

FRI-2G.305-1-ERI-06

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS IN CHANGING THE MINDSET AND FORMING EUROPEAN SELF-AWARENESS AND IDENTITY⁵

Assoc. Prof. Emilia Velikova, PhD

Department of Mathematics

Faculty of Natural Sciences and Education

“Angel Kanchev” University of Ruse

Phone: +359-885 635 874

E-mail: evelikova@uni-ruse.bg

Mrs. Sevda Tsvetanova, PhD

“Angel Kanchev” University of Ruse

Phone: +359-889 205 770

E-mail: tsvetanova.sevda@gmail.com

***Abstract:** Building Bridges for Europe (BBE, 2017-1-DE02-KA204-004188) was an Erasmus+ project, which was implemented by partners of the European umbrella organization “Danube-Networkers for Europe (DANET) e.V.” such as “Angel Kanchev” University of Ruse, coordinated by the affiliated “Institute for virtual and face-to-face learning in adult education at Ulm University (ILEU) e.V.”, Germany.*

The main goal of BBE was to analyze education projects and their methods of adult training with the focus on good practices in the areas of fostering critical thinking, European self-awareness and identity, and solidarity, and reduction of prejudices.

***Keywords:** European Self-awareness, European Identity, European Project BBE*

JEL Codes:

INTRODUCTION

Building Bridges for Europe (BBE, 2017-1-DE02-KA204-004188) was an Erasmus+ project, which was implemented by partners of the European umbrella organization “Danube-Networkers for Europe (DANET) e.V.”, such as “Angel Kanchev” University of Ruse, coordinated by the affiliated “Institute for virtual and face-to-face learning in adult education at Ulm University (ILEU) e.V.”, Germany.

The main goal of BBE was to analyze education projects and their methods of adult training with the focus on good practices in the areas of fostering critical thinking, European self-awareness and identity, and solidarity, and reduction of prejudices.

There was organized a survey according to the project goal.

THE PROJECT SURVEY

The survey aimed to identify the change of mindset and attitude of several target groups with regard to their European awareness and identity. A research instrument (questionnaire) was developed by project experts. The survey was taken by 120 respondents; however, there are some questions which have remained unanswered. In the analysis they are marked as „Prefer not to say“ (Fig. 1).

⁵ Докладът е представен в секция Образование – изследвания и иновации на 25 октомври 2019 с оригинално заглавие на български език: ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ РОЛЯТА НА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛНИТЕ ПРОЕКТИ ВЪРХУ ФОРМИРАНЕТО НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКО САМОСЪЗНАНИЕ И ИДЕНТИЧНОСТ.

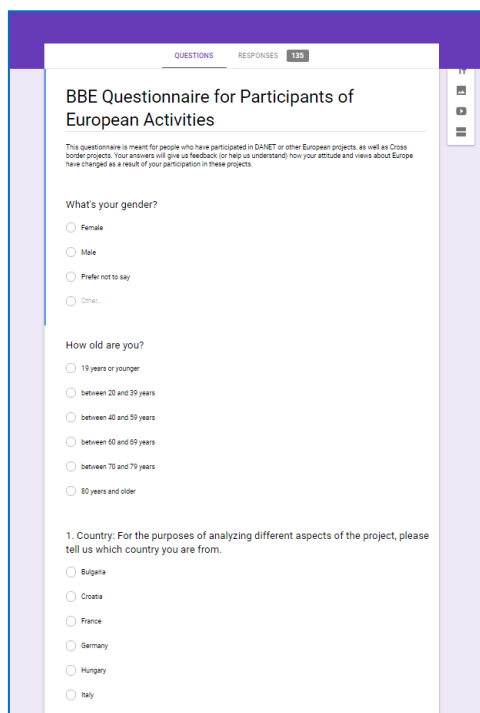


Figure 1

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The gender analysis shows that the survey was taken by 97 (78%) women and 26 (22%) men. The ratio is a striking 4 to 1.

It re-confirms 2 well-known facts about the old adults' group (Fig. 2):

- Life expectancy for women is usually higher.
- Women tend to socialize more than men.

The most active participants have been those in the 40-59 age group – 26.3%, i.e. 31 persons (Fig. 3). The number of participants in the 60-69 and 70-79 age groups, respectively, 26 and 28 persons, is almost equal. The smallest number of participants is in the under 19 and over 80 age groups, respectively 6 and 11 persons each. It has to be mentioned that the number of participants in the 20–39 age group is not small either with 16 persons that have taken the questionnaire. The distribution of the participants in the respective age groups corresponds to the activity (participation level) of the pensioners in the pensioner organizations and in the educational projects.

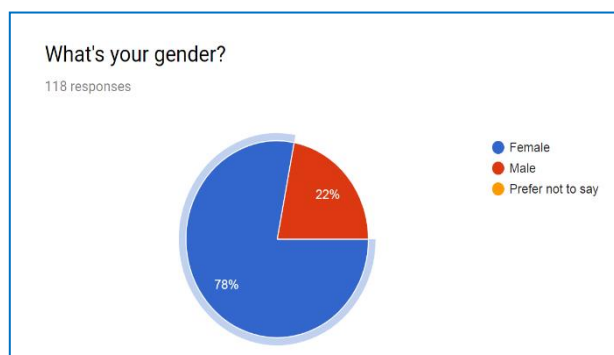


Figure 2

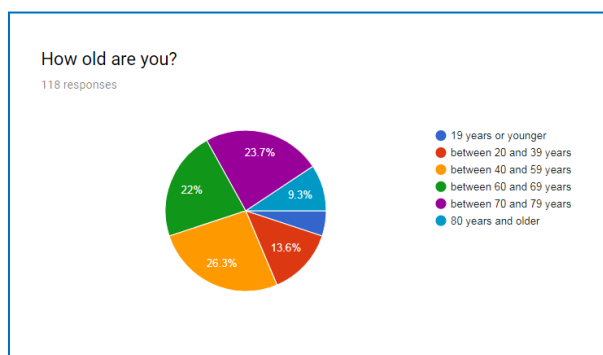


Figure 3

The nation segmentation shows the following: The total number of respondents was 120 from 12 countries (Fig. 4). The largest number of respondents, 37 persons, was from Bulgaria – 30.8%. The second largest group is the one from Germany with 29 participants from Ulm. Romania (18), Italy (17), and Slovenia (15) have almost the same number of respondents. The participation of 12 countries in the survey supports the project aim for evaluating the impact of

the DANET and cross-border projects on changing the mindset and attitude of the participants towards their belonging to the EU and the effect on their European identity.

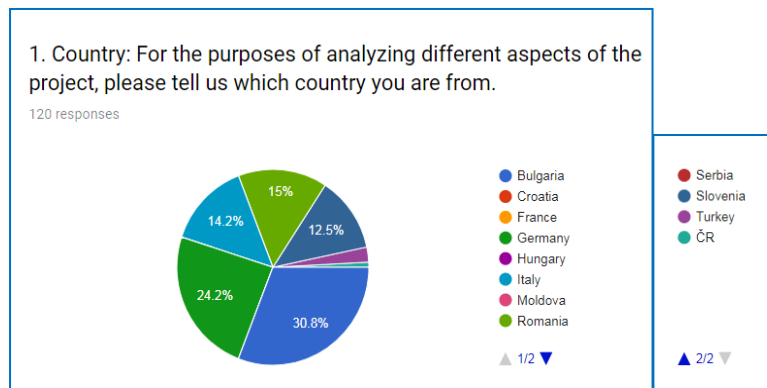


Figure 4

99 people (85.3%) of the 116 respondents confirm that they have taken part in a project situation that has had a strong effect on their ideas about Europe as a union of countries (Fig. 5). 8 respondents (6.7%) claim that they have not had such a situation in the projects. 9 people (8%) say that they don't remember.

The largest number of participants, 31.6 %, declare that a total of 4 of the listed situations have led to a change in their ideas about Europe (Fig. 6). 23.9 % have reported that *There was more than one situation*. 20.5 % respondents have chosen - *Teamwork or joint activity you have done with people from other partner countries*. 16.2 % of the participants remark that important for them was a visit to another European country.

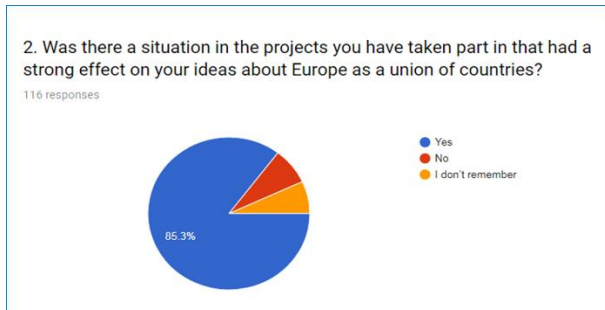


Figure 5

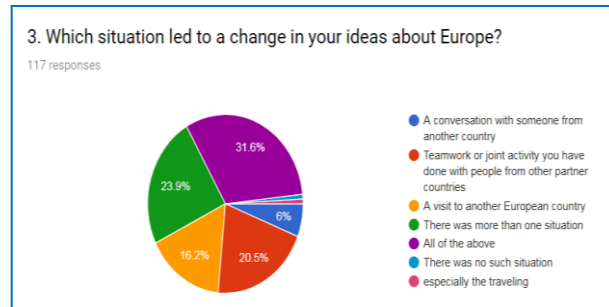


Figure 6

Only 6% of the respondents have declared that the most important situation for changing their ideas about Europe was a conversation with someone from another country.

Therefore the conclusions are as follows:

- Change of mindset and attitude are most effectively influenced by multiple factors.
- The smallest percentage of the most important situation for changing their ideas about Europe was a conversation with someone from another country' was most probably caused by language problems.
- Teamwork with people from other European countries and a visit to another European country seem to be effective eye-openers.
- Personal interaction with other project participants and observation (as they say 'Seeing is believing') are obviously more convincing than any other factors in changing people's opinions.

An overwhelming number of the respondents - 99 persons (82.2%) claim that they will remember a DANET or another event / project (Fig. 7). 9,3 % have replied negatively and 6.8% claim they can't remember such a project/ event. It shows that the impact of the projects and project events

is really significant in fostering European identity and sense of belonging to a union of European countries.

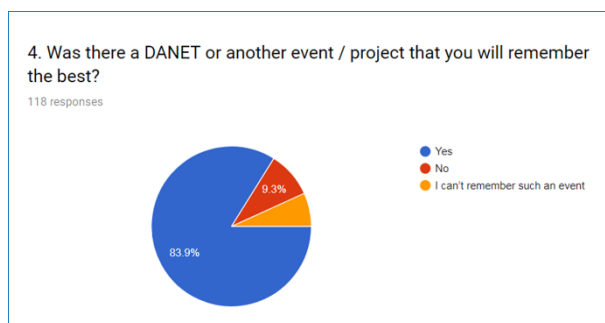


Figure 7

The variety of projects that were listed in Question 5 (Fig. 8) was really big, which explains why the responses were so dispersed. The survey included 34 projects and the analysis shows that the most impactful were:

- Personal Town Tour (16.4%),
- Danube Breakfast on the bridge in Ulm (9.5%),
- Tastes of Danube: Bread Connects (BC) (including the accompanying events - Give a Sign for Friendship along the Danube (6.7%).

The chart shows that:

- the survey was taken by participants in all evaluated projects;
- each and every project has had a strong influence on the target group.

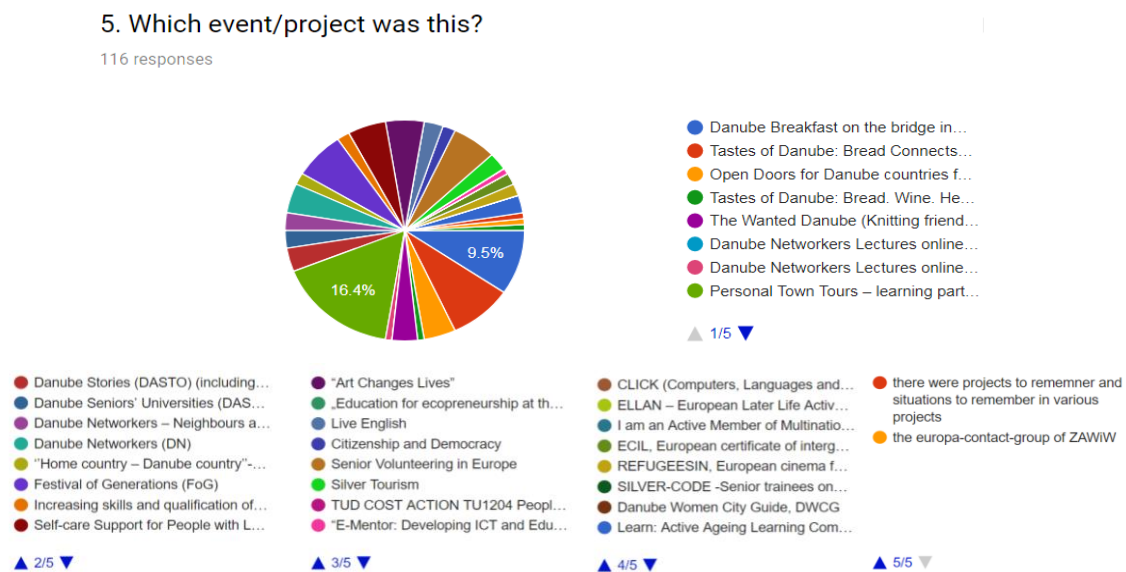


Figure 8

99 (83,5%) participants confirmed that they remember a situation in the project that opened their mind about feeling more European (Fig. 9). 19 (16,5%) participants didn't remember such kind of situation. This clearly shows that the success ratio of the projects is really high.

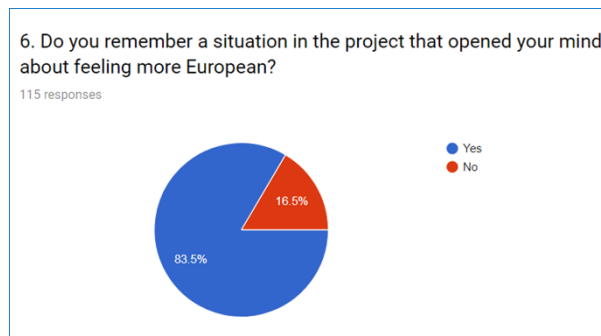


Figure 9

A very large number of participants, subdivided into 3 groups, reported that the change in their views was due to a project or a situation in the project (Fig. 10). The ranking of the impact factors is as follows:

- *showed them that they can learn from each other (49.6%);*
- *made them aware of the cultural diversity of Europe (47.8%);*
- *showed them that people from different European countries share the same values (43.5%).*

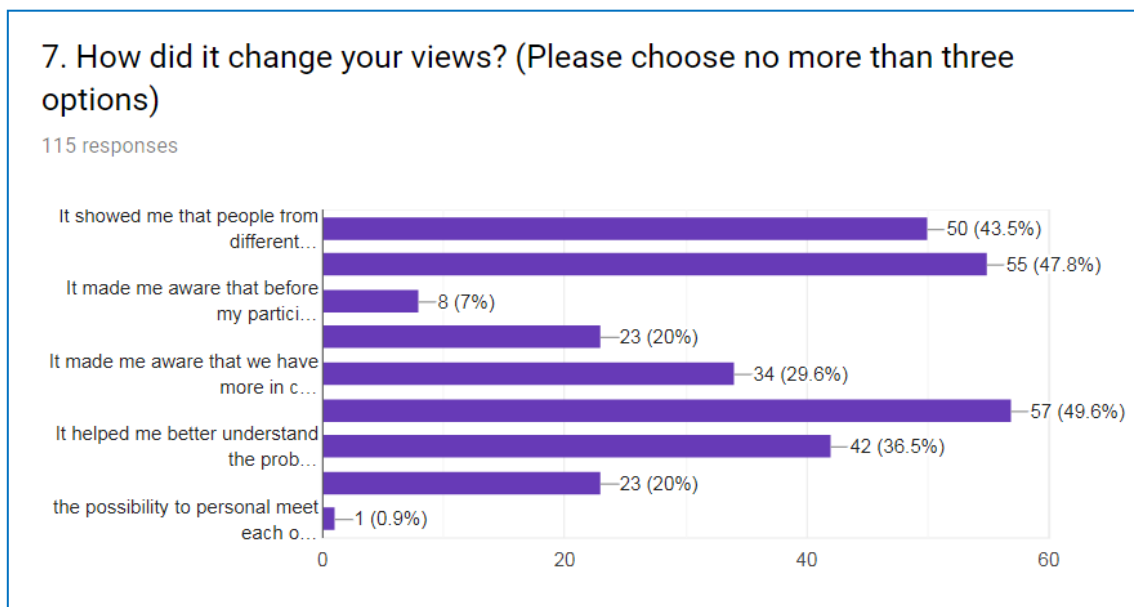


Figure 10

Out of these 3 impact factors two are really important. The first one is that people are willing to learn from each other and that the desire to learn new things is innate to most people. The second really important factor is that people share the same values despite their national belonging, which gives the EU and European citizenship a chance of survival despite the problems and difficulties which are inevitable in such a large union of countries.

Another large group of participants, 66.1%, is subdivided into two groups with approximately similar percentage of opinions with regard to this question:

- *It helped me better understand the problems that are actually existing in Europe (36.5%);*
- *It made me aware that we have more in common than I expected (29.6%).*

An equal number of participants (20%) feel that:

- *It made me aware that I have missed a lot of information about the other countries.*
- *It answered some of my questions about Europe.*

Only 1 participant found that the possibility to personally meet each other is important.

The participants' opinion about *the type of experience which helped them to change their attitude/opinion about being an European citizen* shows that what really matters to them is (Fig. 11):

- *the opportunity of visiting other partner countries and interacting in a social context with the local volunteers and hosts (44.8%) and to a lesser extent;*
- *doing things together (37.9%).*

Discussion has the least value for the project participants with 17.2%.

The number of participants who had language problems in *some situations* (40.8%) or did not have such problems (33.3%) is relatively close (Fig. 12). *However, the number of participants who did have language problems is not insignificant (23.3%), which means that 1/4 of the people were unable to communicate effectively with the other project participants. Only 2.6 % had difficulty communicating most of the time.*



Figure 11

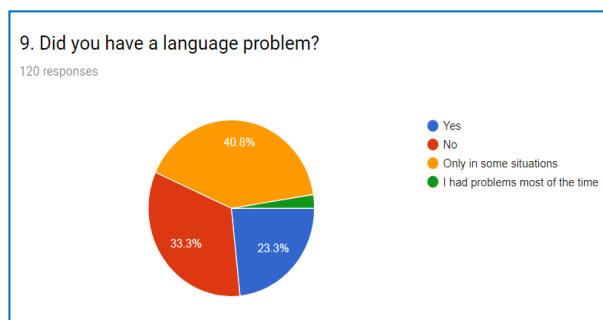


Figure 12

Although 33.3% of the participants claim that they *did not have language problems* during the implementation of the projects, almost all of them also report that they *were able to deal with these problems* (Fig. 13).

Out of all the options for dealing with the situation the most frequent cases involved:

- independent coping with the situation (33.9%)
- help from another person (31.2%).

The number of participants who were unable to find ways to deal with language problems during the implementation of the projects amounts to merely 6%.

Therefore, projects provide opportunities and motivation for acquisition of knowledge, development of skills and competences for communicating with other people.

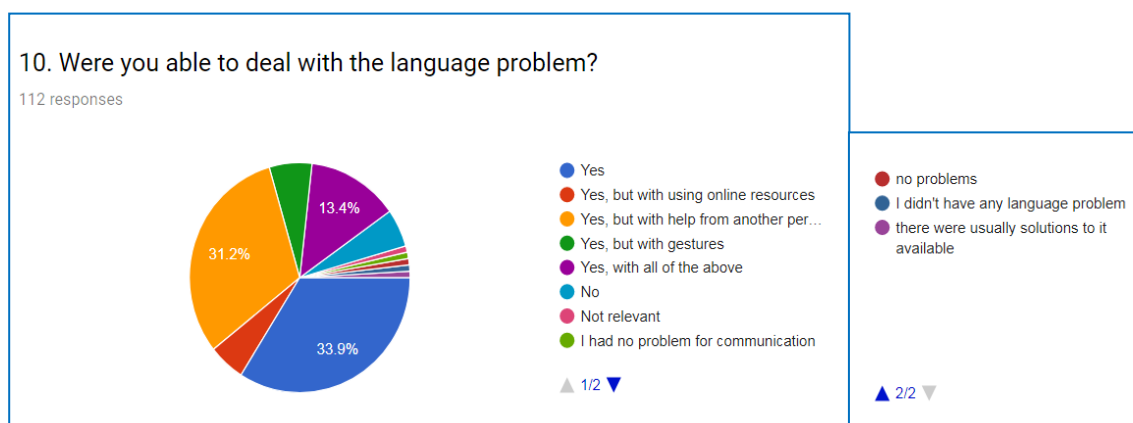


Figure 13

About 60% of the respondents confirmed that meeting people from other European countries in their country has changed their attitude towards these people as a result of their interaction with them within the framework of the projects they have participated in (Fig. 14). The number of people who have not changed their opinion (15.1 %) or have only changed it to some extent (16 %) is approximately the same. The percentage of people who didn't have grounds for comparison (9.2 %) cannot be neglected.

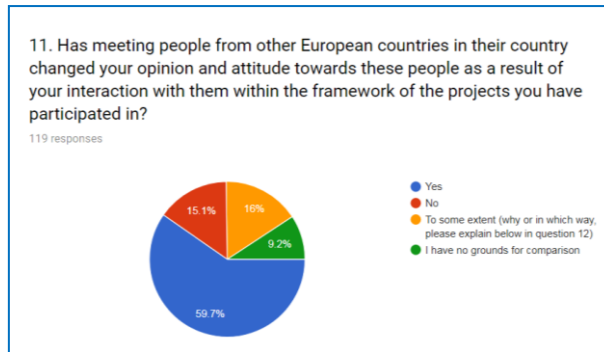


Figure 14



Figure 15

Analysis of the personal responses to Question 12 can be summarized as follows (Fig. 15):
Overall impact of DANET and cross-border projects: *positive*

Lessons taught and learnt:

- Tolerance to the differences in culture, circumstances and ways of thinking
- Respect to other nations' traditions, behavioral norms and ways of doing things
- Acceptance of diversity at various levels
- It is never too late to learn.
- It is better to build bridges between the countries than fight with each other.

Results on personal level:

- Awakening to the existence of other nations/people in the EU, it's not just us
- Broadening the personal horizons of project participants
- Opening to others
- From accepting to appreciating diversity
- Appreciating the idea of togetherness and teamwork

- Steering away from negative or false stereotypes and overcoming biases
- Getting to know others, learning from others and mutual exchange of ideas
- Helping others

Other effects of the projects:

- Motivated participants to learn other European languages.
- Activated critical thinking.
- Eliminated previous prejudices to other EU nations.
- Helped to better understand oneself on national level through comparison with other EU nationals.
- Brought about some positive surprises.

E.g. “I was really surprised by the kindness and joie de vivre (joy of living) of the Eastern European people despite their material limitations.”

There were only a couple of political comments, which shows that ordinary people interact at different, non-political levels.

Out of the 14 learning events that were listed, two stood out as the most preferred ways of learning with equal percentages for both of 32.8% (Fig. 16):

- Dialogues in small groups (33 participants);
- Social events (parties, festivals, joint project events) (30 participants).

The highest percentage for these two options (32.8 %) comes to re-confirm the importance of personal interaction for the project participants. It can be summarized with the popular phrase “From heart to heart”.

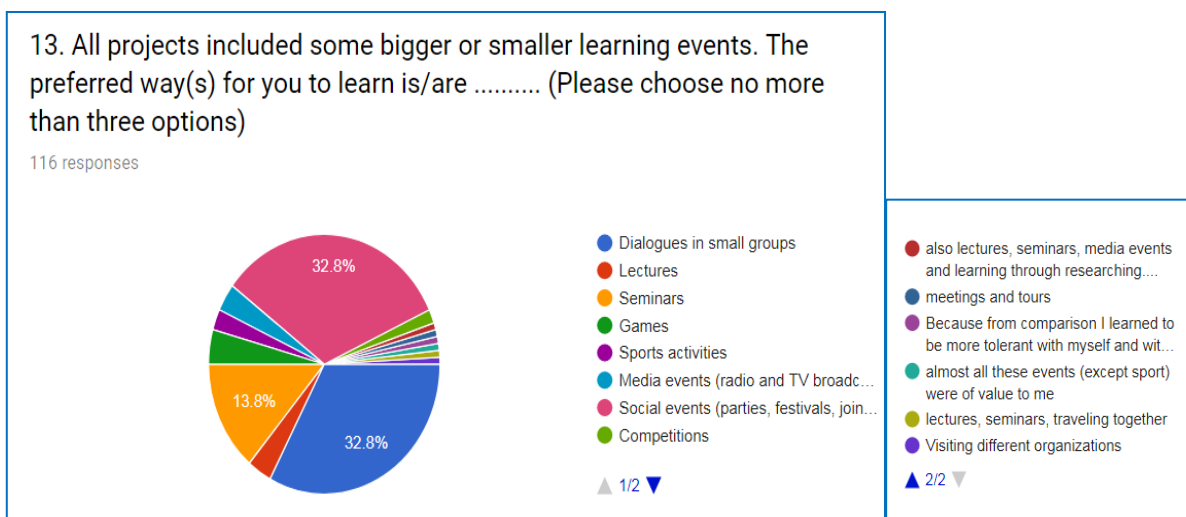


Figure 16

The least preferred ways of learning include:

- lectures (5 participants);
- games (5 participants);
- media events (radio and TV broadcasts, documentaries, articles, online resources) (4 participants);
- sports activities (3 participants);
- competitions (2 participants).

Under the Other option some respondents have given answers which include elements from various categories.

CONCLUSION

- Changing people’s mindset is a challenging task that requires a lot of efforts on behalf of educators.
- Planning, organizing and implementing learning events has to be done with great attention to detail so as to achieve the desired effect.

- The age of target groups, especially with regard to the old adults group, has to be taken into consideration since learning styles differ from one generation to another, or as the English say, “*You can’t teach an old dog new tricks*” (Why do they make me play games at my age?)
- Educational situations for people of various cultures must be based on things that unite people such as the innate desire to learn new things, explore the world around us, and last but not least, enjoy life!

REFERENCES

European project *Building Bridges for Europe*; Activating, motivation and educating methods
URL: <https://bbe-toolbox.eu/> [viewed 09.09.2019]