

MY STORY OF RESISTANCE

*From Exclusion to
Active
Participation*



Booklet on resistance in youth empowerment and non-formal educational methods to turn victimhood stories into stories of resistance

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Access of minority young people to participation in democratic life is limited not only in Europe, but on a global scale. The project MySoR – My Story of Resistance: From exclusion to active participation creates relationships and dialogue among diverse groups of marginalized youth and youth organisations (Dalit and tribal minority youth in India; indigenous youth in Nicaragua, Roma and Gitan@s in Hungary and Spain, and young migrant people in Italy); shares and compares practices of empowering disadvantaged youth for active participation; and uses the tools of storytelling to allow young people and youth workers to develop a positive self-identity by transforming their hardships into stories of resistance. Sharing their stories and drawing a positive picture of themselves not only enhance their skills and encourage them to stand up for their interests, but give them the opportunity to reach out to audiences who have the power to initiate changes as well.

The project involves 5 partner organisations in Hungary, Italy, Spain, India and Nicaragua to address this topic. Throughout the period of two years 9 volunteers have the chance to gain and share experiences and tools outside of their countries, in local communities during the 9 months of their service.

Besides the specific activities related to the MySoR project, volunteers take part in the daily

activities of their hosting organisations, develop intercultural skills, and build close connections with local people.

The project offers volunteers and youth workers a specific path in the field of international mobilities and cooperation, intercultural understanding and solidarity.

Specifically, the volunteers get to understand the histories and the struggles of minority communities and minority young people, discover their conscious or unconscious tools and methods of „resistance” and empowerment, exchange and learn ways of expressing these inspiring stories through different storytelling methods during focused local youth meetings.

Additionally, 25 young people from the five participating organisations take part in a youth exchange to share and practice creative methods of storytelling brought from their community practices and from the toolkits of their organisations. After the youth exchange they bring these new ideas to their homes and practice them with their peers. The results of the stories of resistance are recorded and shared with the wider audience in the form of an online campaign.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Hungary: RGDTS - Phiren Amenca is a network of Roma and non-Roma volunteers and voluntary service organizations creating opportunities for non-formal education, dialogue and engagement, in order to challenge stereotypes and racism. As Roma and non-Roma network, the organization wants to create equal opportunities for all young people in our societies, especially through giving equal access to voluntary service.

Spain: Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña (FAGiC) – Barcelona, It is a non-profit organisation that brings together 96 local Roma associations from all over Catalonia, making it the most representative Roma organisation in Catalonia. Its aim is to defend and promote the rights of the Roma and to react and denounce any form of xenophobia or discrimination towards them. Its main purpose is to gather information about their aspirations and concerns, and establish a communication channel between the Roma and the rest of the Catalan society.

Nicaragua: Fundación Marijn – Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas is an organization which aims to improve the conditions of education, health and safety of children, teens and youth of Bilwi. The centre offers local youngsters alternatives to the dangerous and violent living conditions, school and educational support, sport lessons and leisure activities for minors.

India: Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI) is a students' movement based upon Christian values. SCMI involves youngsters and students all over the country in activities and actions in order to transform the society. Its main aim is to promote human rights and social justice organizing seminars, and actions to raise awareness on topics of interest for the contemporary society.

Italy: CSD - Diaconia Valdese is a non-profit organization belonging to the Waldensian church, the protestant minority in Italy. The organization is laical, everyone can benefit from its services regardless of religious, political, cultural, sexual belonging. The organization coordinates many services at a national level addressed to people in situation of need, such as disabled, elderly people, minors and youngsters, adults with fewer opportunities, refugees and asylum seekers.



DEFINITIONS OF RESISTANCE

Agency

Agency is the capacity, condition, ability of individuals to act or practice power, to construct and reconstruct their world. When we talk about the agency of oppressed groups, we oppose the victimhood-narrative by saying that the suffering people/groups do have the capacity to act, resist. This has an empowering effect.

Resistance

The term resistance can be understood in different ways, and sometimes it can be very subjective to decide if an act is resistance or not. According to sociologists Hollander and Einwohner[1] there are two basic elements in all definitions: action and opposition. Action refers to active behavior, and opposition means that the act of resistance is turned against something (or someone) unfair or unjust.[2] Resistance can be individual (e.g.: dressing as a punk - resisting the middle-class values of appearance) or social (e.g.: participating in protests), visible or less visible (speaking up against injustice in the classroom, vs. crossing arms and taking a closed posture) , passive (not buying the product of a company which treats their workers poorly) and active. Depending on the circumstances and subjective opinions, the mere survival of people unwanted, unsupported by the majority can be seen as an ongoing act of resistance.

Social resistance

Social resistance refers to the acts of disadvantaged and exploited groups with which they oppose the dominating practices and norms constructed by states, institutions, organizations, and cultural practices – such as discrimination, racial injustice, or inequalities. For example, LGBT movements challenge and try to reform the existing cultural norms about gender, and climate justice movements criticize the existing global economic system.

Spiritual resistance

Most often spiritual resistance refers to attempts by individuals to maintain their humanity, personal integrity, dignity, and sense of civilization during World War II. in the face of Nazi attempts to dehumanize and degrade them. More generally, spiritual resistance may refer to the refusal to have one's spirit broken in the midst of the most horrible degradation.[3] Such unarmed resistance can come in many forms, religious and non-religious, cultural, and educational.

Victimhood

Victimhood is the condition of being damaged, hurt, or oppressed. In terms of minorities, it is used to describe a narrative where the one who is oppressed feels sorry for themselves and/or the majority feels sorry for them. Victimhood narrative paints a very passive picture of someone who suffers and does not act against it (because they cannot or, as often implied, because they do not want to). Victimhood narratives do not recognize the often hidden forms of resistance (such as re-learning a lost native language) these groups practice, or minimize the systemic obstacles to their resistance.

Wartime resistance

Resistance movements have existed probably since the formation of human communities. Groups of people have organized themselves to resist and fight down a ruler, a government, or a tyranny system. Some of these movements have been violent, others nonviolent. There have been resistance movements today in several parts of the world, but, at least in Europe, the most well-known historical resistance movements developed during WW2 against the Nazi regime. Their tools have included demonstrations, sabotage-actions, espionage, circulating censored publications, listening to banned music or radio stations, hiding people, illegally escaping from a country, or even using armed force. The French La Résistance, for example, had small groups (cells) all around the country and fought against the Nazi German occupation of France through armed guerilla attacks, espionage, or spreading illegal newspapers.



[1] Hollander, Jocelyn A., and Rachel L. Einwohner 2004 'Conceptualizing Resistance', Sociological Forum Vol. 19, Issue 4.

[2] <https://haenfler.sites.grinnell.edu/subcultural-theory-and-theorists/resistance/>

[3] <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/spiritual-resistance-in-the-ghettos#:~:text=Spiritual%20resistance%20refers%20to%20attempts%20by%20individuals%20to,in%20the%20midst%20of%20the%20most%20horrible%20degradation.>

EXAMPLES

WE CAN AND WE ALL RESIST OPPRESSION, VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION IN ENDLESS WAYS. SOMETIMES THEY SEEM CONTROVERSIAL, NEVERTHELESS WE ARE FREE TO CHOOSE WHAT WE DO TO CHANGE THE SITUATION. HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES HOW PEOPLE CHALLENGE THEIR EVERYDAY REALITIES.



- Lack of representation



Political organizing; advocating for inclusion in structures

- Disappearance of native language



Language clubs; writing articles in native language; teaching language to children

- Racist bullying in school



Keep going to school as resistance; organizing campaigns

- History of group misrepresented in schoolbooks



Keep the memories alive in the community; write books or articles; advocacy for including minority history and culture; blogging; podcast

- Educational discrimination/no access to education



Keep pursuing education; going to work, and send own child to school; protesting for policy change

- Exclusion from certain jobs



Social entrepreneurship; pursuing higher education; protest; advocacy; unions

- Environmental racism



Keep rebuilding; migration; protest

- Lack of healthcare



Practice traditional medicine; push for state support

- Early marriage



Leaving the family; moving to another country, region; protesting against this practice at home; make sure own child does not have to marry early; being proud of this cultural practice

- No respect for indigenous culture and cultural appropriation



Wearing traditional clothes; keeping customs and celebrations

- Exclusion from news reports



Create alternative, own media; spreading knowledge online





HI EVERYONE! I'M ALEXANDRA, I LIVE IN ROMANIA AND THIS IS MY RESISTANCE STORY!

I'm Roma and a member of the LGBTQ community which makes it even harder for a young person to deal with different situations in this homophobic and racist society that we live in.

Picture this: living in a small, homophobic, and racist town where everyone is judging any person who looks or acts differently or refuses to act according to their status quo is automatically discriminated! As a person who carries the double stigma of being Roma and gay in a judgemental society it was pretty harsh. I was bullied in high school, my self-esteem was low, I just wanted to fit in but then I realized that self-acceptance and self-love are more important than trying to fit into a broken society! I was lucky enough to meet some special people who always had my back! Then I moved into a bigger city and things got better. Since I was 18 I promised myself to never allow anyone to make me feel less of a person! I will always speak against any human injustice! I owe this to my ancestors! We will never bow down to fear and oppression! We will only bow down to love and acceptance! Stay safe and love yourself!



HELLO, MY NAME IS SEBASTIAN VARGAS AND I AM FROM SPAIN!

When I was at school I started to train Muay Thai and soon I've fallen in love with it. Muay Thai helped me to finish my studies, and trust me, it was a tough journey.



Throughout my life, I had to deal with a lot of barriers. No one, only my parents were expecting that I will have success with my studies or sports (Muay Thai). Also, in my city, the academic level of Roma people was as low as the teacher's expectations, so the school failure was almost guaranteed. But my parent's support and my motivation of having a chance to go to Thailand were enough to take the courage to finish my studies. When I finished my degree I was able to fly to Thailand and train Muay Thai on the best gyms, that allowed me to win the World Muay Thai Championship. Once I returned to Spain I started with my activism and keep studying, doing a Master Degree in Educational Guiding. I was given the Roma Culture Institute recognition. I hope that sharing my life with other Roma people helps them to achieve their goals.



ACTIVITES

COMPLETE THE IMAGE

Participants create frozen images first of general interactions between two individuals, then of their ideas of resistance which get analyzed by the spectators. They reflect on the meanings and the types of resistance

Time: Between 40 and 60 minutes, depending on group size

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants use their bodies and creative capacities to create frozen images which express themes or ideas about resistance.
- Participants use their analytic capacities to discuss frozen body images and deduce their meaning.
- Participants identify and analyze different types of resistance, and how they operate in society.

Materials needed: none

Preparation: Facilitator familiarizes with the definitions and concepts of resistance

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Ask two volunteers to come to the front of the classroom. They should face each other, shake hands and freeze. While they are frozen, they must stay in the same position as long as they can.

2

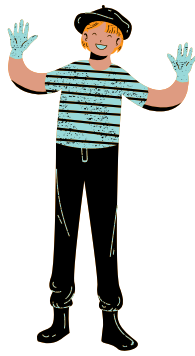
Mime drawing an imaginary frame around the image they have created and ask the spectators to imagine what this image can be. For instance, they could be meeting for the first time and one is a boss interviewing a job candidate, etc. Be sure to get the participants to talk about how the characters are standing and how their stance affects what observers see in the image.

3

Then, ask one of the pair to step out of the image, leaving the other alone but holding the same pose as before. Participants then analyze this image in the same way as above.

4

Next, another participant can come into the image and “complete the image” in any way they wish. They can arrange their body in front, behind, below, etc. of their partner, but they cannot change their partner’s image in any way. They must try to create a different image through how they position themselves. This new image is analyzed again by those watching.



- 5 Then the second partner (who remained frozen) can come out and someone can come in and complete the image in the same way as in the first round. This new image is analyzed by the spectators.
- 6 Do this a couple of times to get them thinking playfully and creatively.
- 7 Then ask the group to think of the word “Resistance.” You can use the definitions and examples from the beginning of this booklet.
- 8 Ask participants to make an image of resistance as they step inside the frame. As you analyze these images in the making, ask what kind of resistance is enacted (violent, non-violent, etc.) track the different kinds of resistance or resistance behavior on the flipchart or board for discussion later.
- 9 Repeat the exercise until several resistance types are on the board.
- 10 Review and discuss each type further. Try to categorize the terms: reactions to oppression, resistance to domination; active, passive, visible hidden, violent, non-violent, spiritual resistance, etc. Ask participants to give examples of each type they see in real life.

NOTES TO THE FACILITATOR:

Often, participants will create images of resistance as confrontation. If they are not moving past these images, feel free to challenge them on this point. Ask if they can make images of resistance that are not confrontational or that don't pit one person against another. For instance, you might suggest images of resistance as non-violent - people praying together, meditating, helping each other against an outside force. Feel free to show your own ideas if participants need further prodding to expand their thinking.

RESISTANCE BINGO

Participants reflect on their own resistance practices individually, using the bingo grid, then discuss the differences and similarities of their experiences and situations in small groups. Then in a plenary discussion they reflect on the emotional aspects of the resisting practices, discover the oppressive and harmful practices they face and re-evaluate their understanding of what counts as resistance.

Time: Between 40 and 60 minutes, depending on group size

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants familiarize with different forms of contemporary resistance
- Participants think about their own resistance practices
- Participants discover oppressive/destructive systems and practices in today's society.

Materials needed: pens, printed bingo grids

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Print out the bingo grid from the next page, so each participant can have one copy.
- 2 Ask participants to individually reflect on the activities in the bingo and mark the ones which are true for them. Give them 10 minutes for this.
- 3 Distribute participants in groups of 3-4, and ask them to share what they have done already and what practice they resisted with doing so. They have 15-20 minutes to discuss.
- 4 After the group discussions, get back to plenary and discuss the following questions:
 - Was there any element of the bingo which surprised you?
 - Was there any element which reminded you on sad, stressful events?
 - Was there anything that made you feel proud during your individual work?
 - Did you find any common or very different experiences in your group?
 - What are some of the systems, practices you resisted when doing the things mentioned in the bingo?
 - Was there anything missing from the listed activities?
 - How would you define “resistance” now?



Organized an action or demonstration	Donated to a social justice organisation	Marched or protested with my family or friends	Put a political poster in my window	Re-learnt my community's native language	Offered my home as a sanctuary
Corrected "alternative facts" on social media	Supported local farmers by buying their products	Addressed an emergency without the police	Reused instead of buying new	Organized commemorations related to the history of my people	Stood up for underrepresented groups in a debate/discussion
Took a social media break	Wore my community's traditional dress	Practiced my people's traditional craft	Wrote a letter to the editor	Created blogposts/podcasts about or for my community	Stopped an act of hate or prejudice
Divorced	Married the person I love	Used my privilege to help others	Filmed the police	Re-constructed or renovated buildings in my neighborhood	Started/signed a petition online
Volunteered	Looked after children while their parents were at a conference, organizing event	Escaped my country	Went to school	Asked my organization to include underrepresented groups in leadership	Organized/took part in cultural celebrations
Erased hate speech from public spaces	Considered running for public office	Spoke up in my church	Created (political) art	Wrote articles/taught in my native language	Called someone to ask how they are

COMMUNITY STORIES - LOCAL COMMUNITY RESISTERS

Participants think about people who fought for justice in their own communities and develop ways for finding and collecting information about these people.

Time: 120 minutes (+optionally time for conducting the interviews)

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants learn about local and community-based anti-discrimination activism;
- Participants look at how local and community-based anti-oppression activism challenges stereotypical notions (representations) of passivity and non-involvement among adults and youth of color and different minority groups.

Materials needed:

- Pens and paper
- Enough space for groups to work separately
- Flipchart and markers
- Access to internet and smart phones/laptops

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Invite participants to tell stories about a person or group who have struggled for access to resources in their communities (e.g., housing, education, health care, criminal justice reform, immigrant rights, voter rights, etc.). If they cannot come up with stories, ask them to brainstorm how they could find out about persons, who are dedicated to dismantling oppressive social conditions.

2 After they have come up with a few persons, people and/or groups, write up their names on a flipchart. Ask participants to reflect on these examples and identify actions that constitute activism/resistance. Write their responses on the flipchart as well, next to the names.

3 Ask participants to choose one of the people/groups written on the flipchart, and based on their choice, form groups of 2-4 people.

4 In the next 20 minutes, participants can use the internet, or call people to find out more about the people chose.

5 Ask the participants to get back in plenary and start the “hot chair exercise”: one group sits in the middle of the circle and the others can ask questions. They have to answer in first person, as if they were the person/member of the group they chose to research. Encourage questions about personal history, emotional life, the hard choices.

6 Explain that now they are to imagine themselves as investigative journalists looking to write a story about everyday resisters of racism, or injustice in their community.

- 7 Ask each group to choose a rapporteur and come up with 3 ways they would go about finding a person, people or groups in their community to interview, and at least 10 questions they would ask them about their anti-racist/resistance action, the features of their actions that have been successful and what obstacles they have encountered in succeeding. They will have 15-20 minutes for this task.
- 8 Circulate around the room and offer help and encouragement as needed. Give a 3-minute warning when time is almost up. Sticking to the time will help them come up with something quickly without worrying too much about perfection.
- 9 Call the group back together and ask one group at a time to go to the front of the room and present their ideas and questions.
- 10 If there is a possibility, send the groups out to find these heroes and conduct their interviews.
- 11 Ask participants to conduct these interviews and/or gather the information and create social media posts about them. Agree on a deadline and a dissemination plan.



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