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Insight Report

PER ESEMPIO

"I would like to have back my sense of serenity while being with the other": The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's lives in Palermo, Italy.

This report is a picture of the main feelings, opinions and images of what a group of young people from Palermo felt, thought and saw during the pandemic and how their lives have been impacted by COVID-19. These elements have been taken from the stories collected during storytelling workshops in which 15 young people interviewed each-other starting from the question: "How did the COVID pandemic impact your life?" In a welcoming and comfortable environment, young people have been accompanied through an experience of self-reflection using digital techniques for telling personal stories: snapshot stories, photography icebreakers, storytelling through images, and music. These workshops had one main purpose: to give voice to young people. Autochthonous and youth with a forced migratory background from Tunisia, Maroc, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast between 14 and 30 years old shared their experience of the pandemic through videos or audio.

Each of them has a very different background: some of them are studying, others are working, others have to do both. Some live alone, others share their apartment with peers. Some young people are supported by their family, others struggle to satisfy their basic needs. In this diverse panorama of lives, there is a common ground: the pandemic is an experience made of positive and negative sides, made of fears and discoveries of new talents and old passions, struggles and desires of being connected and cultivating relationships.

"I would like to have back the sense of serenity while being with the others. This is the biggest thing I feel I am missing" – Life in a contactless society



"What did you miss the most during Covid-19 pandemic?" This was a common question that participants posed to each other during the peer-to-peer dialogue interview. Nobody hesitated and all the answers had a common denominator: the contact with people.

For S. it was difficult to keep the physical distance or saying *"ciao"* without the classic meeting of cheeks, as people are used to do in Sicily: *"it was strange not to greet each other"* says M., highlighting the value of that gesture.

The relationships of the daily life have been impacted: at work, at school, at University. S. told about the difficulty of following her classes online *"without the colleagues"* around her with whom exchanging and help each-other to stay focused; A. spoke about how strange and difficult was not to go out from his room for one month and half because of COVID-19 sickness. The only contact with the world outside was receiving food from his sister and his mother through the door.

All this affection, given and received, moved to the virtual space, a less empathetic world for some young people, less fulfilling. Many snapshot stories talked about the first time outside after the first national lockdown, a special moment in which they fully enjoyed their surroundings, the city, the nature and anything was obvious to see before. Nevertheless Zoom call and online activities have been a way to "survive" and still have some social life.

"I have some social anxiety" – Anxiety and fears. Emotions to deal with during Covid-19 pandemic

Fear and anxiety are the most recurrent emotions in the participants' story: *"I still have some social anxiety"* (M.), *"there are still many things I have to overcome [...], The fear of the unpredictability of things"* (S.). Young people shared that very often they feel



uncomfortable in contexts where there are many people, for example at school: "*too many people in a too little space*"; they don't know how to greet others, which distance to keep; they fight between the human desire of meeting new people and the fear of contamination, fear for themselves, for their friends, for their family. At the beginning, some of participants did not believe the gravity of COVID-19 as reported by the media, until it get close to them. T., from Cameroon, was thinking it was a lie, until he lost an important person to him. From that moment he started to fear it. Pandemic is leaving its traces among young people but they say they are ready to overcome them.

"I worked a lot on myself" – Finding alternative activities to "survive"

For many young people, pandemic was an excuse for being creative: "*I rediscovered the pleasure of reading a book, which I hadn't done for a long time*". Getting bored from staying at home all the day long was an opportunity for dedicating time to what is usually left aside and most of the time this is about creativity: sport, artisanal work, trekking. Some participants shared how pandemic created a new space for reflection making them change perspective, either towards themselves and others: "*I had a lot of time to focus on myself ... I can also look at others with a different, more understanding, less judgmental eye*" (S).

Some young people were able to reinvent themselves and relationships: One young man spent lot of time playing games with his family at home; another lost his job with COVID -19, starting a new one as online housing broker. Others found refuge in video games and movies, such as S., who was sleeping all day long and watching series at night or A. who spend much of his quarantine on the PlayStation. During pandemic, it is apparent that young people activated their defence mechanisms, trying to respond as best as possible to the stress of the period.



Conclusions

The key learnings from the stories are:

- Contactless society: relationships are the aspect on which covid had the biggest impact for young people. They miss the opportunity for socialization and experiencing the world which seems not to be replaceable by the virtual life.
- Fear and anxiety: Fear and anxiety are the most recurrent emotions in the participants' story
- Alternative activities: For many young people, pandemic was an opportunity to experience new activities, practicing passions already known a left a part due to the so called "lack of time", reinventing relationship.

About CONTINUE

CONTINUE supports young people experiencing social exclusion to tackle the specific challenges of post-COVID times in terms of staying connected and integrated into European communities. The project is being delivered by a consortium of 8 NGOs from different European countries who are experienced in youth education and community-based activities. The work involves storytelling, social action projects, policy development, knowledge exchanges, an outreach campaign and the creation of an online platform.

As part of this project, Community Reporting activities are being delivered with young people across Europe to explore their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and what can support them as part of the COVID-19 recovery period. This learning will be used in



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the CONTINUE project to kick-start social actions led by the young people in their communities. Community Reporting is a digital storytelling movement founded by People's Voice Media and supports people to tell their own stories, in their own ways in order to catalyse change within processes, policy and practice. You can find out more here: <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

This insight report has been produced by PER ESEMPIO and is based on n.15 from young people living in Palermo (Italy). All of the stories from young people that have been gathered on the project can be listened to here: <https://communityreporter.net/continue>



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