

**A summary of the research carried out by Diana Certan, the program director for IMPACT on the relationship between adventure education (the VIATA program) and the development of social capital (“Adventure education as a tool for social capital development”) is offered below. The study performed on the participants in the VIATA Program confirms the main hypothesis, according to which *the children enrolled in the program show, at the end of the week, a higher level of social capital than at the beginning of the week.* There is a 23% increase in the interpersonal trust item at the end of the week. The study also shows a direct correlation between the increase in the percentage of the interpersonal trust and the increase of 10 – 15% in other values, like solidarity, cooperation and empowerment.**

The research focused on VIATA, one of the main programs developed by the New Horizons Foundation, the mission of which is the development of positive values as a strategy for sustainable development. This system of experiential education is one of “learning by doing” - by challenging both the mind and the body and working together to solve problems. Through this experience, young people shape their character and develop a higher self-confidence which helps them to overcome the daily challenges.

The theoretical framework for the research has been based on the theories of social capital. The research started from the following premises: (1) Social capital is a key element for a good functioning of a democratic system; an increase in the social capital level favors an economic growth and a quick recovery from economic crisis; (2) Educational policies can be used as efficient instruments for generating or improving the level of social capital; adventure education can be a starting point for this; (3) The fundamental values of a person are to a large extent gained in the pre-adult period and are a reflection of the life experience from that period of time (Inglehart 1990, p.56); (4) At this moment there are no strategies/policies for generating/improving the level of social capital.

The research aimed to provide an answer to the following questions:

- What are the effects that the VIATA Program has over the kids that are coming into the program?
- What kind of abilities and values the kids develop during the one-week program?
- Does the program make a difference from the social capital point of view?

The analysis tries to see to what extent the young people who took part in VIATA Program have a higher level of social capital as compared to those who have just entered the program. Social capital has been measured through the following items: interpersonal trust, team building (openness to cooperation), solidarity and empowerment, identified according to the existing literature. The main hypothesis is that *the kids who came in the program have - at the end of the week - a higher level of social capital than they had at the beginning of the week.*

Methodology: The questionnaire was applied to a number of 382 kids. The data analysis focused on the differences observed between those two moments of time. *(A number of 50 kids were questioned both at the beginning of the week and at the end of the week to see if the kids answers at the end of the week are affected by the fact that they already completed the same questionnaire at the beginning of the week).* Through the questionnaire I tried to see with what values and abilities the kids came in the program and with what qualities they leave the program.

Below are the most important findings regarding each social capital components measured in the study:

**1. Trust.** The trust item was measured through two questions that we took over from the World Values Survey questionnaire:

- Generally speaking, can you say that most people can be trusted or that you can not be too trustful with people;
- How much trust do you have in people?

For the first question, the differences between the beginning and the end of the week were quite surprising. At the beginning of the week 51,8% answered that one cannot be too trustful

as compared to the end of the week when a percent of 28,8% answered the same. Regarding the second question a cumulative percent of 52,4% do not trust, or have a little trust as compared to 34,6% - the result at the end of the week.

## **2. Empowerment**, measured through three questions:

- If the conditions from your school or teachers' behavior do not satisfy you: 1. You're going to tell your parents about the problems you face at school; 2. You're going to tell your friends from school; 3. You're going to talk to your colleagues; 4. You wouldn't do anything because you cannot change anything; 3. You're going to write a petition to the school director
- Do you think that in your life there will be problems, except the health problems, that you're not going to be able to solve? (yes or no question)
- Do you have confidence in yourself? ( yes or no question)

The first question: at the beginning of the week 15,7 % answered that they wouldn't do anything because they cannot change anything; while at the end of the week the percent was 7,3%. Additionally, at the beginning of the week, 22% argued they would write a petition while at the end of the week the percent increased to 33,5%. Regarding the second and third questions mentioned above that tried to observe if the kids feel they can solve everything that stays in their power and if they have confidence in themselves, there is no significant difference.

## **3. Solidarity**, measured through the following questions:

- How important it is for you to show solidarity towards people that live worse than you?
- How important it is for you to think of the others like you were thinking for you. ?

There were not any noticeable differences to these questions, so our attempt to catch this aspect failed probably because the question faced the social desirability phenomenon.

## **4. Openness to cooperation**, measured through the following questions:

- When you have an opinion and the others disagree: 1. You do all you can to impose your point of view on your team members; 2. You're willing to listen others' point of view; 3. You're not accepting any other point of view?
- Let's suppose that together with other three colleagues you're going to clean a river full of trash. Right before you go one of you're colleagues tells you that he is not able to come and you still have to take out a lot of trash from the river. What are you going to do in this

situation: 1. I'll take out the trash myself; 2. I am not going to go since we are not going to finish in time; 3. We share the part of the colleague that couldn't come.

- Do you think that teamwork is more efficient than individual work? – (Y/ N/ Don't know)

Regarding the degree of tolerance for other points of view in the two moments of time there is a percentage difference of more than 7%. 74,9% of the respondents are willing to listen other opinions as compared to 81,7% at the end of the week. The percentage of those who do not accept other points of view decreases from 8,4% to 4,2%. For the second question mentioned above there are not any noticeable differences; a possible explanation would be a measurement error. Concerning the third question, there is a small percentage difference: at the beginning of the program, 78,5% of the respondents consider that teamwork is more efficient; at the end of the program the percentage increased to 85%.

The study also revealed that the increase in interpersonal trust prompts higher levels of cooperation.

### **Conclusions and openings for further research**

The results confirm our main hypothesis: *the kids that came in the program, at the end of the week have a higher level of social capital than at the beginning of the week*. Although at a first glance it seems that the percentages are low for the empowerment, solidarity and cooperation taken separately, the significant increase of the interpersonal trust (23% increase) at the end of the week must be underlined, as well as its correlation to the other three components. Once again, interpersonal trust appears to be the most important component of the social capital that contributes to the development of other values and abilities that have as final result cooperation.

Further research attempts to integrate quantitative and qualitative instruments. The idea is to have in the research, besides questionnaires, structured interviews with teachers of 100 kids who came to VIATA program and discuss with them about the children's behavior (if they noticed any difference, if they have better results in school etc). Besides teachers, 100 parents will be questioned about their children's behavior, one month after the program is over.

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