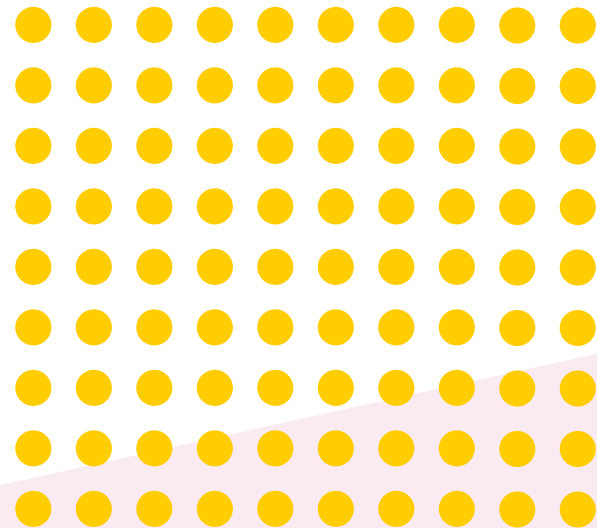
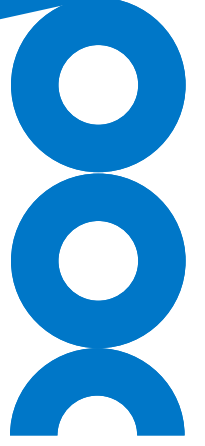


It's a lovely neighbourhood: Europe Goes Local





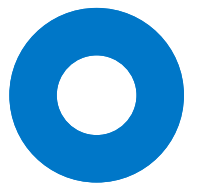
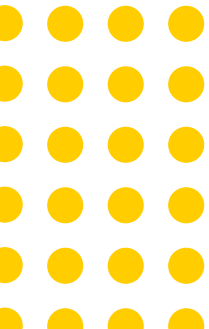
Özgehan Şenyuva

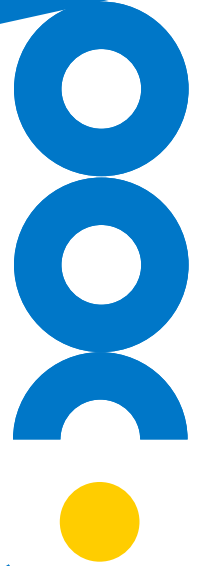


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<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/knowledge-books>





ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the Covid 19 pandemic has strengthened the already existing trend of solidarity at local level. Young people in different countries have transferred their social capital and competences developed in a connected world into solidarity action with those in need in their local communities, mainly through different forms of volunteerism. With the pandemic still affecting societies, with schools closed and mobility limited, it is very likely that solidarity at local level will become even stronger. Young people, as active agents of change, in search of diverse and alternative ways of participating in their communities are going to continue being part of the solidarity action, both in the provision and receiving sides.

1. Solidarity and (local) Community: Not so alone

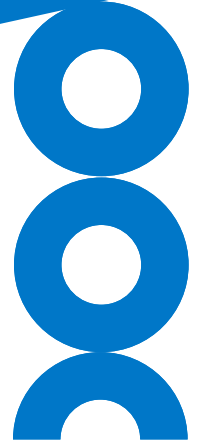
Kitty Genovese is famous (Wikipedia). Unfortunately, she is famous for a very notorious reason: She was murdered brutally in her neighbourhood on March 13th 1964. What made her murder different than many others were the original reports that indicated that her ordeal lasted for around half an hour and nobody in the neighbourhood came to her help. The lack of reaction by her neighbours who heard her cries or even saw the incident, became a case for social psychology prompting the theory of the “bystander effect” or “Genovese effect”. The Genovese effect became part of every psychology, sociology, public policy and social work introductory course in the US and many other countries around the world for decades. People who knew or read about this tragic story have

naturally questioned human nature, the community they live in and the sense of solidarity among individuals sharing a space.

The good thing about science is that it keeps asking questions. Over the years, many researchers kept visiting and revisiting the nature of events on that night and the sets of conclusions people have offered as a result. The good news is; the Genovese effect is not valid.

Many investigators have questioned the accuracy of original reports, for example, that thirty eight people heard the murder and did nothing. In fact, as Rachel Manning and Mark Levine’s detailed work demonstrates, people did not ignore Kitty’s plight. When they could see what was happening many intervened and the attacker ran off (Manning, Levine and Collins 2007).





Many others have designed experiments and comparative analysis on whether it is true that people show little to no support for others who are in need. A larger team of researchers has used real life, cross national data which shows that the norm tends to be for people to intervene when others are attacked. Non-intervention is the exception rather than the rule (Philpot et al 2020). The first conclusion we have is that people care and react to one another.

One of the reasons that the murder of Kitty Genovese took such a hold of American society is that it made it question and doubt its soul. It even created an atmosphere of fear (Cook 2014). This sense of community breaking down was a dominant fear in the United States throughout the 1970s and 1980s. These were fears of the urban masses, fears about cities where people were anonymous and the sense of community had broken down, and fears that each would have to take care of themselves. The powerful visual depiction of urban decay set in the 2019 Joker movie directed by Todd Philips is exactly how people saw their reality.

Gotham (set in 1981) is a collapsing metropolis on the brink of chaos. Unemployment is spiking, crime runs rampant, and financial ruin is assured, as evidenced by the city suddenly yanking away desperately needed social services - like the medication and therapy that Arthur desperately needs ... the poor citizens of Gotham who trudge in filthy streets where it seems like there's a porno theater on every corner, are frightened, angry, and

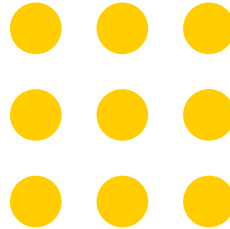
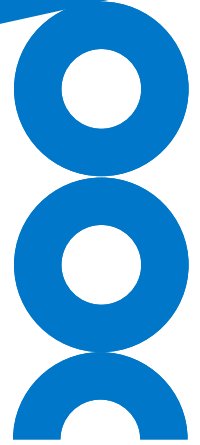
disenfranchised (Orquiola 2019).

Prominent political scientist Robert Putnam uses the concept of Social Capital to explain the loss of the sense of community and the increased sense of growing apart (Putnam 2000). Putnam explains, "social capital refers to 'the connections among individuals' social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p19). By using extensive data, Putnam argues that social capital in the US is eroding drastically:

"For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago--silently, without warning--that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current" (p27). This theme is consistent across seven separate measures of *social capital*, including: political participation; civic participation; religious participation; workplace networks; informal networks; mutual trust; and altruism. Putnam yet identifies four exceptions, and one is particularly important for our argument: an increase in volunteerism among young people. Putting this hopeful news aside for the time being, it is important to remind ourselves why social capital is important for societies.

Putnam argues that social capital "has many features that help people translate aspirations into realities." (p288) In his study there are five such categories. First, social capital can make problem solving and conflict transformation easier as high





social capital levels would lead to less opposition between parties. As a result, the social environment would improve as well as there being safer and more productive neighborhoods. Second, it can make business transactions easier, if people trust each other they need less time for reassurances. As a result, economic prosperity would generally increase. Third, social capital can widen our awareness of our mutual connectivity. This can improve the quality of our civic and democratic institutions. Fourth, it can help to increase and speed up the flow of information, which, in turn, would improve education and economic production. Finally, social capital can improve our health and happiness through both psychological and biological processes which require human contact.

The grim picture of the erosion of social capital drawn by Putnam was read and shared by many, leading to extensive international and comparative research. Just noting the fact that the book *Bowling Alone* is quoted around 85000 times academically is sufficient to show the impact of his arguments. However, another book by the very same researcher (co-authored by Lewis Feldstein) published in 2003, only three years following the famous *Bowling Alone*, presented a brighter picture of action. Titled, "Better Together: Restoring the American Community", the book presented several examples of how people are inventing new forms of social activism and community revival. As societies grow bigger and more diverse, Putnam and Feldstein argue and demonstrate that people grow social capital both

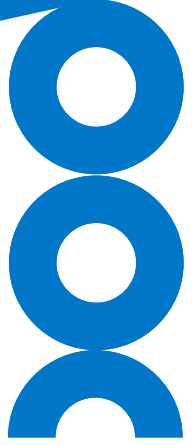
through traditional and more innovative means. Through community action and solidarity building among themselves, people across geographies, class and identity lines, build and realize powerful networks to improve their lives and the lives of those around them. Not surprisingly, younger people are the frontrunners of such initiatives.

What we have are two very popular cases that give alarming signals on solidarity at local communal levels. They are well known and often quoted. However, what we also have is irrefutable scientific evidence to the contrary; the sense of solidarity is very resilient among people, especially young people, and they continue exploring and developing ways to enforce solidarity at local, national and international levels. This also became true at the trying times of the Covid-19 Pandemic, during the spring and summer of 2020.

2. The joker effect: Cooperation driven by destructive agents

The title, *The Joker Effect* is from a brilliant article written by Alex Arenas and colleagues (Arenas et al 2011), in which they use game theory to look at the notion of cooperation in a public good perspective. Their starting point is that society is an emergent structure resulting from cooperation among its members. By using complex modelling, they prove, both theoretically and by numerical simulations,





“that the addition of purely destructive agents (jokers) to a standard Public Goods game has, paradoxically, a positive effect on cooperation” (Arenas et al 2011 p116). Although this study focuses on individuals, it may also be expanded to include situations such as destructive settings, for example, the case of the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020.

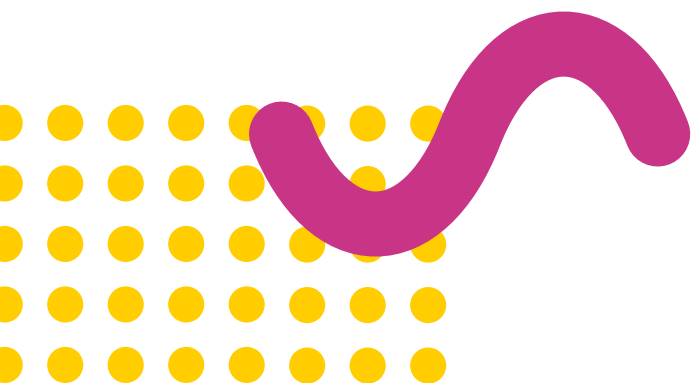
The Covid-19 Pandemic, the drastic measures that were taken (i.e. lockdowns, age specific curfews, closure of schools and businesses) and the dramatic losses experienced by people, including the passing away of loved ones, generated a major change in how things are perceived and how things are done all around the globe. With the travel bans and curfews, people were confined to their houses and their neighborhoods. Students were forced to follow courses through computer screens and internet, and did not see classmates and friends in person for an extended period of time. How the fall and winter of 2020-2021 will progress is still unknown, and whether the schools will be open or not is yet to be decided. As a student of the Middle East Technical University said, “I was dreaming of going on an Erasmus and meeting new friends and developing myself. Now all I want is to be able to

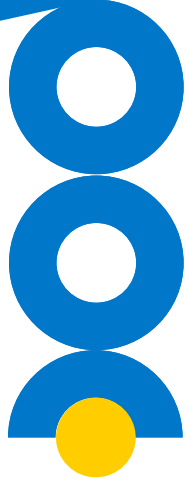
come to class and see my classmates in my own university. I gave up on progress, I am fighting against losing what I already have” (anonymous, 23, Turkish, Female).

The difficult times and the level of confinement have brought about a joker effect. People started showing solidarity with one another and this solidarity was taking place at different levels, such as International, European, national and local.

3. Solidarity in the times of Corona

Languages bring people together. Words, the essential building blocks of languages have lives of their own. Similar to playing with wooden building blocks, individuals construct over and over manifestations of their feelings, emotions, thoughts, needs and desires, by using words. In an ever connected world, an unprecedented number of individuals learn and enjoy expressing themselves in languages other than those spoken in their homes. Furthermore, just like borrowing an interesting building block from your neighbor, a particular block you don't have in your box, words also get borrowed between languages. These are the special words that one culture has developed to talk about something particular, at first it can be difficult to see the advantage of having such words because they are not easily translatable. These are not words you can easily find in a pocket dictionary,





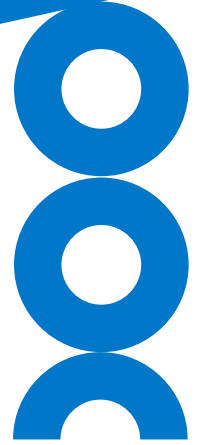
these are not words that you can ask somebody, “How do you say... in your language?” More often than not, it simply does not in other languages, these words can only be told and explained. Such words are used in youth work when talking about mobility. For example, “Fernweh”. It is a typical example from the German language, it refers to the sense of longing for faraway places (Senyuva 2016). Turkish has one of these words, it is *imece*, which is easy to say, but one needs to explain it as it is rather untranslatable. Some dictionaries take the simple approach of using “collaboration” for this concept, but it goes way deeper and is more complex than that. *Imece* is a word that is about empathy and active citizenship. It refers to volunteering, it incorporates support and responsibility and it is mainly about strengthening community. This not-so-often-used Turkish word alone, addresses most of the solidarity model proposed in the study, ‘4Thought for Solidarity’ (Bacliija Knoch and Nicodemi 2020).

What is *imece*? The best way to describe it is to get the setting right. It comes from mainland Anatolia and its origins are from agrarian rural life. It is about being together and taking care of things as a community. It is about the people in the village working as a volunteer group. It refers to a culture of doing tasks in which everyone contributes evenly and voluntarily, and problems are solved in cooperation.

Imece started at a very core local level, in village life. It is passed through generations. Although the majority of the global population lives in urban areas in the present, the sense of solidarity in your local reality still thrives. And it is about to get even stronger and more widespread during and after the pandemic. In the 4th thought for Solidarity Study, the motivations of solidarity are discussed in detail and the authors explore four major issues: Altruism, Reciprocity, Reward, and Sacrifice (Bacliija Knoch and Nicodemi 2020 p80). The authors continue, “if solidarity is a broad universal concept, then it is based on something innate and common: humanity. The connection between everyone, between one and the other, is something that is ‘unifying’. It is to form a (solid) unit with someone else, to support them and to share assets, hardships and joy with them. Support comes very strongly through this perspective of motivation for solidarity” (Bacliija Knoch and Nicodemi 2020 p84).

The initial cases of solidarity came from China, where the pandemic hit first and strongest. Ground zero, the city of Wuhan, was in complete lockdown when first the tales of solidarity emerged with Wuhan *jiayou*, which literally translates as stay strong Wuhan, a slogan many within the city of Wuhan and the people from other cities shared through social media and even shouting out from their windows. Then, followed numerous stories of people packing and distributing free food, dropping groceries at the doors of people in blocks, people distributing masks to their neighbors and many other small but





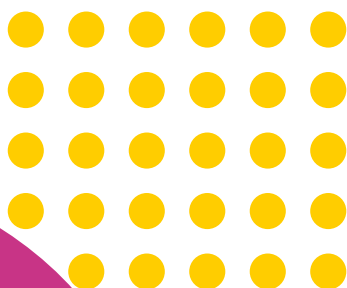
meaningful gestures of solidarity (BBC 28 January 2020). When the wave of Coronavirus hit the rest of the world, waves of solidarity also emerged. There was solidarity between countries, they were sending each other financial, medical and humanitarian support (Dartford 2020). It was also among individuals and small groups with numerous examples from the US (Lawrence 2020), Turkey, the UK (London Covid Volunteers) and Belgium (Covid-Solidarity.org). These initiatives became very efficient at local and regional levels and managed to provide and continue to provide support for the members of their respective societies that are in need. Such initiatives included small acts of solidarity. In Ankara, Turkey for instance, through the initiative of the mayor's office people offered to pay for the utility bills of people in Ankara who could not afford it through the lockdowns. In Belgium, the Covid Solidarity initiative offered volunteers to do the shopping or the walking of pets for individuals who were isolated. The Covid Volunteers of London offered several schemes; being a phone pal for someone who needed somebody to talk to and collecting soap for beauty banks for distribution are just two examples. There are numerous other examples including, people singing or playing an

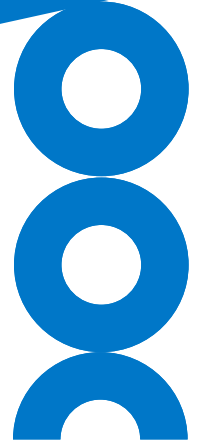
instrument on their balconies to cheer up their neighbors, people offering tutoring or babysitting for the children in their buildings if the parents needed to go out. The European civil society immediately updated their portfolios and agendas, and despite most of them facing numerous difficulties of their own, they have increasingly supported those in need (European Civic Forum 2020). The important conclusion is, at times of unprecedented crisis in recent history, people stood up and offered to be part of their community and to be there for one another. As the Belgian initiative's motto said; "they have spread solidarity not the virus".

4. Politics of (Re-) Discovering the local: A Paradigm Shift or Change in magnitude

'Solidarity starts with your neighbour', is one of the mottos of the Belgian Covid 19 Solidarity volunteer scheme. The local level of solidarity has become much more visible and much stronger during the Pandemic. The question that arises is whether this is an 'unleashing' of potential that was already building up due to the Corona lockdown or is it a paradigm shift where people have started to think differently?

The answer is rather complex, yet a good starting point would be to look at the underlying politics of solidarity. In a sense, what we have been witnessing is minor politics in its best definition.





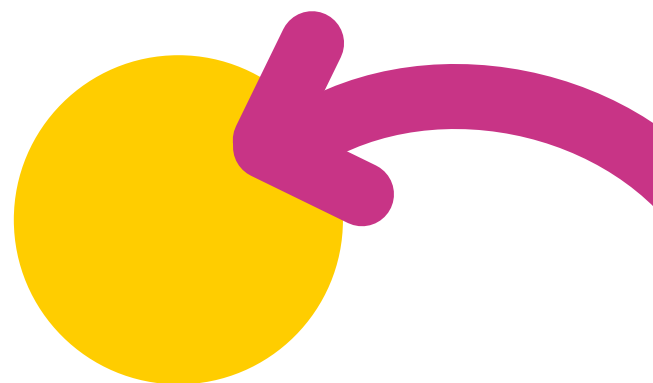
Before going into the structure and dynamics of minor politics, it is useful to revisit the linkage between solidarity and 'local community'. As Lahu- sen and Grasso (quoted in 4Thought for Solidarity Study) state, "things that are 'wrong' in everyday life most often happen on the local level. Feelings of social exclusion, as addressed through solidarity activities, are likely to be local and identity-focused; citizens and organisations will therefore prioritise these local concerns and act at the local level." As the TransSOL-Transnational Solidarity at times of Crisis research project demonstrated, the main focus of civic solidarity is mainly a local one when considering activities and beneficiaries (TransSOL 2018).

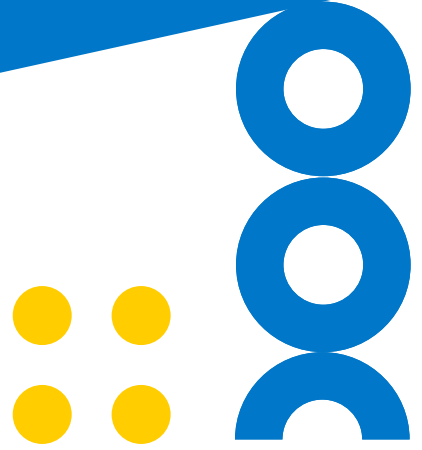
As the 4Thought for Solidarity Study points out, the role of the local and regional level in young people's civic engagement is also highlighted by the Committee of the Regions in their report on the European Solidarity Corps (Dec 2018). The report identifies this as a first essential point of contact for young people in the area of solidarity. As the authors state, "the level to reach out to young people, to get them involved in something, is the local level" (Baclijs Knoch and Nicodemi 2020 p39).

The local level is important for young people. It has always been the level that is part of their identities and has an influence in their choices and life paths. It is also the level where they socialise and interact. It is also the level where they are most politically engaged. One important finding from various

studies on youth participation is that young people prefer and indeed do participate more at the local level (Partispace project 2018). This may be easily linked with the concept of minor politics (Conio 2015).

Major politics, by definition, involves the struggle for power in its largest sense. It involves competition, conflict, and confrontation. It comes along with ideologies, exclusive groups, parties, and discourses. Major politics takes place within major identities, which tend to be inward looking and not at all inclusive. Minor politics reacts to all these competitive and conflictual natures of politics and offers a more inclusive, more down to earth and more solidary approach that aims for doing the best





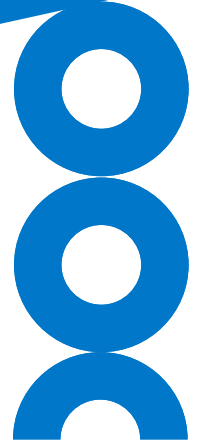
one can. Thus, minor politics is also very concentrated at a local level by its definition. In general, minor politics has three main features, namely prefiguration, immanence and affirmation, and the politics of friendship and affects (Kara 2019). Prefigurative politics, as coined by Carl Boggs, are the modes of organisation and social relationships that strive to reflect the future society being sought by the group. It is a push for change, but by leading through example (Jaster 2018). Minor politics focuses on the here and now, and rather than the negativity of a reactionary approach, it focuses on productive, active, impact generating and difference making contexts (Kara 2019). They don't make demands or protest, but instead seek practical effects. The idea is not to plea for solutions from an external power or to make noise so others (representatives, those with power, etc) recognise and address the issue. The solution is inherent in minor politics and each and all are part of this solution by taking action to the degree they can. By becoming part of minor politics, people empower themselves. For instance, the social and community centers and the migrant networks are all examples of minor politics to a degree (Yates 2015).

5. The Solidarity at Local Level: Youth in charge

In the first edition of the European Academy on Youth Work, 2019, Maarten Leyts from Trendwolves offered an interesting comparison between two

popular literary characters that have and continues to affect children and young people: Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen (EAYW 2019). His comparison was loosely based on the activism of Katniss versus the passivism of Harry. In his explanation, Katniss Everdeen is a more accurate representation of the current youth mentality; more prone to take action and focus on creating change. Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen are indeed subject to numerous comparative analyses in terms of leadership, rebellious acts, and feminism, as well as being role models (Pharr, Clark, and Palumbo 2012; Underhill 2018). What makes Katniss more popular than Harry (at least for academics, researchers and youth workers) is that she goes through a different transformation than Harry, and is an embodiment of activism from grassroots levels. Katniss Everdeen comes from a disadvantaged background, raised by a single mother who is struggling with mental well-being issues. She lives in an impoverished district that has working and mining background. She and her family struggle with hunger, this forces her to go hunting, which is clearly against the law. She volunteers to replace her sister from taking part in a traditional human sacrifice game, imposed by the oppressive central authority. Throughout the series we witness her grow, rebel and bring about change. Throughout, she remains connected to her local reality and background. She is independent, change oriented, angry yet very powerful. She is already skilled in archery and makes use of her competences in her adventures. Harry Potter on the other hand is a much more passive character.

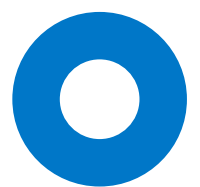
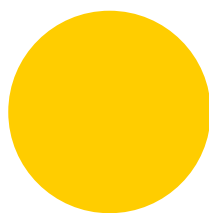
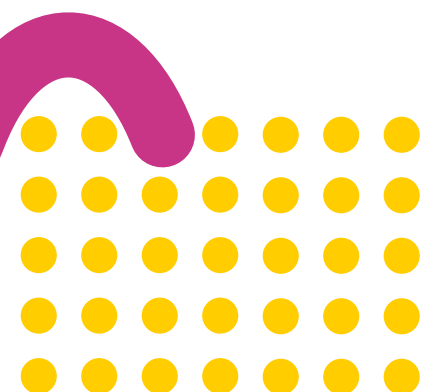


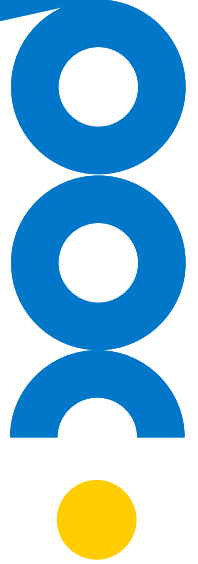


Although he is an orphan, he comes from a bloodline of powerful magicians, and in fact he himself is a celebrity among the world of wizards. He is taken care of, is protected and mentored by a central power authority, Dumbledore, who watches over, enables and oversees Harry's growth and his search for his identity. Harry is a leader and has to fight evil, but it is clearly not by choice and requires a lot of care taking and support from his best friends, classmates and teachers. He has potential but needs to be trained and educated, for which he relies on adults and his mentor. Katniss already knows what she has and what she is against from the very beginning of the series.

The pandemic is a call for Katniss Everdeen to step up. Young people around Europe have shown solidarity and supported each other as well as those in need. The Genovese syndrome is a myth, people do help their neighbors. Societies are better together and while people may be bowling alone there are many online game and chat rooms that allow people to keep building their social capitals, create networks and show solidarity. Young people

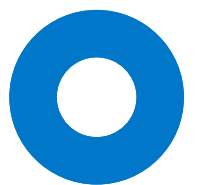
may not be allowed to travel to other countries at this time, and in fact even to other cities during the pandemic, but they have utilised already existing competences to design and implement solidarity in their communities. We have witnessed numerous cases of multiplier effect at the community level linked with learning mobility. The impact is achieved by the participants taking action in their home communities using their project experiences. They improve their competences and acquire certain values during mobility and, later on, either get actively involved in various activities targeted at creating a more active, responsible and cohesive society or simply share their knowledge and newly gained points of view with their families, friends and other peers (Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska 2018). As the pandemic continues to affect societies, we will continue to see increased levels of solidarity among the citizens. And as the first wave demonstrated, the local level will be the main stage for such solidarity action. It is a fact that the Covid-19 Pandemic is inducing a change within our societies. But it is important to note that it is not generating a rupture or a paradigm shift. It appears that the change is more in terms of speed and direction of already existing trends. Minor politics at the local level was already a reality. Covid-19 made it more visible and stronger.

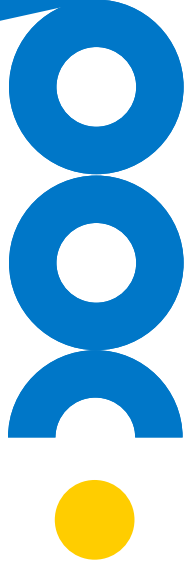




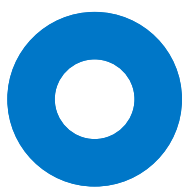
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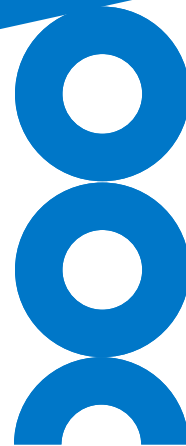
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EUROPE TALKS SOLIDARITY

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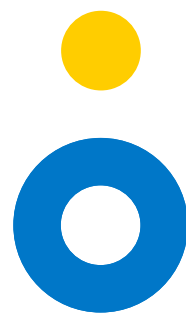
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