the project: because of lockdown and keeping distance policy cultural activities needed to be rethought. This project focuses on these changes and all the novelties the COVID situation brought in local communities, which will shape the cultural life after the pandemic as well.

The project, [CRESTART](#) involves partner countries from Bulgaria, Hungary, Netherlands and Cyprus. We involved different types of local communities: big cities (Nicosia, Rotterdam), a town in the metropolitan area (Érd) and a medium size town (Lovech).

The aim is to collect and understand the old cohesive traditions of the local societies and their chances to survive in the 21st century, furthermore, to find out what is the impact of the COVID pandemic on the community cohesion of these local societies. The partnership collected inspiring examples and elaborated useful tools for those wanting to make a difference in their local communities and are eager to support their surrounding in times of crisis. To find out more please visit our website: <https://crestart.org/project-results/>

### Partners



CROMO was established in 2002 in order to contribute to the local and regional cooperation of non-governmental, business and governmental actors and thus to strengthen a participatory, active and democratic society in Hungary and Europe. We wish to see local organizations well managed and effective; local citizens active and committed to participation; local communities vibrant and sustainable; society inclusive and tolerant. Core values of our organization are credibility, accountability, professionalism and innovation. We believe in active citizenship and local democracy as well as empower youth to mobilize their energy for countries they live.



C&C is a network organization based in the Netherlands, realizing professional educational and training programs with at the intersection of art, education, and society.

We make programs for people at the edge of society and use creative media as a tool to make them more active participants. We see non-formal learning and informal learning as strong tool to develop these skills and methodologies.

C&C aims at the highest possible level of schooling, development of skills and the creation of chances on the labour market for the underprivileged as well as for artists.



CARDET is one of the leading research and development centers in the Mediterranean region with global expertise in project design and implementation, capacity building, and e-learning. Is independently affiliated with universities and institutions from around the world, such as the Yale University, the University of Nicosia and the International Council of Educational Media. CARDET has completed numerous projects relating to the development of capacity building and planning in education and VET, youth support, adult learning, literacies, digital tools, eLearning, educational technology, and social integration of marginalized groups. One of our core-strengths is our ability to carefully plan, implement, execute and evaluate projects in various contexts.





Public Policies Watchdog Forum Foundation – FORUM – is a non-governmental organisation with activity in public benefit, established on 07 February 2010.


The organization was founded by civil activists working to achieve a higher transparency, inclusion, public dialog and last but not least –evidence based policy making in Bulgaria. FORUM provokes, catalyzes and supports processes and works on ideas that can create social change. FORUM’s mission is to foster, develop and advocate the values of democratic society in Bulgaria.



## Local Communities

<p>City/ town where the interviews are conducted:</p> <p><b>Érd, HUNGARY</b></p>  <p>Location of Érd</p> <p>Area: 60.54 km<sup>2</sup> Number of inhabitants: 69,431 Ratio of inhabitants (young/old, working age):</p>	<p>Érd is a town in <u>Pest County</u>, <u>Budapest metropolitan area</u>, Hungary. A <u>city with county rights</u>. Érd was the fastest-growing locality in Hungary between the 1991 and 2001.</p> <p>It's advantages and disadvantages:</p> <p>It is close to the capital, Budapest, therefore people prefer to go on programs into Budapest. Érd is also called the sleeping city, citizens just go home to sleep but don't spend their freetime there. It is a huge problem that the city is lacking community spaces.</p> <p>Another difficulty is that there are different parts of the city that are quite separated from eachother.</p> <p>A city of 75,000 inhabitants with an infrastructure designed for 20,000 inhabitants.</p> <p>Érd is a sleeping city and a young city - many families with small children - among those moving out. Too many apartment buildings, disappearing green areas.</p> <p>Locals think: "Transport is terrible, infrastructure even worse. Roads are impassable, pavements are either non-existent or impassable in most places. Sewerage is ongoing. There are still a lot of dirty roads. Public safety is also questionable.</p> <p>In terms of shops, not bad, almost everything is there, there is a market twice a week.</p> <p>Of course it depends on which part you are interested in, because Parktown e.g. is quite nice, but the centre and Old Village are a disaster." "I don't like it, no life, bad roads, like a village, just no one knows anyone."</p> <p>What would help the identity of Érd: many people are moving in - it's a very long settlement - there is an identity in the old village of Érd, there is a real community - you sit in the pub, everyone greets you by name.</p> <p>The city leaders are very responsive and population-centric, immediately responding to the mayor on FB - I feel my opinion is important.</p> <p>It was a suggestion box, if someone writes to the newspaper of Érd, e.g. he found somewhere rubbish-trash (e.g. in the woods), the newspaper responded with an article. Anyone can walk into the mayor's office - I can write a messenger to any one: mayor or deputy mayor - anyone can do it.</p>	<p>Population by nationalities: (cultural background)</p> <p><u>Magyars</u> - 93.4% <u>Romani</u> - 1% <u>Germans</u> - 0.6% Others - 0.8%</p> <p>Worldview / religion:</p> <p><u>Roman Catholic</u> - 49.2% <u>Calvinist</u> - 14.2% <u>Greek Catholic</u> - 2.2% <u>Lutheran</u> - 1.8% Others (<u>Christian</u>) - 1.5% Others (non-Christian) - 0.2% <u>Atheist</u> - 16.5%</p>
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<p>City/town where the interviews are conducted:</p> <p><b>Rotterdam NETHERLANDS</b></p>  <p>Most interviewees live, study or work in Rotterdam and are involved both as volunteers as professionals in the organization of activities in their living environment or participate in it. The diversity of the interviewees is broad, working in healthcare, management, students, research, journalism, artists, etc.</p>	<p><b>History:</b> Rotterdam is a port city in the west of the Netherlands, in the province of South Holland. With 588,490 inhabitants (Jan 1, 2021), it is the second largest city in the Netherlands by population, after Amsterdam. The entire municipality of Rotterdam has 656,050 inhabitants, and the even larger metropolitan region of Rotterdam Den Haag has more than 2.4 million inhabitants.</p> <p>Rotterdam owes its name to a dam in the river Rotte. The city is located on the Nieuwe Maas, one of the rivers in the delta formed by the Rhine and the Maas. The port of Rotterdam was for a long time the largest in the world and is still the largest and most important in Europe. The port area extends over a length of 40 kilometers and is an important logistics and economic center. Partly because of the port industry, Rotterdam has the image of a working-class city and has a very diverse population.</p> <p>After the historic center was largely destroyed by a German war bombing in 1940, Rotterdam has become a cradle for innovative architecture, including the Erasmus Bridge, the Cube Houses, the railway station and many skyscrapers.</p> <p>The city is also known for the Erasmus University, the art collections of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and the Kunsthal and soccer clubs Feyenoord, Sparta and Excelsior.</p>	<p>Population by nationalities: (Cultural background)</p> <p><b>Nationalities:</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>Native</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>48.5%</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Suriname</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>8.2%</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Turkish</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>7.4%</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Moroccans</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>7.0%</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Antilles</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>4.0%</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Cape Verde</td><td>2.4</td></tr> <tr><td>%</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Other non-Western</td><td>9.6%</td></tr> <tr><td>Other European</td><td>8.3</td></tr> <tr><td>%</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p><b>Religion:</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>Religious</td><td>42.0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Catholic</td><td>14.7%</td></tr> <tr><td>Muslim</td><td>13.3%</td></tr> <tr><td>Protestant</td><td>6.0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Other</td><td>6.0%</td></tr> </table>	Native		48.5%		Suriname		8.2%		Turkish		7.4%		Moroccans		7.0%		Antilles		4.0%		Cape Verde	2.4	%		Other non-Western	9.6%	Other European	8.3	%		Religious	42.0%	Catholic	14.7%	Muslim	13.3%	Protestant	6.0%	Other	6.0%
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<p>City/ town where the interviews are conducted:</p> <p><b>Nicosia, CYPRUS</b></p>  <p>Area: 111 km<sup>2</sup> Number of inhabitants: 55.014 (within the municipality) &amp; 330,00 (in the wider metropolitan area)</p>	<p>Nicosia is the capital of Cyprus and the largest city of the island, though divided after the Turkish invasion back in 1974. It has about 55,014 inhabitants within the municipality and 330,000 in the wider metropolitan area.</p> <p>According to Greek mythology, Nicosia was a siren, one of the Daughters of Achelos and Melpomene, and its name translates as "white substance". In ancient times Nicosia was known as a city-state called Ledra, while over the years it was occupied by the Franks, the Venetians, the Ottomans and the British, who left their marks on the city. After the tragic events of 1974, with the Turkish invasion of the town, Nicosia was divided in two and remains so until today.</p> <p>Nicosia is the island's financial capital and its main international business centre. Interestingly in 2018, Nicosia was the 32nd richest city in the world in relative purchasing power (UBS 2018).</p> <p>The city of Nicosia provides several opportunities to enjoy architecture, history and culture, long walks through narrow streets of the old city and its folklore neighbourhoods, and the lively streets of the contemporary city. Traditional cafeterias ('kafenias') and tavern-restaurant with their delicious</p>	<p>Population by nationalities on the island of Cyprus and Religions: Cyprus enjoys a high level of freedom of worship.</p> <p>While the majority of Greek-Cypriots are Greek Orthodox Christians, other denominations are represented on the island, including Armenians, Maronites and Roman Catholics. The Turkish-</p>
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	meze food may be found everywhere, almost in every quarter, but especially in the narrow streets of the old town. Contemporary or chain cafeterias and restaurants are also there to keep their worldwide fans happy and sane.	Cypriot community is predominantly Muslim.
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<p>City/ town where the interviews are conducted:</p> <p><b>Lovech, BULGARY</b></p>  <p>Area: 930.8 km<sup>2</sup> Number of inhabitants: 53,578 Ratio of inhabitants (young/old, working age): 65% people aged 60+</p>	<p>Lovech (<u>Bulgarian</u>: Ловеч, <u>romanized</u>: Lovech, pronounced [ˈɫɔvɛt̪]; is a <u>city</u> in north-central <u>Bulgaria</u>. It is the administrative center of the <u>Lovech Province</u> and of the subordinate <u>Lovech Municipality</u>. The city is located about 150 kilometers (93 miles) northeast from the capital city of <u>Sofia</u>. Near Lovech are the towns of <u>Pleven</u>, <u>Troyan</u> and <u>Teteven</u>.</p> <p>Advantages and disadvantages: Lovech is one of the alarmingly depopulating districts in Bulgaria with an increasing share of the aging population (at the age over 65). There is a great but not fully utilized potential for all sorts of tourism and organic food production in the district. The administrative center Lovech is less developed than some of the smaller towns like Troyan, Letnica, Lesidren, etc., which is due to the capture of the local economy by people not being able to develop its full potential but at the same time not allowing others to do so and also due to the local government reluctance to implement policies in support to further and advanced local regional development.</p> <p>Forty years ago the region was industrial center with many light and heavy industry factories, including the only cars manufacturing plant in Bulgaria. There was also a well-developed agricultural sector. The rapid and prevalingly not transparent privatization of the economy in the 90s changed the industrial landscape of the district, leaving it with only few working factories, seriously damaged agriculture and huge army of unemployed people. Sometime in the late 90s criminal groups hijacked the local economy and had been suffocating every single entrepreneurial initiative. Nowadays the situation is a bit different – the criminal groups are already legal businessmen and the local economy is still to a great extent captured by them, but there are also new initiatives and enterprises that gain international recognition – for example Walltopia (the worldwide famous producer of climbing walls) or Rico Style - a furniture producer furnishing some of the world’s famous hotel and restaurant chains, the football club Tottenham, Formula 1 speedway Silverstone, Wimbledon, World Trade Center in Dubai, etc. Some SMEs are slowly making their path but the lack of qualified and motivated labour force is stopping their further growth and expansion. It might sound like a paradox, but although the big number of unemployed people, the business still faces a lack of good workers. The supply and demand on labour market do not meet regarding qualification, discipline and remuneration of labour force.</p> <p>The local community is divided. Main problems faced by Lovech community defined according to the respondents opinion are lack of business opportunities, low income, corruption, migration of young people from Lovech to Sofia, Varna, other bigger cities and abroad. The social and cultural life in the district is quite limited and in many ways affects young people decisions to leave. Other problems are related to lack of qualified labour force, lack of good health care, few places for sports, no working cinema that do not meet the requirements in terms of quality, lack of universities, poor infrastructure, low birth rate. Many small places and villages don’t have access to constant medical services. The interviewed people find the cultural sector extreme fragile and instable in general and after the Covid crisis it is even vulnerable.</p>	<p>Population by ethnos (%):</p> <p>Bulgarians - 83.68 Turks - 3.06 Gypsies - 4.03 Others - 0.64</p> <p>Religion (%):</p> <p>Orthodox - 59.75 Catholics - 0.53 Protestants - 0.91 Muslims - 2.31 Others - 0.08 None - 6.68 They do not self-determine - 7.62 Not shown - 22.08</p>
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## 2. RESEARCH

In order to gain more insight, each partner country completed approximately 100 online surveys and 15 in-depth interviews.

	HUNGARY	Bulgaria	The Netherlands	Cyprus	
Partner organisation:	<b>Cromo Foundation</b>	<b>Forum</b>	<b>Changes &amp; Chances</b>	<b>Cardet</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Nr. of personal interviews:	12	13	17	20	<b>62</b>
Nr. of questionnaire answers:	106	96	99	100	<b>401</b>
Nr. of focus groups:	1	1	1	2	<b>5</b>

Through online surveys and personal interviews, we collected information about:

- what connects communities?
- how and where are cultural activities are planned and organized?
- how to plan local cultural activities, what are local needs?
- what is the creative capacity amongst the target groups?
- we added an extra question about people in crisis situations like war, because of the current Ukraine-Russia war.

The following evaluation of the online survey collects and compares the answers of respondents from the four partner countries involved. We researched if the results are somewhat uniform, strongly divergent and if the best practice examples are complementary or similar.

Though we have managed to find certain best practices concerning the cultural changes before and after COVID we plan to collect further on during the project, and we will try to find cultural similarities and differences in the participating countries. If you want to learn more about the best practices, please visit our website: <https://crestart.org/project-results/>



## 2A. ONLINE SURVEY

In the [online survey](#), information is collected by means of closed questions and open questions, as well as a number of statements.

The survey is divided into different sectors. You can find the questions in the Annex I and answers in Annex II.

### **Sector 1: Personal information about the respondent**

Questions 1- 8 and 16, provide information regarding gender, age, living environment, living environment and education.

Within the four partner organizations, approximately 70% of the respondents are women, for the Bulgarian partner this is slightly different: 88% is female.

In three of the four countries, most respondents are aged between 21 and 55. The Netherlands is an exception, with a strong representation of the group between 21 and 34 years old (73 %).

Most respondents, plus minus 70%, live in the vicinity of the city in question in an urban area. Between 60% and 80% have a college or university education. The number of respondents with vocational training is limited to plus minus 10%.

The majority of the respondents live with their parents or partner. Between 10% and 18% live on their own. In the Netherlands, many respondents live with other housemates, but that is only logical as 70% of the respondents are students.

What is also striking is that few or no respondents live in an elderly home while these could be the target group for whom the needs during corona time could provide important information.

The majority of respondents have a paid job or are self-employed. The Netherlands gives a different picture because of the student respondents.

### **Sector 2: Local cultural situation**

Questions 9 – 15 give information regarding the local cultural situation before the COVID epidemic.

Question 9. In most partner countries, there is a reasonable balance in the range of facilities on offer, with around 70% of these facilities available to a greater or lesser extent.

Cinema, theatre performances stand out in a positive sense. Performing arts usually are lagging behind in terms of supply.

What is remarkable is that 90% of the Hungarian respondents mentioned the presence of the cultural community center.

Question 10. It appears from this question that films, theatre performances, concerts and music performances are the most organized activities. Folklore activities, according to these respondents, are not organized much.

Questions 11/12/13. The respondents indicate that most activities are organized by the Municipality, followed by the professional organizations and to a lesser extent by volunteers. There are few or no neighbourhood initiatives

70% of the activities that are organized are easily accessible, but this accessibility decreases as the entrance fee increases. This turns out to be a considerable barrier for a large number of participants.

Question 14. Most respondents are informed about upcoming activities by posters, flyers and social media. Newspapers and radio are less important.

Questions 15 and 15.1 There is little uniformity in the two answers per country. The Netherlands, Hungary and Bulgaria plus minus 70% do not miss anything in the offer, Cyprus 46% say they do not miss anything.

Many examples were given in the survey of what is missed, but to present this in a brief evaluation is going a bit too far. Therefore, a list of activities, from most mentioned to less is provided. The total overview can be found in the template in which the open questions are collected, and which is attached to this evaluation.

-festivals

-concerts

-activities for young people

-films

-sporting activities

### **Sector 3: Propositions**

Questions 17 - 21 give a number of statements concerning:

-cultural offer

-connection with the society

-active involvement of the respondents

-creative ability of respondents

They are relevant to measure the social impact of this project.

In general, it can be said that the majority of respondents agree with the statements related to these questions. Between 40% and 50% say they agree. Plus, minus 30% are neutral. There are few if any outliers to strongly disagree.

With Question 19, it is striking that there is a clear majority who endorse the proposition and fewer respondents choose neutral.

### **Sector 4: Talent and employment**

Questions 22 - 23 provide information about talents of the respondents.

Questions 22, 22.1, 23



Respondents from the Netherlands and Bulgaria are less able to deploy specific talents. 20% indicated that they had specific talents. In Cyprus and Hungary, 50% say they can offer specific talents to support cultural activities.

Many specific talents were mentioned in Question 22.1. To provide some insight, a brief overview of the most frequently mentioned talents is attempted. The complete overview can be found in the appendix "template open questions per country".

The talents mentioned are very diverse. There are participants who can mean something in organizing festivals, giving artistic workshops, wanting to organize cooking lessons, but also participants who have talent for organizing, fundraising, and marketing and organizing promotional activities.

In question 23, the respondents indicated how many hours they may be available and use their talents to organize cultural activities. What is striking is that the Netherlands is showing some restraint. 38 % indicated that they were available for 0 hours and 55 % indicate that they are available for between 1 and 5 hours. In the other partner countries, the readiness is significantly higher. Approximately 75 % indicate that they are available between 1-5 hours.

## Sector 5: Skills

Questions 24 - 25 information is given about the skills of the respondents which they lack and would like to improve as they would be useful to create a range of cultural activities in their environment.

The options from which choices can be made differ somewhat per country, but planning, communication, diversity, promotion are skills that respondents would like to develop further.

Apart from the choices they could indicate in Question 24, approximately 80% indicated that they had no need to develop other skills.

Skills they would like to develop further (all answers in open questions annex) are listed below:

- digital skills
- vocational skills such as welding and gardening
- how to network
- how to deal with conflicts and how to prevent them
- fundraising
- using social media

## Sector 6 / 7: Covid influence on cultural activities and changed needs

Questions 26 - 26.1 gathering information on the influence of COVID on existing cultural activities.

Questions 27 -29 information is gathered about changed needs and other offers during and after Covid.

The respondents indicated that approximately 90 % of the existing activities were no longer offered. The Netherlands differed somewhat with 73%, while in Bulgaria 100% was no longer offered.

Films, festivals, concerts, folklore, sports, all activities that require physical presence could no longer be organized for participants.

About 40% of the existing activities were offered in a different form. In the vast majority of cases, several activities were offered online:

- online courses
- online movie
- online concerts
- online workshops
- online pub quiz

Physical activities could sometimes take place, but with a limited number of participants and within a distance of 1.50 meters.

Approximately 25% of respondents from three countries indicated that other activities had been developed during the covid epidemic. In Bulgaria this is 8%.

The newly developed activities were mostly initiated online, sometimes elaborating on existing physical activities as mentioned above, but also completely new initiatives such as:

- beer stores instead of pubs
- online sport together
- neighbourhood initiatives to help each other
- all kinds of workshops in the open air
- care for the climate by combining hiking and outdoor cleaning.

The need for cultural activities has changed as a result of the COVID crisis. Plus minus 40 % of the respondents agree and about the same percentage have no opinion.

## **Sector 8 Willingness to support local society and creative solutions that connect people in times of crisis**

Questions 30-31 Information is gathered about the willingness of the respondent to play an active role in the local community during crisis time.

Question 31 information is collected on best practices, innovative ideas, creative solutions and new cultural activities developed due to the covid crisis.

Half of the respondents want to play an active role in the local community during a crisis. Plus minus 40% are still neutral about this, but with the right approach they may represent a deployable potential.

A wide variety of good examples and creative solutions were provided:

- online bingo, music quizzes
- city walks

- digital meetings in all sorts of areas
- online counselling for people with special needs
- neighbourhood barbecues
- special support for the elderly
- fundraising for the local hospital
- increased cooperation between public institutions and voluntary organizations

## **Sector 9 How to support people fleeing from war**

Question 32 information is collected on helpful activities, actions, tools and support for people fleeing the Russia- Ukraine war (best practice examples).

The respondents have substantiated their involvement with a large number of creative performances and possible actions that can be supportive for the people who are escaping the war:

- organizing creative activities together, such as dance, festivals and workshops
- organize activities for and with children
- make leaflets with different translations about any subject
- offer housing and work
- provide education
- fundraising and donations
- collecting first necessities
- storytelling
- using Facebook for communication

These are just a few examples. A complete overview can be found in the open questions annex.

## **SUMMARY OF THE ONLINE SURVEY**

After comparing the questions of the participating respondents, the general conclusion can be drawn that the covid epidemic has had a major impact on the range of cultural activities in the respective living environments in all countries. But it has also become apparent that people do not lapse into apathy, but instead work together to find creative solutions to the situation that has arisen. Many existing activities have been converted into digital online offerings, but also new activities have been developed that can be used well after the pandemic. People seem willing to initiate these new activities and want to use their talents and skills.

However, it is noticeable that the time people have available for an active role within the activities is limited.

There are no major deviations in the different countries for most of the questions. The deviations that do occur can be attributed to the sometimes-undifferentiated composition

of the respondents. In the Netherlands, 70% of the respondents are students, which has a compelling influence on deviations.

The answers to question 32, divided into tools, activities and actions, indicate that in all countries there is an awareness that refugees from war zones need support, not only financial support, but also activities that can have a positive influence on their well-being.

## **2B. SUMMARY OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS**

### **BASED ON THE FOUR COUNTRY REPORTS**

Several interviews were conducted in the 4 partner countries. Initially, there were to be five interviews per partner, but because it proved difficult to meet the target for the number of online surveys and the results of the interviews were qualitatively interesting, it was decided to increase this number. Each partner conducted between 10 and 15 interviews.

Using a template, each partner summarized these interviews conducted with the key stakeholders of the pilot settlements, such as major, cultural community centre leader, head of the local museum, grassroot organizers, volunteers initiating neighbourhood activities, CEO of local NGOs.

These templates are the reference of this summary.

To get a clear picture of how the cultural activities before and during Covid were organized in the partner cities Érd (Hungary) and Nicosia(Cyprus) Rotterdam (Netherlands), Lovech (Bulgari) what influence Covid has had on the activities, what we have learned from them etc. it is enlightening and instructive to read the individual summaries of the partner countries.

The overall summary is based on 4 themes with a number of questions that guide the summary.

Because the questions are a guideline and not all partners have formally followed this guideline, it is not possible to process all questions unambiguously.

### **Cultural Activities**

- the key elements of the activities
- the target-group they are aiming at
- how long does the activity exist?
- the ratio of professionals to volunteers
- the kind of environment they work in (social/cultural)

In the partner countries, the activities are aimed at

- creating connection within the communities/society,
- target groups with special needs
- cultural/social activities that are accessible to all and can positively influence the well-being



of the participants.

The target groups are very diverse and similar in the four countries, from classification by age to target groups with a very specific need for help.

There are also many general activities that are not organized for a specific target group, but are freely accessible.

Two of the partner countries indicated that the activities have existed for some time and are embedded in the cultural/social offering of the city or region.

In the Netherlands, this is strongly related to the multicultural society in which most cultures organize their own activities.

In Hungary, the activities are and originate from the direct need of the community and have little focus on folklore.

In general, more volunteers are involved in organizing the activities in the local communities, which in some cases are accompanied by a professional. Besides NGOs, governments are also involved, but mostly not when it comes to organizing activities for the target groups with special needs.

## Organization of Activities

-How did the activities develop during Covid?

-Who were the most active players, organisations of active citizens?

-Were ideas of participants used?

-Which role did digital media play?

Due to the Covid epidemic almost all cultural and social activities in the partner countries where participants could be physically present were stopped. Some of these activities were converted to an online version if the activity lent itself to it.

This could not be done overnight because there were a number of barriers that had to be overcome first. Both the participants and the organisers were not prepared for a digital format. They lacked the skills, knowledge, resources such as Wifi and computers and the financial means needed to make this new environment suitable for an online offering. In addition, the government agencies were heavily burdened by the corona outbreak, so they could not directly participate in the changed aid demand.

The activities in the partner countries are mainly organised by volunteers and NGOs.

Ideas of volunteers and participants reflect the needs and guide the activities to be organised.

In Cyprus, there is little search for and listening to ideas of participants and volunteers, but the administrators have organised the most popular activities online.

In the other partner countries, the government also plays a role in organising the more general online activities in which government buildings such as theatres, museums and libraries play a role.



In all partner countries digital media have played an important role in offering and organising cultural and social activities.

Without Zoom, Teams, Facebook and many other platforms, this lockdown period would have had a more serious impact on the well-being of the community and the individual.

This does not alter the fact that these digital media have not been accessible to everyone, which means that target groups with special needs, for example, may have been less involved in the activities within their social environment, with all the associated consequences.

### Handling crisis situations

- The influence of Covid on the activities
- Did new initiatives arise because covid?
- Are there activities that are more widely applicable in times of crisis or war?
- Topics where improvement is needed.

As indicated earlier, by far the majority of activities in the partner countries were **discontinued or offered in an online environment** with some delay.

However, it became clear that a number of activities could not be made suitable for an online environment. For example, for target groups with special needs, where physical presence could not be replaced by a digital environment.

The covid epidemic has also shown us the **flexibility and creative capacity** of our society. Many new activities were initiated, and existing activities were organised in a different form. Both the online survey and these interviews showed that people are open to helping others, taking initiatives and caring for

their community. Not only are there many new initiatives that can be of importance for the social and cultural life of the community after Covid.

In addition, these new initiatives have also given more insight in how to deal with volunteers. Through evaluations and thresholds, the needs of the organisation and volunteers have also been highlighted and useful advice for the future has been given. To clarify, a number of success factors were mentioned by the Hungarian partner.

Some of the **success factors** were:

- keep looking for connections with the community
- Look for needs of participants, volunteers and organisations.
- make sure there is a good team spirit among colleagues
- trust that everything will be solved or worked out.
- everyone should do what they like to do -no coercion- to keep the internal motivation alive.
- work, volunteer always in pairs - don't have the responsibility alone.
- they communicate a lot within the team
- constant brainstorming
- can we do this right now?
- the organisers must feel good about the activity they are organising.





- take care of internal correspondence between group members
- operation is the key - to bring the association together, it is not enough to organise a project, you need to make it work, you need a driving force - you need encouragement, you need to feed, how about an idea, you need to throw in an idea
- everyone has a well-defined role
- relationships between peers are very important in everyday life

In the interviews (also online), it became clear that Covid required volunteers and organisations to develop further in a number of areas in order to be able to continue to offer quality social and cultural activities to their community in this renewed environment.

The changed offer and the new activities require different skills and talents.

Both in the online survey and in the interviews, it became clear that there is still a positive development to be made in this respect.

Examples of **skills and talents that should receive extra attention** are

- how to keep participants motivated
- fundraising
- marketing, how does an NGO create a brand name?
- team building activities to keep volunteers motivated
- developing/training digital skills
- unlock digital environment

### **Overall comments of the partners**

- Will other organizations benefit from the lessons learned?
- Do the activities have the potential to be transferred and exploited in other European crises?
- Lessons to learn and things to get better
- Best practice that can add value

The partner countries indicate that the outcomes of the interviews and the online survey can **add value to the organization** of social and cultural activities at local and regional level.

Some of the lessons learned differ per partner country, but the characteristic aspects can be summarised in the terms **CONNECTION, COHESION, VALUATION, MOTIVATION, NEEDS.**

They indicate that if there is the conviction of a common interest, people are more likely to be motivated and get moving. A degree of responsibility and being able to think along in the process increases the involvement of participant and volunteer.

Look for the real needs and include people in this process.

Those who work as volunteers to organize the programme - must have time and opportunity to enjoy the programme they have organized.

Do not even start a project if there are not at least 2 volunteers interested in organizing it. Don't put too much effort into organizing something for which there are not enough resources at the beginning.



As the **digital environment changes**, organizations also need to **invest in training their staff and modernizing their facilities and services**. So upskilling and updating digitally wise is a must for these organisations (and many more), especially if they want their activities to be widely acknowledged and influential as well as sustainable and transferable in other international contexts/ crises.

A Chitalishte /Cultural centre has great opportunities to mediate access to various online cultural events and potential to manage a cooperation and networks of cultural organizations and social service providers, through which older people and people from vulnerable groups can reach online and other cultural events at the local level.

If you package this support too much in structured tools, people will adopt a wait-and-see attitude instead of taking initiative, because they assume that it will be organized anyway.

In the context of the crisis in Ukraine and the war, no innovative aspects emerged in the interviews. The interviewees indicated that the collection of **basic necessities, providing a safe environment, organizing education and a daytime activity and activities that create a connection between refugees and communities** are the activities that can make a difference.

On the other hand, several new initiatives have emerged during the covid epidemic that can also add value to the cultural/social offer of activities in the future.

### 3. OVERVIEW BEST PRACTICES

#### HUNGARY

- members are singing at home and – creating a common online video out of individual songs.
- civic bidding - in the online space, each month a beneficiary is selected. Various items are collected for bidding.
- Facebook posts for various age groups by the community center
- boga plate: was introduced during the pandemic, when mum went into hospital and dad was left alone with kids, they cooked for the family.
- plate for fresh mothers: In the days following the birth the woman in childbed got food and a large, plaited loaf from her female relatives four or five times - the better-off even more often.
- marriage week wine tasting also went online with wines being sent out to families via post and a presentation given by Somelié on Zoom.
- our proudness – every week on FB Members are chosen and presented to the community.
- alert chain - everyone knows who to call one after the other, so all members can be notified in case of an urgent need or crisis, ask how they are
- hybrid working should be possible. working 8-5 is not a normal state for humans. It is unnecessary to maintain offices, this situation has highlighted that - meeting works well online and not wasting time travelling - this could be a serious benefit of this period
- a great example for involving citizens into decision making is the local government of Érd:



they organized 3 community meetings - randomly selected local citizens discuss given topics - participatory debate agglomeration issues of Érd.

### Open door initiatives

The 2030 Association has created an online constructive community opinion room, with the aim of allowing the residents of Érd to individually report tasks, problems and ideas they perceive to be solved in their living environment. It is an online opinion-generating room where any resident of Érd can make comments about their living environment. The Association is also trying to get representatives (members of local government) to work together to find solutions by involving the public. The association created a google form for the citizens to be able to write down problems or ask us questions here about the city, transport, anything related to Érd. They can write the street by name and we forward it to the relevant people. We make connection with the person in charge and we track if the problem has been solved. Any municipal problems or complaints are sent to this centre – it is operated by volunteers.

Plenty of the Ukraine war refugees were seeking help in Hungary, [in this summary you can read more about the activities offered by NGOs.](#)

### NETHERLANDS

- exchanging recipes from different cultures
- organizing birthdays of family and friends online
- online bingo, street cafe life on Facebook
- young people supporting elderly people in learning digital skills
- mental and physical health lessons and conversations online

During this COVID period a number of activities were also started that created togetherness and connection in the living environment such as:

- shopping for the neighbours
- supporting contamination and isolation measures.
- flowers for health workers to show that they matter.

There are few examples of physical activities (online yoga and training courses) in the recent period due to the lock down.

Whether these activities continue to have an impact after the crisis remains to be seen. In times of crisis and war, most activities focus on collecting clothes, food and money.

In addition, activities have been organized to connect with the refugees through sports, music, breakfast sessions, etc.

### CYPRUS

Good practices that may add value are the following: digital storytelling, interactive activities, online concerts, theatrical performances, musicals, online fundraising, etc.



## BULGARIA

The local authorities, organizations and cultural centres had to open up to new initiatives by and for the people of the local community, such as the open-door initiatives mentioned below:

- seating's (women get together, they sing local folklore songs, knit and chat about daily life)
- community seeds-sharing meetings
- community discussions and sharing advice on growing agricultural products
- organizing bread kneading
- chants
- organizing activities for children in the library, drawing, reciting poems, etc.
- competitions – drawings, poems, etc

## 4.OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE ONLINE SURVEY AND THE INTERVIEWS.

It is difficult to combine these two evaluations given the background of the interview respondents and the respondents who completed the online survey.

In the online survey, the respondents were in most cases eventual participants while the interviewed respondents were often actively involved in organising the activities through NGO, government, volunteer organisations etc.

Despite this diversity, when evaluating these two surveys it becomes clear that the point of departure for the partner cities by the Corona epidemic was unequivocal; all social and cultural activities in which participants would be physically present were stopped.

How to deal with this during the covid epidemic was and is a challenge for every partner.

Not only for the voluntary organisations, the professionals etc., but also for the residents who were now deprived of their social and cultural activities.

In both studies, it became clear that the digital environment played an important role in this. New online activities were initiated to maintain the connection in the living environment. From online contact with target groups with special needs to online activities that were accessible to everyone.

Sometimes existing activities were converted to a digital environment, but new creative online activities were also initiated that can continue to play an important role in the supply of social and cultural activities in the living environment after COVID

Both in the online survey and during the interviews, many creative examples were given of best practices that can be effectively deployed in most living environments during the COVID epidemic. In this context, the willingness of the environment to initiate new ideas was also present. At least 70% of the respondents were prepared to commit 1 to 5 hours per week to a social or cultural activity.

In general, one can say that COVID has not led to apathy in the living environment but has challenged the population to find ways to strengthen social cohesion in these difficult and hectic times.

There is no lack of new initiatives and creative solutions, but in a number of situations there is a lack of means and skills to make what is on offer accessible to a broad public in this changed digital environment.

An online offer requires not only digital means and finances, but also specific skills for both participants and organisers. Participants and organisations mentioned skills that can help to optimise the supply of social and cultural activities and make them more accessible in this digital environment.

In addition to digital skills, it was also interesting to learn about the demand for informal skills.

Both the survey and the interview asked about possible initiatives in crisis times such as the Ukraine.

In both surveys there were no immediately innovative activities. Collecting first necessities of life, care and education for children, participating in communal activities and organising sports and music events were the most suggested.

If we were to summarise both evaluations in key words/activities, we would come up with the following list:

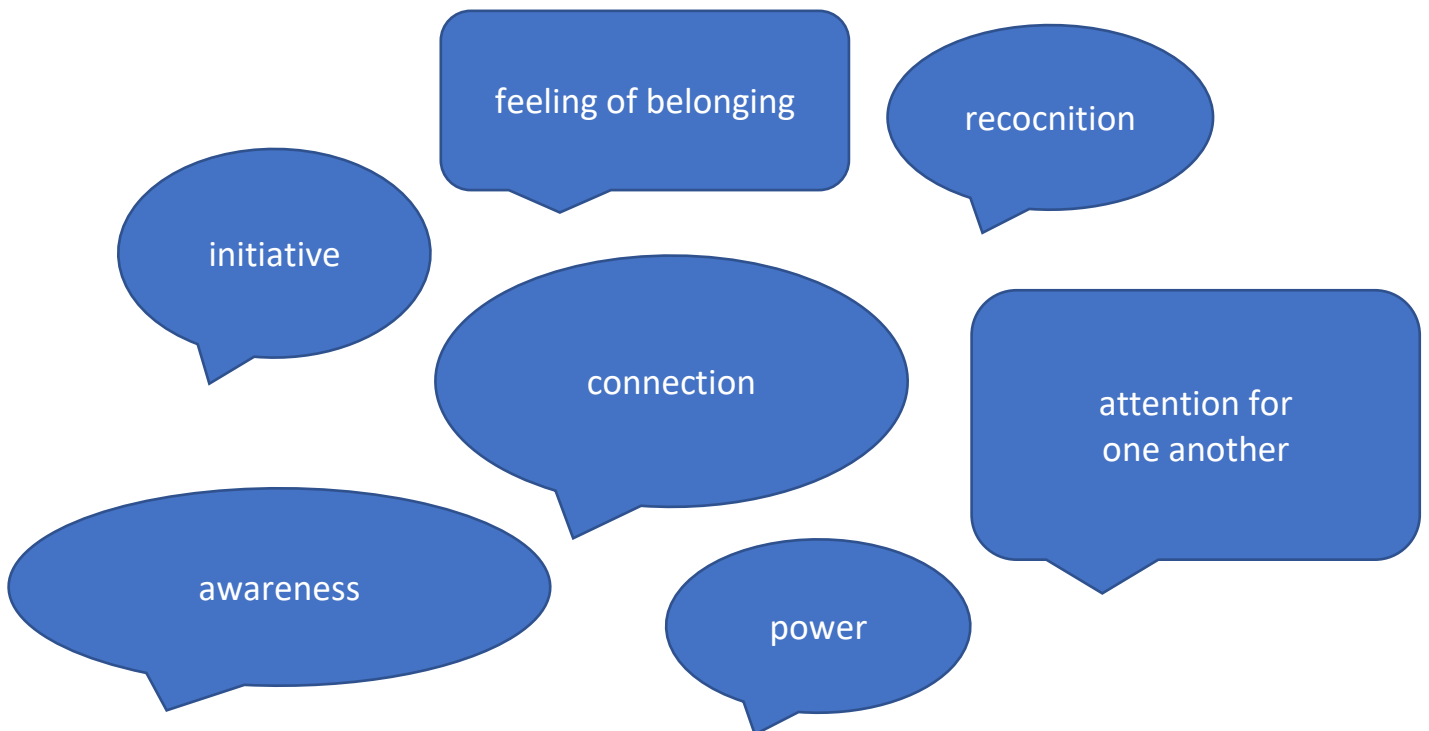
- COVID epidemic has a major impact on social and cultural activities in the living environment
- existing activities are offered in a digital environment
- many new ideas and initiatives are created in both digital and physical environments.
- willingness to look for connections in the living environment
- equipping the digital environment
- support in the living environment, readiness, attention for each other
- needs in these changed times: formal and informal skills
- importance of volunteers and organisations, attention for volunteers
- links between government and volunteer organisations important link in these difficult times.

COVID has, next to the horrors, opened new doors that can provide connection in the living environment. Old social and cultural activities that have been restarted and the new activities that have been added can be an enrichment for the community.

## CONCLUSION

**COVID did not stop social and cultural activities but challenged them to find new ways, develop talents and new skills and make the community understand the importance of caring for each other.**

In the framework of the evaluation 7 words emerged to be important and coming back in every reading attempt:



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## APPENDIX

[I: QUESTIONNAIRE ON COMMUNITY COHESION HABITS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS](#)

[II: ANSWERS FROM THE OPEN QUESTIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

[III: LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWS with local STAKEHOLDERS](#)

