



DANUBE-NETWORKERS IN THE TIME OF CORONA

New Experiences on Individual and Organizational Level
and Online Cooperation

Edited by Carmen Stadelhofer and Olivera Stošić Rakić, ILEU e.V.

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Institute for Virtual and Face-to-face Learning in the Field of Adult Education
at Ulm University - ILEU e.V. and DANUBE-NETWORKERS Network

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The logo for Danube Networkers features the words "danube" and "networkers" in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. A blue line, resembling a map outline of the Danube river basin, is drawn across the text, starting under "danube" and ending under "networkers".

Imprint

Published by Carmen Stadelhofer, Olivera Stošić Rakić,
Institute for Virtual and Face-to-face Learning in the Field of Adult Education at Ulm University
(ILEU e.V.), Schweinmarkt 6, 89073 Ulm www.ileu.net info@ileu.net
Book concept: Olivera Stošić Rakić, Carmen Stadelhofer, Viktoria Kurnosenko
Graphic design and comprehensive edit: Olivera Stošić Rakić
Layout: Michael Goefsky and Olivera Stošić Rakić
Printed by Digitaldruck Leibi.de, Neu-Ulm, 2021

Translations:

-from mother tongue to English: Ana Zlibut, Olivera Stošić Rakić, Emiliya Velikova, Gabriela Körting
-translation from English into German: Jasmin Alkuwaiti, Carmen Stadelhofer
Proofreading: Gabriela Körting (English version), Dorothee Durka (German version)

All photographs were made within the Danube-Networkers activities and ILEU e.V. projects.
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We, the Danube-Workers

The educational network Danube-Workers is an informal network of more than 100 organisations working in the Danube Region in the areas of education, culture, social affairs and ecology as well as universities and schools. The aim of our work is to bring together people from all Danube countries and beyond and to foster mutual understanding through meetings and common projects.

The network was initiated in 2008 during the Danube Festival in Ulm by a small group of German educators and senior learners. Our intention was to get to know our Danube neighbours, especially those from the middle and the East side of this river, which is 2857 km long and connects 10 countries. The coordinator of the projects and the office of the Danube-Workers was formerly ZAWiW, Ulm University, under the direction of Carmen Stadelhofer. After her retirement in 2012, these responsibilities went to the non-profit Institute for Virtual and Face-to-face Learning in the Field of Adult Education at Ulm University (ILEU e.V.) that she continues to manage. The international association Danube-Workers for Europe (DANET) was founded in 2014. Our methods are outreaching methods using diverse approaches suitable for the various target groups. Over the years we have successfully conducted many international projects with the support of European and local funding, some of them were awarded prizes by the European Commission. Many organizations are cooperating in joint projects of European participatory lifelong learning and social engagement, exchange takes place through Internet based communication and project meetings. To this day, more than 10.000 persons took part in the projects, campaigns and activities.

www.ileu.net | www.danube-workers.eu | www.tastes-of-danube.eu

Introduction

The publication in front of you is the result of several months of joint work. It wants to show, how deeply the COVID-19 virus changed the life and work of people of all ages in the spring of 2020. On the one hand, the publication provides insight into how ILEU, as the office of the informal network Danube-Workers had reacted immediately to the pandemic, declaring that the necessary physical distancing does not need to mean social distancing, and how it can be combated by creating new online communication forms fostering cooperation and togetherness. On the other hand, selected texts and photos that arrived following a public call demonstrate, how individuals tried to overcome this big challenge in their personal environment. This book provides just a small insight into how the people in the Danube countries handled the situation and invites everybody to reflect upon where we are one year later, in the spring of 2021, how we handle the situation in the ongoing Corona time and how adult education of the Danube-Workers had changed from face-to-face to virtual learning with added value for the individuals and the organisations.

In the first part of the book: “Examples of Danube-Workers’ Project Activities and their Continuing Development during the Time of COVID-19”

1. we briefly demonstrate on the international cultural project CODANEC the Danube-Workers overall participatory approach of connecting people of all ages
2. we present methods applied for overcoming the challenges imposed by Covid-19 in March 2020.

3. we show on selected examples how video conferencing and other social tools combined with interactive and participatory approaches has helped us:

- to continue the ongoing work in the projects (CODANEC-digital exhibition, DENTA-onlinecooperation)
- to create new virtual approaches fostering the feeling of community: to meet friends and to get new friends (Come Together Sessions, lectures, working groups, conversation courses, International digital advent calendar)
- to foster exchange between experts, contributors, stakeholders and learners (online conference Sharing Beyond Borders in July 2020)
- to teach disseminators and learners on organisational and citizens' level using Zoom for cooperation locally and globally
- to use the new experience and know-how in the development of an interactive German online platform VIVES intended to bring together older (and younger) people by sharing knowledge, discovering common interests and learning by doing.

In the second part of the book: "Living in the Time of Corona – My personal Experience" you will find a collection of texts, photos and drawings, which express reactions and feelings of people of different ages and life situations. It is a result of a public call that ILEU made in the spring of 2020.

The idea of the necessity of gathering information about the experiences and coping of citizens in such an unexpected extreme situation arose among the network's associates immediately after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The idea was soon transformed into a project of collecting texts, photographs, and drawings about the personal experiences of European fellow citizens during the Corona pandemic.

From March 2020 up to now we made a lot of new experiences, which gave rise to new ways of co-creation and co-design through new media tools and videoconferencing with citizens of all ages as experts and evaluators. The use of new online tools opens new ways of attracting citizens and makes the engagement meaningful, locally and globally. It allows us to stay in close contact with our partners and to learn about citizen's needs, problems and hopes.

Especially important is the synergistic action amongst projects. It expands the participation in the program, increases the number of network members and strengthens international cooperation - e.g., digital content created by many fellow citizens in the Danube Region within the CODANEC project: „Connecting Danube Neighbours by Culture- Share Your Personal Cultural Treasure“, is regularly presented in online sessions „Come Together“, where it enriches the program.

The methods implemented at the international level are transferred to the local level by the organizers and the participants.

The implementation of these joint online activities and the common challenges caused by Covid-19 have brought together citizens of Europe who live physically far from one another. It also helped to establish an intergenerational dialogue amongst the participants, irrespective of their age. All this is reflected in the texts and images in this publication.

Carmen Stadelhofer, Viktoria Kurnosenko and Olivera Stošić Rakić, ILEU-Team

Acknowledgments

Numerous persons with different functions from many Danube countries were involved in the production of this book, and many more in the testing of new online methods in international general adult education. It is not possible to mention all contributors individually here. Our sincere thanks go to all of them.

Our special thanks go to the project coordinators from Romania and Bulgaria, Ana Zlibut, Vice President of the Writers' League in Timișoara, Romania and Prof. Velikova, University of Ruse, Bulgaria, without whose tireless efforts in coordinating and implementing the projects and individual events these innovative ways of cooperation between many organizations and individuals from the Danube countries would not have been possible. We also thank them for coordinating the submissions of the individual texts, drawings and photographs to the collection within the project „Living in the Time of Corona“. The idea for the text-drawings-photo collection came from by Dr Sevda Tsvetanova, Ruse and Tomislav Milunov, Vršac, Serbia and was implemented by the Danube-Networkers and ILEU team. Thanks to all of them!

We would like to thank the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, the Baden-Württemberg Foundation and the City of Ulm for their trust and financial support of our projects.

We would also like to thank all translators, the teacher Anne Käßbohrer from Ulm, who coordinated a collection of drawings by her students on the theme of „Living in the Times of Corona“, and especially Michael Goefsky for the graphic design of the English and the German versions of the „Corona Book“.

The greatest thanks go to Olivera Stošić-Rakić, voluntary project worker at ILEU, who with great creative impetus, knowledge of the subject and boundless patience made the publication of this book possible and to Viktoria Kurnosenko, deputy managing director of ILEU, who cooperated with great competence on the concept and the implementation of the online project. Their profound organisation and communication competences and tireless engagement have decisively contributed to the success of the new formats in the times of Corona.

We are very saddened that during the preparation of this book our kind and most competent colleague Sevda Tsvetanova, who always contributed to the projects in her wise and reflected way, died from the COVID-19 disease. We will miss her creative ideas and reliable cooperation. We extend our sincere condolences to her family. We, the Danube-Workers, will never forget her.

Carmen Stadelhofer
Chair of the ILEU e.V./DANET e.V.
Coordinator in charge of the education network Danube-Workers

Part 1:

Examples of Danube-Networkers' Project Activities and their Continuing Development during the Time of COVID-19

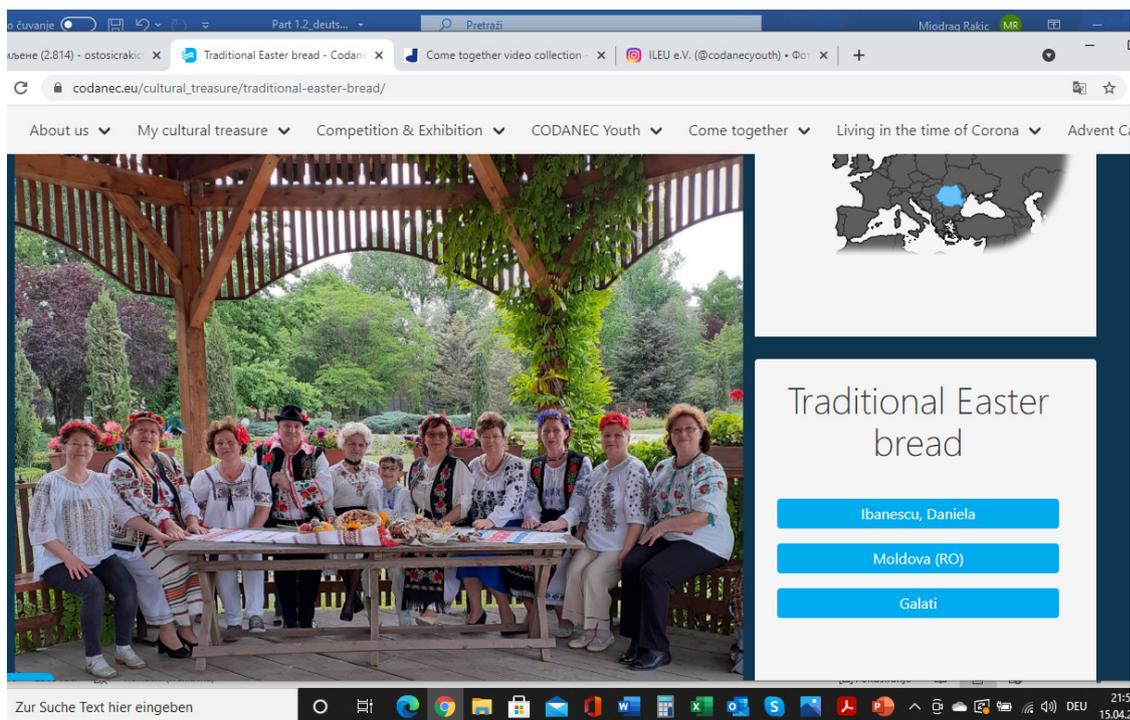
Preserving cultural heritage in art and culture is not just a matter for museums. Everyday culture has many facets that have to do with the people who live them.

1. Project “Share Your Personal Cultural Treasure- Connecting Danube Neighbours by Culture“ (CODANEC)

In October 2019 ILEU e.V. started the project “Share Your Personal Cultural Treasure - Connecting Danube Neighbours by Culture“ (CODANEC), supported by the State Ministry Baden- Württemberg, Germany.

The aim of the CODANEC project is to bring attention to the knowledge and skills of older people from the Danube countries who contribute to the preservation of material and immaterial cultural assets. At the same time, the project wants to highlight the contribution of the younger generation, who bring in own ideas on the subject of cultural assets. Through intergenerational cooperation and the exchanges between the groups from different Danube countries, the encounter with traditions, customs and values has been shaped in a new way. The project was scheduled for two years and started in October 2019 with a call for participation. Learners of all ages were invited to participate. Regional and national coordination has been done by members of the education Network Danube-Networkers and other organizations.

Up to April 2021, when this text was written, the project website www.codanec.eu has been demonstrating the involvement of people of all ages from 8 Danube countries and from 4 other European countries. Presented are 144 contributions describing “personal cultural treasures” from areas such as culture, nature, everyday life. Invited to visit the website are people of all ages. There they find all contributions presented in English and in the original language, with many texts also translated into other languages of the Danube Region. The texts and photos make aware how our (everyday-life) culture can be expressed and what the persons presenting them consider important to share with other people home and abroad. The examples show, that it can be very different things and highlight similarities and differences between the Danube neighbours.



CODANEC Project “Share Your Personal Cultural Treasure- Connecting Danube Neighbours by Culture“: https://codanec.eu/cultural_treasure/

To make the project more attractive, we invited all interested persons, individuals and groups, to participate in 3 different competitions in the areas texts, photos and videos. Use of the new media should aid visualisation and at the same time strengthen media literacy. The intention was to present the best contributions to the competitions in the frame of the Danube-Networkers conference and meeting in July 2020, which was to take place during the International Danube Festival Ulm/Neu-Ulm. As both the conference and the meeting could not take place because of the COVID 19 –epidemy, the results were presented on the project website and an exhibition of the best photos chosen by a jury took place in a virtual way (see <http://codanec.eu/codanec/about-codanec/>) as well as live in the House of Encounters in Ulm (German: Haus der Begegnung).



CODANEC Exhibition, June 25 – July 15 2020, House of Encounters in Ulm, Germany
Digital edition of the exhibition: <https://codanec.eu/photo-exhibition/>

In spring 2021, ILEU started a new activity within the frame of the CODANEC project about “personal intangible cultural treasures” dedicated to young people and their ideas. The concept for a CODANEC youth competition was prepared by an internationally composed youth group from 5 countries, who used social media such as Facebook and Instagram for the call and the incoming contributions. The outcomes of this competition will be presented in June 2021 on the CODANEC website.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/codanecyouth/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/codanecyouth/>

2. Project “Danube Neighbours Connect by Culture (DANECT)”

In February 2020 all planned actions in the project CODANEC had been blocked by the COVID-19 epidemic. “Social distancing” was the common motto. But ILEU and the Danube partners did not accept it because in their mind the needed physical distancing did not need to mean “social distancing”. In times of crisis like the current pandemic, solidarity and a feeling of community are needed more than ever. And so in February 2020 ILEU started online sessions per Zoom “Come Together in Times of Corona by Culture (DANECT)” confirmed by a pilot project from March to November 2020 “Danube Neighbours Connect by Culture (DANECT)” supported by the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung. Due to its success, the project was prolonged in January 2021 for one further year. In this project, various pedagogical methods involving new social media for fostering lifelong learning, social participation and intergenerational dialogue had been experimented with and successfully tested.

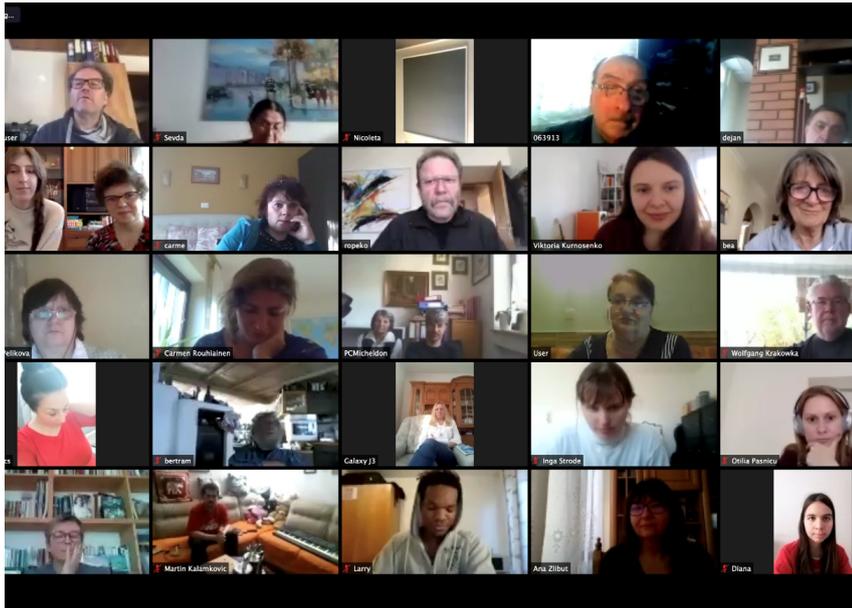
2.1. Online Sessions “Come Together in Times of Corona by Culture”

At the end of February 2020 weekly Sunday online meetings per Zoom were set up called “Come together! Connecting People in Times of Corona by Culture”. Each time, 50-70 members of the network DANUBE-NETWORKERS from 7-9 countries and many guests from all over Europe take part in these video conferences for 90 minutes to create a living European community. Under the motto “from friends for friends”, volunteers from various countries design a colourful program. From music, singing, dance, presentations of different cultural traditions to breathing relaxation exercises, there is something for everyone.

At the beginning it was really difficult to convince people, especially older ones, to participate in the Zoom sessions, as they were not used to using online platforms. But an informal group of Zoom helpers in each country organised by the partner organisations achieved good results and many individuals who never used social media tools before were attracted by the contents of the sessions and learned to handle it.

Another big challenge was the communication language. Selected was English, but also English is for a lot of people a real barrier. That is why since July 2020, simultaneous translation is provided by volunteer translators via Zoom from English to Bulgarian, Romanian and since September 2020 also to German. This way, also people, who were not interested before in participating due to their lack of language skills, could get actively involved.

The coordination of the sessions is the responsibility of ILEU, in close cooperation with the partners of the University of Ruse, Bulgaria, under the leadership of Emilia Velikova and Sevda Tsvetanova (†), the Association “Writers League” in Timisoara, Romania led by League’s vice-president, Ana Zlibut and Olivera Stošić Rakić, freelance cultural manager in charge of coordinating partners in Serbia.



Danube-Networkers invite: Come Together Connecting Cultures! 05.04.2020

2.2. Online Lectures for International Audiences

Since autumn 2020, several online lectures were organized in English, with the option of translation into several other languages. For example, a lecture by Prof. Dr. Heidrun Mollenkopf, vice-president of the AGE-Platform Europe and board member of BAGSO, Germany on “Discrimination of older people and their rights”. Furthermore, Prof. Rumiana Stoilova, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Science spoke and then discussed with the audience the topic: „Wellbeing, Life Satisfaction and Happiness among older people in the countries of the Danube Region“.

2.3. Initiation of Two International Online Working Groups

Within the project DANECT, meeting regularly are two online working groups dedicated to the topics of history and civilizational contribution of women: „Powerful women: women’s history along the Danube and Europe“ and a group on topics that the Danube-Networkers continuously deal with: „Sharing Traditions and Cultural Treasures- Get Together“.

2.4. Internationally Composed Online Language Conversation Groups

In autumn 2020, online language conversation groups in English and French started in the frame of the project. They address seniors who would like to refresh their foreign language skills. The groups are led by professional volunteers who are native speakers and meet every two weeks. Their aim is to activate the learners’ basic language skills through exchange with others and to enable them to make conversations about everyday topics. 8-12 people from four countries take part in each of these groups. There are meanwhile also guided language conversation groups in Italian and German.

2.5. Online Advent Calendar

Christmas time is a special time, a time of celebration with many old traditions and customs, which is usually spent with family and friends. Due to the COVID-19 crises it was not possible in 2020 for many to meet. That is why the Danube-Networkers prepared something special – a digital advent calendar composed of 37 contributions from friends from 21 different European countries. A click on the number of the day from the 1st of December to 25th, had opened a unique Christmas-themed contribution in form of song, a poem or a warm greeting to brighten the day. There are many Christmas contributions and traditions to discover under the motto “United in Diversity”.



<https://codanec.eu/danube-networkers-advent-calendar/>

3. Online Experience Exchange Programs and Educational-Information Programs on International Level for Persons in Charge and Educators

3.1. Online conference: “Sharing Beyond Borders – New Ways for Care, Communication and Cooperation of Older People along the Danube and in Europe in Times of COVID-19”

In spring 2020 it was evident that the Danube-Workers conference and partner meeting planned for July 2020 will not take place due to restrictions in response to COVID-19. Experience of working with digital media and sharing their experience with others in a wide European context enabled the Danube-Workers under the leadership of ILEU e.V. to offer relatively quickly and easily the annual conference of the network in its full scope online. The meeting of network members and numerous guests and experts took place in the form of a two-day virtual conference on 10 and 11 July 2020 entitled “Sharing Beyond Borders - New Ways of Care, Communication and Cooperation of Older People along the Danube and in Europe in Times of COVID-19”. The conference was attended by approx. 130 persons in key positions in NGO’s, educators and stakeholders from 21 countries. In dynamic interactive discussions, participants received new information and materials for further work on relevant topics and areas of knowledge and praxis. They also got direct experience of videoconferencing concerning work in large and small groups, as well as simultaneous translations into multiple languages in parallel.

More about the conference: <http://conference2020.codanec.eu/>



Virtual conference: „Sharing Beyond Borders- New Ways of Care, Communication and Cooperation of Older People along the Danube and in Europe in Times of COVID-19”
July 10 – 11 2020

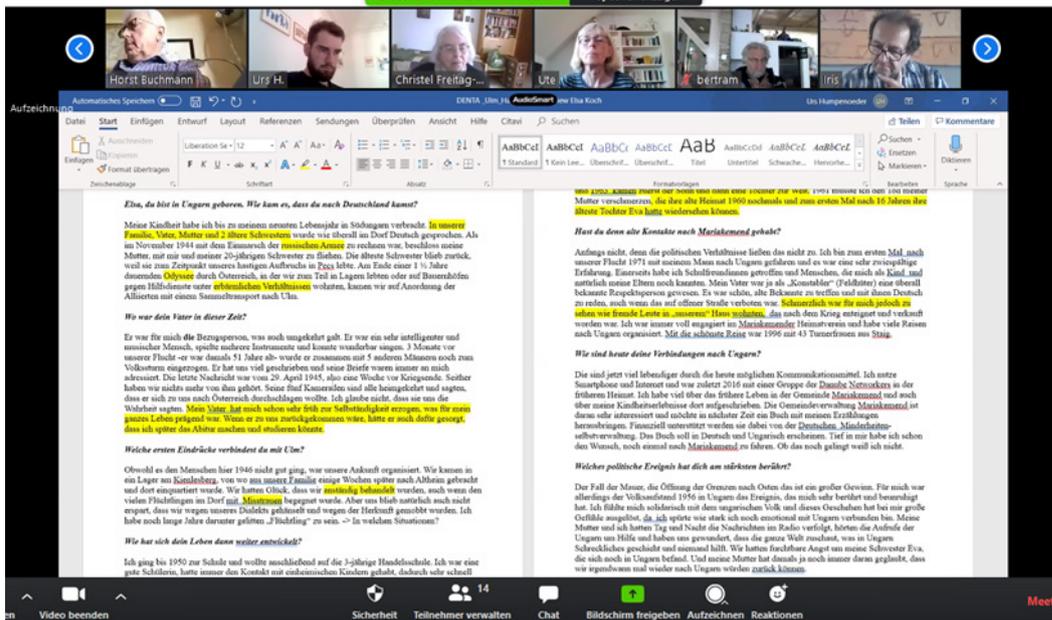
3.2. Project-related Online Meetings

Project managers of international projects meet regularly in face-to-face international meetings, older learners meet in international meetings as well as in local groups. As since March 2020 face-to-face meetings were no longer possible, the ILEU team members have been working closely with partners from all the Danube countries to create online meetings and activities, both on local and international level using videoconferencing and other digital tools.

A good example of how the challenging barrier was removed is the Ulm working group Danube-Networkers in the frame of the Erasmus+ project “Danube Networkers for Europe” (DENTA). In the DENTA project, learners in 8 groups from 6 different countries conduct interviews to find out how people in the third age manage their daily life and present the results of the interviews to the other groups in the project. In an experimental trial, the Ulm group has learned in March 2020 how to handle the Zoom platform and continued to meet each Thursday at 17.00 to work together online. They worked together on texts, presented them, discussed and ameliorated them. They were assisted by a journalist and have learned to appreciate this form of cooperation more and more.



DENTA-Project: Meeting of the persons in charge



Online Training for creative writing within the project work of the Ulm Group of Danube-Networkers

On the international level, ILEU organised regular meetings of the project managers and also meetings between the learners. This brought the desired learning effect in terms of the content, the methods including the digital tools used, and also increased their motivation to learn.

3.3. Qualification Seminars

During the last year ILEU offered on local, national and international level several qualification courses for users of Zoom and in-depth courses for technical managers and moderators of Zoom sessions. The participants profited from this experience and could promote the application of Zoom for online communication and learning in their own organisations.

4. The German Online Platform for Seniors: ViVES@BW

The successes of the projects CODANEC and DANECT described above brought the Office for Civil Society and Citizen Participation of the State of Baden-Württemberg (Stabstelle für Zivilgesellschaft und Bürgerbeteiligung des Landes Baden-Württemberg) to the idea to promote such learning for older people in Baden-Württemberg. This had led to the project ViVES@BW “Virtuell verbunden - Senioren und Seniorinnen in Baden-Württemberg” (Virtually connected - Seniors in Baden-Württemberg), coordinated by ILEU e.V. After the successful pilot phase May to December 2020, the project has been extended until the end of 2022.

Exchange ideas with others, keep informed and try out new things in the community- without „distance“ and from your home! The VIVES@BW project makes it possible. The project aims to promote the exchange of views between older (and younger) adults on topics of their interest via a video platform on the Internet. There is something for every taste and interest: you can listen to lectures, exchange ideas about travel, literature, art, a scientific or technical question and much more. The speakers are often the seniors themselves who talk about their interests and experiences, past and future. In addition, numerous group activities are offered such as „Singing together from the living room“, film and literature reviews, „Cooking together“ and language conversation groups on various topics. All people, who have a particular topic of interest, are welcome to offer a lecture or even to start a working group.

The strong cooperation between the activities of DANET and VIVES@BW is of big benefit for both projects and for all involved citizens and foster digital and language practice.

What Are the Results of Danube-Workers Experiences in Times of COVID-19?

In the large number of responses that we have received during the many months of the online programs, associates and network participants claim that this way of collaboration helps people overcome isolation and to share knowledge, interests and skills with others. Important to them is the feeling of unity that this type of cooperation provides and of course also the opportunity to meet friends from other countries, whom they could not meet personally. Many positive reactions arrived directly in the Chat during the „Come Together“ program and there is a large number of e-mails that the participants have sent to ILEU, expressing the need to actively continue with such programs.

In the current COVID-19 restrictions, live cultural activities have been reduced to a minimum or abolished worldwide. However, cultural events such as those organized by Danube-Workers help to establish direct communication between the participants and provide a sense of real presence and closeness, which is an important aspect of vital social life and a necessary element for the enjoyment and sharing of cultural content.

COVID-19 and its effects on society, education and economy are terrible, however, in the sector of lifelong learning and education for seniors on local and international level it brought some progress. People miss contacts and feel more and more lonesome and the motto “to meet friends and to get new friends” is a good label to interest them to take part in online activities, especially in the Sessions “Come Together in Times of Corona by Culture.” They learned to use digital tools because they are interested in the topic of culture. They are motivated by the prospect of meeting others online and sharing common values with them. A strong side effect of these activities is the fact that in exchanging their “personal cultural treasures” via the new media, the participants discover what is common and what is different between the cultures and mirrored in the history and present of the cultural treasures of the other, they discover the history and the presence of intangible culture in the own country. Their European awareness is strengthened and they get to feel what the European slogan “United in Diversity!” actually means.

Carmen Stadelhofer

Impressions of the Participants of the Online Events

Attending the video conferences on Sunday during the pandemic had a positive impact on me. I appreciated them very much, I felt honored to be there. As a social being, one suffered a lot during the isolation. So, like to the many other people, the video communication between so many people brought me, beyond curiosity, delight and satisfaction. I consider it a means to open ourselves to each other: different people, different countries, but united by European ideals. It was especially nice to meet so many people who greet each other with friendly warmth and their cultural contribution specific to their countries. I appreciate the sessions as a beginning of creating a horizon of cultural knowledge among Europeans. This way, they will be able to gradually learn to cherish each other, their values increasing.

Lucia Elena Popa, Timișoara, România

I participated in the course „Parlons un peu le francais“, organized on Mondays. I enjoyed the encounters with the French language and its speakers. I learned many interesting things about the sights, the culinary and artistic specialties. In addition, I made new friends and improved my knowledge of French.

I recommend participating in these European language courses, as they contribute to the socialization of people and the improvement of knowledge of the language, customs and way of life of the peoples living in the European space.

The „Come together“ meetings are very welcome on Sunday evenings. We socialize, we find out interesting things about the countries where our friends live in. We learn about the cultural and artistic habits, the social projects, the achievements of the participants. We relax through music and poetry. We enrich our lives.

I urge other friends to attend these meetings.

Any good thing is useful if as many people as possible know about it.

Ana Ghiaur, Timișoara, România

I am happy to be part of this team with kind people and an overflowing energy. I had the opportunity to meet people from whom I could learn, even though online. The activities carried out were attractive.

I hope to maintain close collaboration also in the future.

Nicoleta Gherghina, Timișoara, România



Danube-Networkers invite: Come Together Connecting Cultures! 29.11.2020



Danube-Networkers invite: Come Together Connecting Cultures! 31.01.2021

Part 2:
LIVING IN THE TIME OF CORONA:
MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Collection of texts, photographs and drawings

Selection from the online Collection:
<https://codanec.eu/corona-collection/>

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

Context and Aims

This collection is a selection of texts, photographs and drawings by members of the DANUBENETWORKERS network and also by many other fellow citizens from the Danube countries. The idea for this collection arose together with the appearance of the COVID-19.

All contributions were made in response to an open call issued in spring 2020 during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic within the project: “CODANEC: Connecting Danube Neighbours by Culture- Share your Personal Cultural Treasure”. Therefore, the contributions refer exclusively to the experiences from the first wave of the pandemic. The complete collection with all received contributions can be found at: <https://codanec.eu/corona-collection/> where each text is published in the original and English language.

In addition to the previously mentioned online activities of “Come Together in Times of Corona”, which aim to bring people out of their isolation during the times of the pandemic and give them a chance for social participation by bridging physical distance via videoconferencing, it was also important to find out how people in partner organizations of the network deal with the pandemic as individuals. How do they react to the lockdown and - very importantly - how global threats and restrictive measures affect the very private sphere of individuals. Numerous suggestions have been received on how to collect such experiences. Young volunteers from Serbia (Vršac) proposed to document their experiences with written testimonies and photographs. Colleague Sevda Tsvetanova from Bulgaria (Ruse) suggested collecting experiences of different people across Europe in one publication.

This was followed by several online meetings of the core project-team: Carmen Stadelhofer (Germany), Viktoria Kurnosenko (Germany), Sevda Tsvetanova (Bulgaria), Emilia Velikova (Bulgaria), Ana Zlibut (Romania) and Olivera Stosic Rakic (Serbia/Germany) with discussions about how to collect, present and preserve the gathered information.

The aim was to collect as many nuances of “life in the time of the Corona“ as possible, especially among older people as the group most endangered by the pandemic, but also among individuals from the middle, young and the youngest generations. While respecting the fact that the pandemic was accompanied by a large number of casualties and losses, this collection was intended to highlight the positive experiences and creative ways in dealing with the situation. Those can serve as an encouragement to individuals who may not have found yet their own model for overcoming the problems caused by the coronavirus.

The Method and Process of Making the Collection

A public call was released encouraging the citizens to submit their reflections, short stories, poems, notes, anecdotes, photographs, caricatures and drawings about their personal experiences regarding COVID-19. The following topics were suggested as incentives:

- How I/we helped others (working as a volunteer; helping neighbours)
- How I'd overcome specific difficulties and how I'd dealt with emotions during the pandemic
- How Corona has changed the relationships in my family and affected friendships
- What are the lessons that Corona “taught” me (regarding small things, nature, the passage of time, changes in the way of thinking)
- What I have discovered about my creativity (a new hobby, new methods of work / learning...)
- How the new media had helped me to continue learning and to overcome the lack of social contact
- How I'd managed to practice my religion in times of Corona

By the end of June 2020, 96 contributions of various genres from 5 countries arrived. Those countries were Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Germany and Hungary. The number of contributions received from the individual countries varied. All age groups were present - seniors, people in professions, students and pupils. An entire school class of nowadays 6th grade pupils from Geislingen in Germany participated by drawing their experiences and feelings about the first wave of the Pandemic.

The most impressive works were presented at the online conference „Sharing Beyond Borders“ 10/11. 7.2020.

The Content of the Selected Contributions

Most of the contributions deal with thoughts about the general surprising and completely new situation, which the authors found themselves in, as well as the „lessons“ that people as individuals, but also as humanity as a whole, received through this experience.

All authors wrote, drew or photographed from their own personal perspective and contextualized that experience in relation to their family or the close environment, often reflecting the global situation. Noticeable is the intention of many to show how they found their personal balance. This was mainly achieved through cooperation and actions of solidarity or using „free time“ that arrived with the Corona for own development, both for the increasing of knowledge and for spiritual growth. Many have discovered or confirmed the importance of the new media for the removal of social distance, and for contributing to work and learning processes. There are also some contributions, whose authors provide their community or individuals with different types of psychological or social support. Some discovered new hobbies, others returned to nature. There are also texts that critically or ironically look at the situation of „reduced freedoms“, i.e., the effects of state measures applied during the pandemic. Also helpful for overcoming of the difficult times were poetry, handicrafts and the creation of decorative objects.

Selection Criteria

Texts and visual contributions were chosen for their representativeness of the presented facts and the interestingness of the author's expression. At the same time, care was taken that from each country, from which authors responded to the open call, some contributions were included in the book. Attention was also paid to the genre diversity of contributions as well as the representation of all age groups of authors. The contributions are grouped thematically and divided into seven chapters with titles reflecting the main topic and the basic atmosphere of the texts and the visual contributions in the given chapter.

The action of collecting and printing these contributions during the time of the Corona crisis had taken place with the desire to jointly contribute to greater solidarity in Europe and in the World!

Thanks to all participants of the project "Living in the Time of Corona", to all DANUBE-NETWORKERS and especially to: Carmen Stadelhofer, Viktoria Kurnosenko, Sevda Tsvetanova, Ana Zlibut and Emilia Velikova.

Olivera Stošić Rakić

Ulm, April 2021



Miriam Vasilită, Timisoara, Rumänien -> *Distance in the Pandemic*, a drawing

...Reflections, Fears, Hopes

Fear or Calmness

Everyone is afraid of death. I was shocked by the news, that there is a virus in South Korea that can kill a person. But my doubts and fears were not great. At first, I was not worried about this virus, because scientific research has found that children handle the disease more easily, that passes like influenza. The tragic part for me was that I would not be able to visit places around Bulgaria with my parents, like every year. My daily life was the same, I sat in front of my computer, I studied or played online games.

Then I got panic, because I hadn't been out of the house for weeks. The fear affected my behaviour. I was worried about my parents, who kept going to work. Every day I waited anxiously to see them home and well.

Fear has also gripped our city. I witnessed it, when I went to a nearby store and there I saw people starting to buy a lot of food and toilet paper. The city was deserted and gloomy. There were no people on the streets. Fear gripped my thoughts and was amplified by the breaking news. Every day – new death numbers. The panic took a turn for the worse, when I had to wear a mask. We looked for masks in several pharmacies. We finally found one for 10 leva, but were willing to pay this to protect ourselves from the mortal disease. My grandmother – who is 70 years old – could shop in the store and the pharmacy from 8am to 10am, but she was sick and so she was waiting for my parents to do her shopping after work. There were times, when I wanted to go back to school and see my classmates. I talked to them online every day, but it wasn't the same.

Over the time, things calmed down. Before long, restaurants, discos and restaurants opened and I am now more relaxed, because they also cancelled the travel declarations when going to other locations. I'm happy that my parents and I will be able to travel again. Calmness has won over the fear.

Reflections

To plant a tree, to give birth to a child and to build a house – what beautiful milestones in life for a Romanian. I managed to fulfil them, not in this order, but with great joy. And when the pandemic came, it turned my thoughts upside down and made me believe that maybe I will not enjoy what I have achieved in life. What an irony of fate for everything to crumble when I finally led a quiet life. But I was ambitious to believe that everything will be fine, that I will be able to fulfil the rest of the wishes that I have for my life. And so, little by little, I managed to create a world of my own, in which nothing bad could happen, in which my daughter and I were protected, in which time flowed pleasantly, with long games of rummy, with reading interesting books, with the discovery that I can cook (me, the one who never liked to cook).

How important it is to surround yourself with people dear to you, whom you can rely on and whom you can trust! I talked on the phone with such people and time passed more easily, more pleasantly. But most importantly, I thanked God that my mother and sister live next door to me, in a neighbouring house, and so I always knew that all the precious people in my life were healthy and close, both mentally and physically, to me.

On the night of the Resurrection, when all Romanians could not attend the church service due to restrictions caused by this corona virus, a special moment was when at the windows of houses in the neighbourhood, voices were heard at midnight, the neighbours singing troparion of the Resurrection and one could see the glowing light of candles held in the hands of the people. It was a very emotional moment for me!

The pandemic has come and it will pass like all things pass, but it would be good if it left people better, smarter and more supportive!

We Are Only Humans After All!

I am a teacher. My job is to explore, to define, to translate into other people's language. I love it. I love reading and discovering new points of view, open new pages, everything that leads us to something new. COVID 19 is something new but it is really strange and frightening. In the very beginning of this period, I was really shocked. I was ready to write my last will, tell my children how much I love them and to get ready to go up to heaven.

I have never thought that the World could stop spinning. It did! It happened! I was amazed and scared, a great challenge was in front of me. I had to teach my children, my students and my whole family something that I didn't know myself. We had to learn to live with it, to live together online, to study, to work, while being separated in our homes with no physical contacts. We did it together!

If I will be honest, the students helped us a lot. They are the people of 21st century! Adults' experience and vibrant children's spirit in a great team can cope with it. Our team got ready to start the new life in no more than 48 hours. I am proud of my children, all of them. Today, my students can be in touch with each other everywhere. We can discuss, argue and collaborate 24 hours a day in all parts of the world. My 9-year-old son can fill in so many different blanks and forms, my 13-year-old daughter can start online meetings, discussions, use different online platforms and so on. And I am proud of them!

We have discovered that we are flexible, reliable and sensitive. We rediscovered the importance of the very meaning of the physical contact and humanity. I knew that but I remembered the power of a person's liberty and relationship. The nature taught us that we can do anything if we work together. I think that it is something that we have forgotten.

I think that all of us had learned the most important lesson in our lives. We are only humans after all! We must be careful, take care of our future and not forget that we are all in the same team! We are only humans after all!

The Season Called Corona

It is May, the lindens are blossoming, but we are living with the Coronavirus. Before the state of emergency was introduced, many people might have thought: „The corona won't come to Serbia.“ However, unfortunately, the virus knows no borders and it arrived just when the nice weather had started and when I started thinking about new shoes and a handbag. They are quite necessary for me (is there a woman who doesn't feel the same?!). However, working from home has changed habits, as well as needs.

The emotions that began to overwhelm me are impossible to describe and measure. Has anyone ever measured the amount of emotions at any point?

While state of emergency was the only topic of conversation, I wondered what a quarantine state would be like (believe me, that's how women usually feel while on maternity leave; the truth is that the reason for staying at home in these circumstances makes our mood completely different). The first thing that occurred to me was Star Wars, a favourite childhood series, when we imagined living on another planet or even on a spaceship only with people we like. Very similar to the current situation, it could be said, but in a slightly different form – we are fighting against some invisible force that ranks us all equally, regardless of gender, nationality, religion, part of the world we live in.

The state of emergency, unknown to me until then, was introduced in mid-March. After a fortnight, I went shopping for the first time. Children will finally be able to eat (a whole) orange. Everything is calculated so that the number of fruits can be divided by the number of days and members of the household and everyone gets the necessary vitamins. Well, I am not really good at math, but I guess I'll manage, hopefully.

After the shopping, time is spent in the kitchen and then, in the afternoon, since I don't have working hours (fortunately or unfortunately), I start working and work until the wee hours of the night. And when will I read all these books I planned to read, when will I pursue a hobby?! I forgot what boredom was. Well, I don't know what to do first. I have more duties than in normal circumstances.

When I get to the phone, I talk to my friend to cool down my head a bit. She is also working from home, with a two-year child by her side. The husband is at work. When I ask her how she is coping, she replies with a smile: 'She is helping me. She has switched off my computer twice today.' Well, so what am I complaining about, then? My children don't switch off my computer. They just keep asking me to play a cartoon or explain homework that they don't understand.

The almost two-month-long state of emergency was lifted two days ago and it seems that we are a little more relaxed. However, just a little. Precautions are still recommended – wearing masks and gloves, avoiding hugs and shaking hands, as well as keeping the distance (possibly only physical). Those who can, continue working from home. Parents with small children, don't despair! There are still some advantages in doing your job without seeing your boss on a daily basis. Can it be any better?

My only concern are the shoes and a handbag. In fact, when I think about it a little more closely, I won't even need the shoes now, because the summer is already here. And so I am off to find those sandals I got at last year's September sale that haven't seen the sun yet, and take them for a little walk... around the house.

What are the Lessons the Coronavirus had “Taught” Me?

Once someone had told me that life is a labyrinth and that each of us chooses the direction we will take. This direction very often confronts us with various obstacles that we have to overcome, which put us to test or force us to make sacrifices in order to continue on our way forward. Ordeals are not accidental, they exist to give us valuable lessons, strengthen our will, help us to answer a number of important life questions and to understand that the truth is in the small, tiny things that we usually do not notice.

Hurrying through our daily routines, we do not appreciate LIFE enough – the most important and the most precious thing we have. But when something happens that threatens it, we understand.

Suddenly everything changed for me, for my family, for the people in my city, in my country, in Europe, in the world... Something so very small, not even seen with the naked eye, turned the life of the whole planet upside down – the coronavirus. It brought confusion, fear, panic ... death. To survive, to stay healthy, we had to will ourselves to stay at home.

Like most young people, I was angry because I wasn't allowed to see my friends or to go for a walk in the park. Instead of going to school we were staying home “talking” remotely to teachers and classmates, and were overwhelmed with homework and many lessons.

One day, while I was surfing the Net, I'd read the following sentence: “If it rains in your life, focus on the flowers that will bloom because of it.” At first, I didn't think about what the sentence had meant.

But on the next day I had read a story about a ruler who was met by a misfortune and what lesson he had learned from it. Then I realized that the pandemic had taught me some important lessons about life and about how I perceive it.

The most important lesson was that health is the most important thing in the life of any living creature. Like most things in our daily existence it does not have a price tag... The time, which I spent at home, was also devoted to activities that give me pleasure such as painting...

Another activity filled my time too – reading...

The time, which I spent isolated has taught me to look at and to appreciate things I have just passed by or underestimated before. The restrictions imposed by the pandemic made me more responsible about the homework chores – I helped with the housework and took more care of my room, even making some changes to make it more pleasant and cozy. Yet the most valuable to me was that I spent more time with my family – we talked, we had fun playing various family games, we laughed. Because everyone was in a hurry somewhere until now, I haven't felt the love between us so tangibly, the need for being wanted and to be useful to someone. This was the other lesson – LOVE BETWEEN PEOPLE. This is the feeling that gives you essence of happiness. It makes you feel needed, makes your life meaningful and makes you feel alive!

The third lesson that the coronavirus had “taught” me was that we should not take anything for granted. Before it appeared in my life, and not only in mine, my daily life seemed to be scheduled – at school, at home, meeting friends. Suddenly everything changed. The school went on in a way I'd never before imagined existed – remotely. At the beginning, it was quite difficult for me because I missed the contact with my classmates, the presence of the teacher. I did not like the fact that we have to study this way, but I decided that it was another challenge to overcome, and it gives me a chance to improve my grades and I think I succeeded. I became more disciplined and responsible and realized that experience strengthens the spirit and gives power to the mind.

I learned that life is a series of lessons, which must be experienced to be understood. I realized that I need to value and respect people and how transient life is. Instead of arguing and upsetting each other, we need to understand and help each other and thus set an example.

And as one ancient philosopher had said: “Only the strongest can overcome great ordeals.”

Thoughts from the Time of the Pandemic

The thirst for life is very strong in a human. One always finds resources to overcome the vicissitudes that arose, to find one's balance, to have patience and to be responsible in difficult situations. Like so many others, I have learned to find new interests and solutions to compensate for the suffering created in our lives by the treacherous coronavirus.

Beyond watching various shows broadcast online, or the news on social networks, always staying at home, I understood, first of all, how many important things in the house I had neglected so far, how superficially I looked at our wonderful garden, especially the flowers, how many books have been waiting for me for a long time to be read. Their rediscovery was somehow a compensation for the fear of illness. I lived, I did something, I did not think about the disease. I haven't reflected on the themes and topics of some of the books as I managed to do during this pandemic! Or, I ask rhetorically, when have I had so much time to listen on the phone to old friends' life stories, or even to philosophize and encourage each other? It was as if we had rediscovered new conceptions of life, we got to know each other better. It was like a wonderful visit to our inner world.

Looking back at it now, I'd discovered in the house so many special things, which I had not noticed, and I saw in them a material soul that has been always waiting for me, pulsing...

In the context of these reflections, face to face with the fear of disease, with the attitude of people, the pandemic forced me (I think not only me) to think differently about the meaning of life, to rediscover the shadowed values of existence not taken into account in the rush of the daily life and the common pressing needs. To live in relation to the time in progress. There are always things waiting, unmade, that we should listen to and look at differently than before.

It is said that only in the face of great tribulations and even in the face of death can life be truly valued. At such moments also come the regrets that, while running through life, perhaps we did not value each other enough. Books about the times of great pandemics emphasize the idea that we should behave in life so as not to leave regrets behind, that it is necessary not to forget to look at the clock from time to time to see the time we still have to live on earth, capitalizing on it well. So the time of the pandemic could also be a time of existential self-analysis of each person, of conclusions about what one did, what one should have done and what one will achieve in the conditions of hard times, like in a battlefield.

Masks

Instead of apple rings and pineapple slices, moist mouth-nose masks dry on the wire racks at 70 degrees. No, virologists have not recommended this method. However, a photo of my converted drying apparatus on Facebook brings me numerous likes. On the internet they are having a heated discussion about the correct use of everyday masks, which scientists and politicians declared to be pointless just weeks ago. That made sense insofar as there were no such masks in Germany. And what does not exist can hardly make sense, can it?

Only when mainly women sat down at the sewing machines and sewed elastic bands (which soon reached the shortage status of toilet paper) on scraps of fabric from old sofa cushions and only when the Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder, wearing a blue and white lozenged mouthguard, declared that masks were compulsory, only then did their breakthrough actually come. At the end of May even the WHO declared: Masks make sense. At least if as many people as possible wear them.

But not everyone may be satisfied with a piece of fleece made in China or a piece of fabric as virus protection. The creative lockdown is over: the politician's wife wears a matching mask to the pink Chanel costume, the lipstick underneath can only be guessed at. Jokers show vampire fangs, contemporaries with lots of hair gel strap on black neoprene pieces, nerds program the 3D printer for transparent protective shields. When we are hard to recognize with the mask on, we want to attract attention.

„Fashionable masks,“ an early-retired teacher caustically comments on Facebook, „are like brightly painted nuclear power plants.“ Excuse me? Did he join the conspiracy- Coronaries now too?

Sure. So far, we have associated masks with carnivals, doctors' surgeries and smog in Asian cities. Or Michael Jackson, the hygiene hysteric. All over now. Since Corona, we have distanced ourselves from such images and order individual masks on the Internet – with a photo of our favourite cat on it. „Cute“, says the cashier in the supermarket behind her Plexiglas window, and we smile, if only with our eyes.

The Hidden Potential of Literature and Art

Being retired, I spent the two-month period of corona restrictions indoors reading books and doing some project work online, like many other Europeans did. Just for the record, I did not go out for six weeks, only made a few trips to the balcony of our flat. It was during my self imposed seclusion that I started finding out that what was happening with the corona pandemic had long been predicted in quite a number of books, a comics and a movie. Some would say that it's really amazing that these authors were able to predict with great accuracy what was going to happen in the future. But is it really surprising or should we say it's logical?

As one commentator in a TV documentary said, there is no mystery in these predictions. Whoever is able to logically and rationally analyze the social, scientific and overall life circumstances, would also be able to make well-founded conclusions, which for some reason mankind calls predictions. Interestingly, one of these early predictions was found by some fellow citizens of mine from the city of Ruse, Bulgaria, members of the first comics club in Bulgaria. By mere chance, they came across a comics magazine titled PIF from about 41 years ago that had a story, which very accurately depicts the situation with the coronavirus today.

The story is called A Virus Accidentally Released. In this episode, the headquarters of the WHO in Geneva receive information about the outbreak of a virus that has spread all over Europe. Then Doctor Justice comes into the picture by saying that the virus was engineered in a laboratory. Other striking similarities are the way the virus is depicted today and the way they drew it then. As one of the members of the club says, it must be an irony of life that the virus covers nothing less than North Italy. And for those interested in such insightful stories, I'll just list the other works which predicted the coronavirus pandemic. These are The Simpson's animated comedy series (27 years ago), a 1981 crime-thriller novel, titled 'The Eyes of the Darkness', by Dean Koontz, who wrote about a virus called Wuhan400 (almost 40 years ago), a 2011 movie "Contagion", and a book by Sylvia Brown titled "End of Days: Predictions and Prophecies about the End of the World", published in 2008 (12 years ago). Two of the details in these books are really shocking. The year of the pandemic is 2020, and the name of the virus is Wuhan, the city in China where the virus was allegedly engineered. These are all amazing examples how literature and art can "predict" our future!



Young Volunteers, Vršac, Serbia

...Solidarity

How We Lived in the Time of Corona

I may disappoint the readers by saying that I did not experience anything overly dramatic during the 2-month period of restrictions imposed by the Corona pandemic unless we count the fact that I did not see my two sons for 2 months, that my daughter who lives in Finland cancelled her visit to Bulgaria and my younger son had to cancel his wedding which had been scheduled for the auspicious date of 10.10.2020. I was grateful that all of them were safe and sound, and none of them lost a job, which was a devastating reality for many other people.

However, life has not been so merciful to everybody. The news that a disabled person starved to death because he could not get access to food is all over the Internet, but he is definitely not an exception to the rule. A 16-year old disabled Chinese boy similarly died due to starvation because his father and other members of his family were quarantined elsewhere and there was nobody left to take care of him. But being a person who believes in human solidarity I remember the notices on the front doors of Bulgarian blocks of flats saying that if anybody needed help, they could phone and ask the young people who had posted these notices to shop for groceries or provide any other help needed. Some would say it sounds too good to be true, but just yesterday while doing some shopping myself and walking along a street, I saw a basket hanging from a window and an elderly lady talking to another woman of a similar age, probably a friend.

I quickly figured out what was happening. The lady with the basket was most likely immobile and could not go out to do her shopping, so her friend was there to help. She herself could not probably climb the stairs to her friend's place, so the basket was the only solution. I then remembered some other heart wrenching pieces of news. Elderly people in their 80s sent their meagre pensions as donations for hospitals to fight the virus. I also remembered the marks on the doctors' faces after having worn masks for hours on end and the young volunteers who spent weeks in the hospitals without leaving them even for a day. One can say that the time of corona was a test for Europe, a test for the individual countries but also a test for all of us as people. Some passed it, some did not. Some learnt a couple of life lessons whereas others failed to do so. But I personally believe that the best lesson in this situation was that "United we stand, divided we fall".

My Friend Felix

Felix is my neighbor. An 11-year old lovely little boy. We have the luck that all our neighbors are very friendly. Our neighbors, left and right, are young parents with kids. Having a talk over the fence during the Covid-19 pandemic has become very meaningful and valuable to me.

As an older married couple with health ailments, my husband and I belong to the risk group. Since the Corona pandemic we are in our garden more often than usual and we regularly have a chat over the fence with Felix. As soon as he discovers us in the garden, he looks over to us and asks how we are doing and if he can help us with anything. So far, we couldn't give him a task to carry out. But Felix desperately wanted to help.

A few weeks ago, he had an idea: 'Elsa, I have to tell you something. You have to mow your lawn soon and you definitely don't know that you can't mow your lawn with your robotic lawnmower the first time. You have to use the normal lawnmower first and afterwards you can use the robot. You and your husband are already old, so I'll come over and mow the lawn for you.'

Because I know how tough this work is and that it would demand too much strength from little Felix, I told him that our lawnmower is difficult to switch on. But he immediately had an idea: 'Our lawnmower is easy to switch on, so I'll bring it with me. 'I didn't like the idea of the little boy doing this hard work for us and I was embarrassed about it. But Felix had enough of the waiting now and finally wanted to make his contribution, because everywhere one could hear that one should take care of the elderly. A few days later he came over and mowed the whole lawn. He looked at his work with great satisfaction. Afterwards I gave him a small contribution to his pocket money and he was on his way home. Before he left, he suddenly turned and said: 'Elsa, has this been neighborhood assistance?' Tears came to my eyes and I could hardly answer that this was really great, great neighborhood assistance. Then he went home proud.

Youth volunteering in Vršac

Tomislav Milunov: The first encounters were a bit confusing. People looked with distrust at the complete stranger who came to their door with a mask and gloves. They knew it was safest to stay in the house, but giving money for groceries to a complete stranger was almost impossible until then. After returning from shopping and saying the sentence that they don't have to pay anything for the service, they told us with tears in their eyes that they had to repay us somehow. Of course, we did not see it that way, because we are doing this to help them stay safe. Many people told me 'Take care on yourself', 'Thank you', 'Greet all volunteers', 'You are all wonderful children'. The smile and love they give me at that moment is not easy to describe in words. In the volunteer center, we take short breaks for a meal with music, and then resume our activities. I can freely say that in the two months that the state of emergency in my country lasted, I made real friends, met good young people who, like me, without a single moment of reflection or hesitation, came every day and fought for the lives of our fellow citizens against the invisible enemy. There has also been falling in love. Love at the age of the Corona as we popularly called it. None of us expected anything nice at such a difficult time. Unfortunately, the fight against this cruel enemy continues. I don't know when it will end. But what I know for sure is that a friendship remains.

Darko Radak: ... I did not participate in volunteer work before this pandemic, but this pandemic changed that and I am glad because we became closer to our fellow citizens, and all of us volunteers became close to each other and we became a very good team that was ready to respond to anyone's request and to do it very well. The first meetings with people were strange because I never did something like that, but as time went on, people gained trust in us and so everything got much easier. The most common demands of the people were buying groceries and picking up medicines, and as they gained trust in us, we started picking up their pensions and paying their bills. I would accept volunteer work from time to time in accordance with my obligations at work.

Vojislav Milunov: ... Fear of the unknown was present, but not dominant. Considering that I was helping my family by doing some work for them, it was one of the incentives for me to help my neighbors, and later my fellow citizens. I had no previous experience. This was my first and real experience that I will never forget. Each visit to a new address was a new adventure for me. The first meeting with fellow citizens was very exciting for both sides. I hope that soon everything will be over and that we will return to our normal life habits.

Tatjana Petrika: ... Two days after the introduction of the state of emergency, I was bored at home, so I decided to apply as a volunteer by the City of Vršac. I was thrilled that I could be of use to the elderly and infirm people of my city. The feeling of satisfaction, the rush of emotions, but also a dose of fear accompanied me during the whole time of my volunteer work. The reason for the fear I constantly felt was our lack of knowledge about the virus. I was happy to see the smiles of the old people when someone came to their door, that someone was helping them, whether it was walking their pets, buying groceries from their favorite supermarket or simply, bringing disinfectants, which we volunteers of the City of Vršac shared. Of course, they thanked us, sometimes with flowers picked from their garden or some chocolate...



Tatjana Petrika, Vrsac, Serbia
Organizing the Groceries List



Tomislav Milunov, Vrsac, Serbia
Handing over Groceries



Vojislav Milunov, Vrsac, Serbia
Delivering Groceries

Elderly People in the Municipality of Slivo Pole Successfully Cope with COVID-19

On February 26, 2020, a crisis headquarters was established in the Municipality of Slivo Pole. The main task was to save the lives of the elderly, as well as the entire population. There were 25 volunteers.

As of 1 May 2020, 165 socially disadvantaged families have been receiving a free hot lunch. The number of users of social patronage has also increased. The daily food was sold for a minimum payment of approximately 0,6 Eur per day.

The management board of the Union of Pensioners manages 20 Clubs with more than 600 members. I, as the President, had clarified the measures to preserve the lives and health of our members. The first week was very difficult because we closed the clubs where people were used to meeting, discussing news, preparing and holding many events. Because of my explanation and the time spent convincing them, our members understood the danger and stayed at home.

Our task was to take care of and to protect not only the physical health but also the mental health of our members through personal contact with the chairmen of the pensioner clubs. Since the beginning of the pandemic, three times per week I contacted the Presidents of the 20 Clubs, who had feedback from their members about problems such as the need for medicines and food. Special attention was paid to restoring the members' interests and hobbies and distancing them from TV series and news. They were motivated to clean the yards, sow vegetables in their gardens and freshen up their homes. I motivated the members to watch programs about the cultural and historical heritage of Europe and the TV programme At School with BNT.

At the end of the pandemic, when the measures were more relaxed, the Mayor provided us with full protection clothing and disinfection materials to visit five of our members suffering from other diseases. The meetings were extremely emotional for everyone.

The participation of eight of our members in the international video conferences Come together! Connecting people against isolation in times of Corona had a very positive impact.

The self-confidence of our members increased even more when they read in the newspapers and on the website of the Municipality about the activities of the Union's management board during the pandemic.

I am glad that thanks to the strict observance of the measures and the cooperation of the Municipality we do not have patients with Covid-19. We are all looking forward to the opening of the Clubs to see each other and to share the good moments of our lives during the pandemic.

... Life Continues, Despite Covid-19

For days, we lived with the information that somewhere people are getting infected, some are dying. One morning we woke up worried – a state of emergency was declared. It hadn't happened before ... restrictions, scary messages, the need to shut ourselves behind the doors of our houses and wait ... to get sick, die... or survive ...

Our children told us anxiously, 'Be careful and don't go out, we'll do the shopping for you.' From morning till night there are briefings – not about hope, but about the expected apocalypse, especially for us adults over 60 ... We quickly closed the Druzhiba Pensioners' Club, where we used to meet to talk or organize events. We cancelled the planned rehabilitation for 50 people in a sanatorium on Sunny Beach and a visit to a restaurant to celebrate the First Spring ... We confined ourselves at home. The days went by monotonously. The kids from the Red Cross, young volunteers, bought what was needed for us... The only spark of light was my dog Coco. We went for walks around the block, but somehow I was afraid to talk to people and we just nodded our greetings.

The days went by monotonously and ruefully, until one day the phone rang. 'Hello. Some time ago you helped me get a wheelchair from the Red Cross. Now I'm in trouble.' This conversation brought me out of the usual daze. I'd made phone calls and obtained the necessary information – where and how the woman can be helped.

I also called the oldest loners from the club to ask them how they were doing. I understood that one woman was registered with the Public Meal Centre, but her problem was getting there. With the help of a municipal councilor, the municipal authorities decided to deliver food for all elderly people to their door.

Coco and I are walking ... The street is empty, but I feel that someone is trying to catch up with me. I turn around, but we're both wearing masks, so it's hard to recognize one another. An elderly woman approaches – she just wants to thank me that some time ago, through the Resource Center “With care and love for the elderly”, we helped her solve a problem related to her husband, who has Alzheimer’s disease. I advised her to apply for the Personal Assistant Program, which is still operational despite the quarantine. I recently learned that this issue has already been resolved.

Wearing masks, we return to the retirement club – we clean and decorate the inside and the outside. In a circle with limited number of participants we discuss the topics of the day, read a verse, dream of visiting natural and historical landmarks, plan to tell about the good deeds that each of us has done in the second book SILVER THREADS. And then we go our different ways until the next meeting for those who have decided to come. Life goes on and we try to live it with hopes and faith for a better tomorrow...



Reni Koleva, Bulgaria -> *About active aging and the Coronavirus*



Andrea Cares-Stadelhofer, Mannheim, Germany-> *The Neckar Bridge*

...Encouragement

Inspirational Thought for Saturday, 4th of April, 2020

A view from my window in the morning:

blue skies

sunshine

birds singing

spring mood

I want to get out of the house, a walk along the Neckar river is tempting me. It does me good to breathe in deeply and let the beauty of nature do its work on me. The few people I encounter greet me kindly. This is something new, a positive impact of those days of isolation and overall insecurity. I am happy about the encounters and greet back with a smile.

My steps are leading me to the Riedbahnbrücke.

Somebody attached a piece of paper to the railing – no, a few of them:



These lines are familiar to me! Spontaneously, I start humming the melody of “Bridge over troubled water” by Simon and Garfunkel.

As I reach the center of the bridge, I pause. A new piece of paper with a new text:



It says: May the all-powerful and loving God bless and protect you. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The blessing touches me deeply and gives me strength. We are not alone. I begin to pray silently...

I continue walking and I discover. This is a campaign of the protestant church of Mannheim:



“joyinpassion

A walk through the city.

A surprise for the soul.

Searching and discovering.

A little bit like Easter.”

I join the search and scan the QR-Code.

I find – “Bridge over troubled Water”. The whole song starts playing on my phone. I walk over the Maulbeer island, listen to the song and sing...



„Like a bridge over troubled water“

It gives me great joy!

Pictures: Andrea Cares-Stadelhofer, Mannheim, Germany

Virtual Photo Exhibition “QUEEN ROSE”

National Chitalishte “Zora-1990” in the village of Pobeda created a unique virtual photo exhibition named the “Queen Rose”. The organizers’ idea was to make their users happy in the days of social isolation and to lift their spirits.



The moment is specially chosen, because every year at the end of May, the Feast of the Rose is celebrated. At the end of May, the whole Rose Valley celebrates with admiration the unique flower – a symbol of Bulgaria.



And we, although we live in the Danubian Plain, also worship the radiant colors of the divine rose, grown and given as a present with a message of love, fidelity, joy, happiness!



The exhibition contains 1 video and 221 photos sent by 21 participants from 5 settlements. The multimedia virtual exhibition was publicly available on the site of Virtual Chitalishte "Zora-1990" in the village of Pobeda on the social network Facebook. We believe that the unearthly beautiful colors of the Queen Rose and the gentle relaxing music of Chopin will touch your senses!

Photo: participants of the virtual photo exhibition "QUEEN ROSE", National Chitalishte "Zora-1990", Pobeda, Bulgaria

I Firmly Believe

During the Corona crises, I got a call from my former colleague to participate in the school project that should help the students to understand their emotions at this time of the pandemic. The project was named and hashtagged #okk (equivalent to #stayathome). In the video that I made, I tried to calm the student's negative thinking, to explain to them that fear, anxiety, and confusion are normal emotions to feel. With the understanding that they are young and vulnerable at their age, I tried to give them a few words of comfort and support. I hope that I managed to do that. It wasn't easy trying to encourage someone that you don't even know, while, at the same time, during the long hours of isolation and lockdown, you are all alone in your apartment. It was really hard to get oneself together, it was a day-by-day mission. This project has helped me to motivate myself, to remember what is the right way to do it. It reminded me of what it means to be human, after all. I needed a reminder of what my soul says, and, by giving this little video to students, I remembered.

This is a link to the video that I made, it is translated to English:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4FRR1xYNRI>

Poem from the video:

I firmly believe

I firmly believe
in unbreakable ties,
indelible scars, in a voice of silence
and the power of distance.
I believe in the unspoken,
in faculty of sight, in the unattainable,
in something never loved and always needed.
I remember only by feeling,
I forget the words, I invent the cities,
so that in the idleness of time,
I can breathe another eternity into the bones.



Marlis Schabacker-Bock, Ulm, Germany->
photo of self-made objects

...Our Inner Being, Spirituality, Nature

The Holy Easter Feast of 2020 in Timișoara

A beautiful year was in sight on January 1, 2020, especially since 2020 has a double digit in it, a positive sign, as double digits are not found too often. But this didn't last for long, more precisely at the end of January and at the beginning of February, all TV stations reported on the news that a deadly virus, identified as COVID 19, has made its presence felt in Wuhan, a large city in China.

The Romanian government authorities were talking more and more about the ways to protect the population and February became a month of extensive political, economic and health debates about what the protection should be. It was not long before state of emergency was established in Romania- for 30 days from March 15. All television and radio stations and social media channels announced what the state of emergency entailed, meaning that no one could leave their home without a well-founded reason, such as health or buying food. Visits to parents and other relatives were forbidden, cultural and entertainment events were cancelled, the churches were closed, the priests could conduct the holy services only with the serving staff and without the congregation. At that time one could speak of empty churches, of priests and sad people who could no longer pray as they usually did.

During this time, the Orthodox Church was in the period of fasting, a period of preparation for the Holy Easter, with several services and a different liturgical framework than at any other time of the year, because the week of the Sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ followed. But the beauty of the services was overshadowed by the absence of believers, the priests served with the same zeal but also sadness, more sadness than ever, but they were strengthened by prayer, by the evangelical words that reminded of the Suffering of the Lord and they kept going. But this bitterness wasn't over, it increased in intensity, especially when the hope that at Easter people will be able to come to take the Holy Light and the blessed bread (bread sprinkled with wine and holy water), was lost.

This is how I started the festival of Easter, like never before, with tears in my eyes, with the police and gendarmerie at the church door, with the church empty, without congregation, an emotional and desolate moment at the same time. But we all received a ray of light in our souls when we were told that we could go to the people's homes, with volunteers, with the Holy Light and the blessed bread. And indeed it was a joy, although with gloves on their hands and a mask on their mouths, when the volunteers together with the priests, accompanied by the police and gendarmerie, went to the people's homes and distributed the Holy Light and the blessed bread free of charge. The joy of the believers was boundless, to see that they were not forgotten by the Church, that God came through the holy gifts into their homes and many tears and good wishes were heard behind us. It was an Easter night like never before.

I would like to say something worth for the world to know: in the whole country the Romanian Orthodox Church granted aid to the poor people during the pandemic, aid consisting of food, clothes and medical equipment for hospitals, aid worth of 20.896.872 lei (approx. 4.320.000 EUR)

This was the Orthodox Easter in Romania, during the Covid pandemic.

The Harsh Lessons of Quarantine

I've always been used to looking at events in my life from a positive perspective, as life lessons. The Covid-19 crisis was no exception. I saw the "lockdown" months as an opportunity for mental progress. What I did not know was that it was not going to be easy, because numerous moments of loneliness and doubt were awaiting me. However, I perceived the whole situation as a journey to becoming more self-aware, one where I was far away from my friends and stuck in a situation I hadn't previously experienced, a harsh punishment for an extrovert.

The first lesson I learned changed my way of thinking. I managed to achieve a mindset concentrated on my own progress, which I call a "growth mindset". It is based on altering my daily routine and changing my habits step by step. Each change is a reason to be happy and deserves to be celebrated with a small pleasure. Moreover, it implies using oneself as a term of comparison. Each person has their own teaching to undergo.

A subsequent lesson was linked to how I should spend the free time I got after eliminating useless habits. I am reading half an hour a day, but what exactly? With ten minutes of intentional reflection a week I realised that I can plan my development by asking myself two simple questions. What do I want to learn? What book, course or documentary can help me achieve that? I also discovered the importance of occasional reflection on the events, principles and goals in my life, a useful practice in a world of constant distraction.

I had the time and the content. What was missing was the motivation. It was my hardest lesson, this one. With regard to learning German, I decided to do it, I put together a system which required of me to spend an hour a day learning words or chatting with a native speaker, but I lacked the motivation. What saved me was meditation. It is easy to drop everything you decided to do when you commit yourself to doing too much. Meditation was the glue that kept together my ambitious plan of making the most out of loneliness and becoming a better version of myself.

These three lessons helped me to find the time and inspiration to start a blog, to progress in learning German, to achieve graphic skills and a lot more. But most importantly, my new lifestyle and the joy of achieving these things helped me become a more confident, self-aware and mature person. Who thought that isolation from society would be so beneficial?

Life in the Time of Corona

Life is Full of Compensations (S. Maugham)

After overcoming the consequences of a serious fall and feeling really fit again and thinking that now I can make trips again, a virus appeared in distant Wuhan.

For the first time in my life I was at home without any professional commitments. After I had retired, I fell down and as a result I had to do mobility exercises for a long time.

At the end of February, our daughter in Switzerland urged me to stop using public transport and to stop all activities with people immediately, noting that I am very sensitive as far as my lungs are concerned.

The activities continued for a week without me, then everything ended.
The shopping was brought to the front door.
Also the dates that had structured the week were all gone.

It was March and the spring snowflake flowers started to bloom. As every year, we visited the Wolf Valley. I saw the flowers moving under the sun, moving quietly in the wind, as if they were heralding the spring. There are still numerous woods in which spring snowflake flowers bloom. So we saw a lot of blooming spring snowflake flowers together with a very rare red mushroom that is around this time growing on rotting beech branches on the ground. After the spring snowflake flowers the anemones or wood anemones bloom in the Alb forests. The forest floor is like a white sea as far as you can see into the forest.

Our radius has now grown. In Nenningen we saw the white clouds of cherry trees and pink apple blossoms. In Dächingen I heard a lark for the first time in decades and after a while I was able to discover it in the sky. Nature continued to develop and corydalis in purple and white grew in the Brieltal amidst yellow anemones. Visited in the Lonetal were the caves and the site of the “Lion man”. In between an excursion to the heath again, first to the pulsatilla, then to the spring gentian and then to the orchid flower.

As every year, I waited for the rare flower called lady's slipper. When a friend told me that it was in blossom, we headed to the Warmtal immediately to see it. This year, too, the abundance of flowers was a real feast for the eyes.

I started reading at home as I had done long ago when my grandmother asked me if I had nothing else to do. With the e-book reader Tolino I sit for hours in the garden reading.

Of course I keep in touch with other people by phone, email, and Whats App, by video telephony, and messages. The most interesting thing was reported by our son from Spain: The restrictions are much more drastic there. To my surprise the family started planting vegetables, and they water their tomatoes, eggplants, peppers etc. every day. I saw the vegetable beds on Whats app. In autumn I had asked him if the walnut tree had many nuts. He said they forgot to harvest it, because nobody was interested in the garden then.

Without this virus I would not know the Ulm area so well, and had never experienced nature so intensely. These days it is called forest bathing. We walk through nature and take it in with all our senses. It is an experience discovering the flowers, hearing the birds and seeing the sun through the trees in the play of light and shadow.



Yvonne Sinkovic, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *My Great-Grandmother is Getting Better*

...in Children's Eyes



Anton Häcker, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *Pewter Can be Poured. But not the Life!*



Emma Roscher, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *Spending Time with my Family*



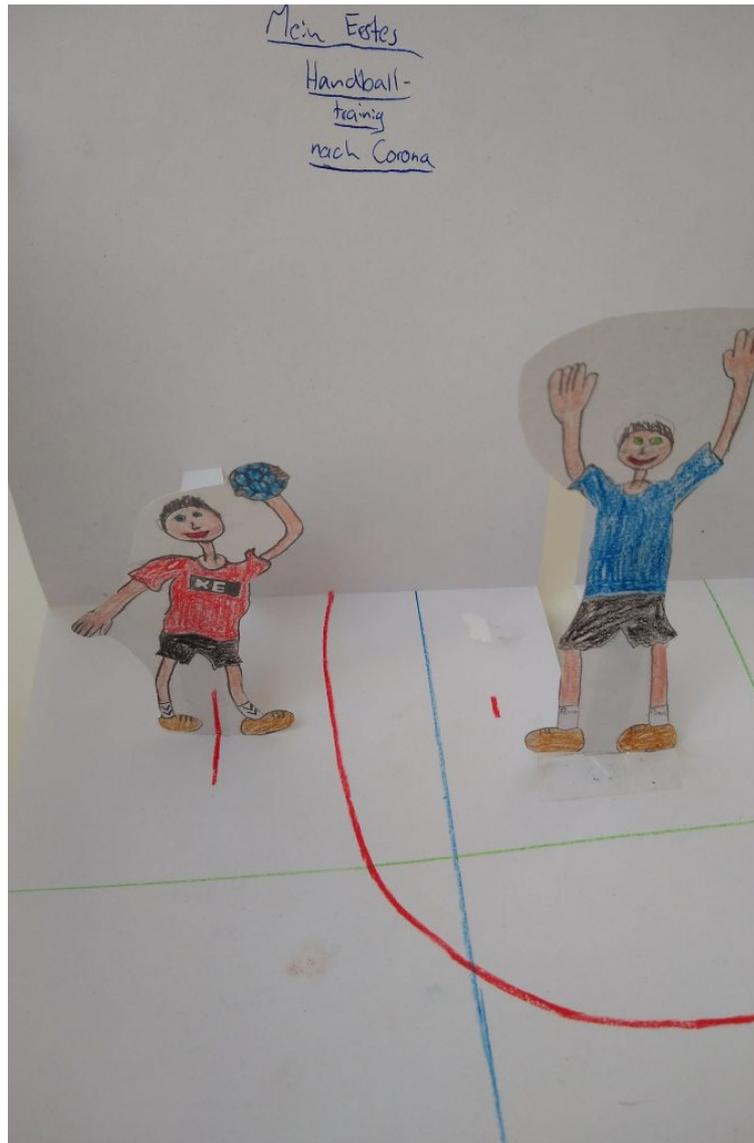
Isabelle Böhm, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *Together at Home*



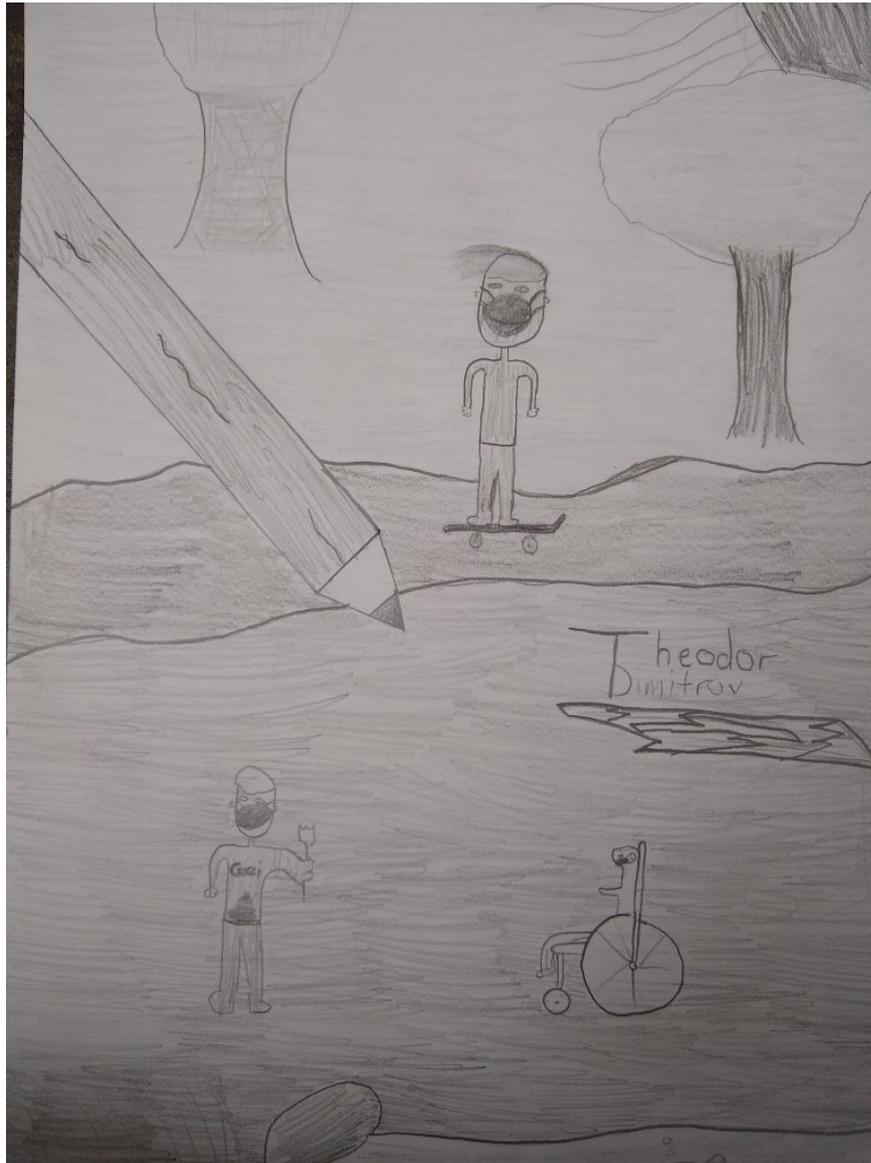
Joel Stiepani, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *Learning*



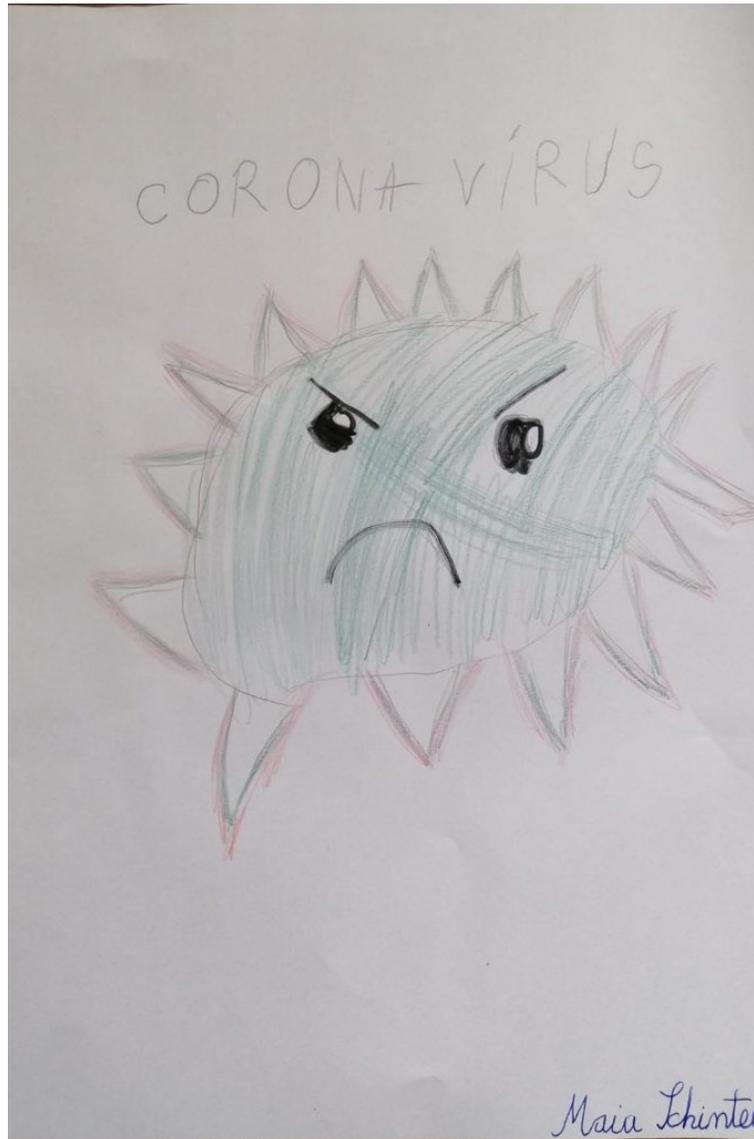
Dominic Zelmer, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *The 25m Fall*



Denny Hommel, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *My First Handball Training*



Theodor Dimitrov, 5th grade, Michelsberg-Gymnasium, Geislingen, Germany
-> *My First Handball Training*



Maria Silvia Schinteie, Timișoara, Romania
-> *Corona Virus*



Amira Iulia Stănică, 5th grade, National College Carmen Sylva, Timișoara, Romania
-> *Visiting Grandparents*



Tamara Rakić, 5th grade, Kepler-Gymnasium, Ulm, Germany
-> *Abstract Art*



DANUBE NETWORKERS invite -> Come Together Connecting Cultures! 12.04.2020

...The Digital Univers,
International Cooperation

How Covid-19 Affected my Training

I am a student at the University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev” doing a teaching degree in mathematics.

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the lives of many people, and the least harm it did was to change our daily routines. We had to quickly get used to and adapt to the changes imposed for the safety of the population while at the same time we had to get used to the flow of disturbing information from the media.

To be able to continue what we were doing before the pandemic and at the same time keep a social distance, we had to move our work to cyberspace – many people started working from home, and students went online. It was difficult for everyone at first, but after a while we started getting used to it. In a short period of time, students and teachers had to learn new skills for working in the digital environment. Teaching took place through various online platforms. In the theoretical disciplines, where lectures predominate, the change was easier; the difficulties prevailed in the tutorials, where students were supposed to solve problems and acquire new skills for solving problems. But the teachers were extremely responsive and put a lot of effort into making the students’ education as effective as possible in the given situation.

Despite the difficulties, distance learning has also many positive aspects – the increased amount of self-study teaches the students to be independent, and facing difficulties and overcoming them develops new skills while most importantly, safety is guaranteed. For me, the most important thing was that the pandemic did not interrupt my university studies. Thanks to the quick response of our universities and professors, as well as the availability of advanced technologies, we were able to adapt relatively quickly and continue with what we were doing before the crisis in the safest possible way.



Galin Velikov, Ruse, Bulgaria -> *The Pandemic and the Little Boy*

How the Corona Virus Helped us to Speedily Digitalize Teaching

On 10th of March we were officially informed about the decision of the Hungarian government about the restrictions due to the pandemic situation concerning travel abroad and receiving visitors, health prevention measures in the educational institutes and suspension of all events, meetings, and conferences until May 31. We were asked to prepare education programs and tools to facilitate online teaching, which was introduced during an emergency study holiday of 11-22 March. It gave us the time needed for the complete transition to online teaching, which was to start on March 23. Thus, both the teaching staff and the students had the necessary time to prepare for what would be their reality over the next couple of months.

The access of all students to the university buildings was stopped and teachers over 60 years of age were advised to start working from home. After 2 weeks, all teaching staff were given the option to resume work at their university offices, respecting all health prevention measures, or if their home circumstances permitted it, to work in home office mode. The online teaching was based on a large variety of platforms such as Zoom, Google scholar, Microsoft Office platforms, and Moodle. Fortunately, some years ago, our university had put into operation the MEMOC system, which facilitates the use of massive online educational forms. The assessment and exams were organized through this platform, called e-learning platform, as well. See...

<https://elearning.uni-miskolc.hu/>

During this period, I offered lectures and consultations through the Moodle system, and we used the examples in our well structured European Virtual Mathematical Laboratory, EVML:

<https://www.uni-miskolc.hu/evml/>

which was created in cooperation with 8 partner institutions, including some partners of the CEEPUS network. This portal offers also online consultation form. For individual and group consultations, or oral examinations, when needed, I had used the ZOOM program.

During this period, May 20-24 we even organized an online conference , see: www.uni-miskolc.hu/hmtm, and are about to organize an online CEEPUS intensive course between 6-17 July. The Covid-19 pandemic was a crisis that hit all organizations badly, but it also provided an opportunity to develop faster and enter the digital era without further delay. As the Chinese say,
“May you live in interesting times.”

The Newspaper Healed of COVID-19

At first I was amazed at the diligence with which the people around me began to empty the shops. Friends, colleagues, neighbors and relatives had left everything in a state like after a battle, and I think that, after all, that was it – our battle with fear. It happened around mid-March, I think. It was the moment when time began to crawl, and the hour no longer had 60 minutes, but much more and hard to count.

To avoid gossip, I also stocked myself for the apocalypse that the neighbors heard knocking on the door, and I bought six cans of meat, two kilograms of rice, three kilograms of apples, four packets of biscuits, two bottles of mineral water, two bags of coffee, two loaves of bread, a jar of pickles and five rolls of toilet paper. And, to be honest, a pack of cigarettes. And immediately I was looked at with different eyes in the block. I was one of them.

After that, I started doing my accounting for the newspaper which I am running. It was terrible. The companies I worked with and which paid me for advertising were closing one after the other, like windows before the storm. I needed their money to pay the printing press and reporters' salaries. Nevertheless, the administrators' refusals did not upset me too much, since they came with the promise that, once we won, we would go on exactly as before.

The money wasn't the only problem. The city froze, absolutely nothing happened, and I had nothing to fill the newspaper's 12 pages every week. Then I gathered the people from my editorial office, wrote a kind of goodbye article, hoping that we meet soon again, and each of us went to our homes.

In the solitude of the room, I would have liked to write at least one chapter of the book I have been working on, until all the madness is over, but it wasn't to be. A colleague I worked with at the first newspaper 30 years ago, asked me to help him with an online publication, because an editor left. That's how my Internet journalism adventure began. I worked from home, I made phone calls, I received press releases, it was easy. One day, out of boredom, I remember putting my mask on my eyes, instead of covering my mouth and nose with it, I took a selfie and posted the photo on Facebook, but I received only 15 likes. This was a time when people had forgotten to smile.

I admit, I agreed to work on my colleague's online publication with the idea that if things did not return to normal and my newspaper would not appear, I would still have a job. It was my safety net.

After about two months, the phone calls started: when do I publish the newspaper again? There were more and more of these, every day. I started doing my calculations again and it was ok.

On Wednesday, June 17, the edition 571 of the newspaper went to the printing house, and on Thursday morning I smelled fresh ink again. Now, the newspaper is doing well and I think that the readers' calls were the vaccine that healed it of COVID-19. And healed me as well.

How Project Work Helped me to Live through the Corona

With the outbreak of Covid-19, personal face-to-face communication became impossible thus leaving many older people in the solitude of their homes without much contact with family or friends. However, surprisingly, it was my participation in one international project that helped me to live through the corona pandemic and made my life considerably more pleasant and satisfying. The project management came up with an idea to continue our communication via videoconferencing, which invited people to contribute in any way they wanted. Our videoconferences were based on presentations of various cultural events and musical performances of the participants themselves who came from the EU and even from all over the World! Our online sessions were very pleasant and I participated with great joy and listened to all participants with keen interest.

In the beginning, I presented myself, the place where I live and my activities in the “Union of Pensioners-Ruse Region”. Of great interest to me was the joint Easter celebration. It included the presentation of traditions in different countries around the World!

I contributed to the programme by presenting in this live show my Easter culinary products! My next participation was with a song by the great Bulgarian composer, lyricist and world-famous singer Emil Dimitrov, the lyrics were translated for the listeners into German and English! Then I took part in a session where we talked about our hobbies. I presented a way of making tablecloths and showed my finished products, which impressed the participants! After that I showed a technique for making paintings with diamond checkers and demonstrated finished diamond tapestries! The presentations of all participants were really interesting for me and the most emotional thing was that we could sing and speak together not only in English but also in the languages of the other participants in the conferences! The emotion was great and now we have memories to keep forever!

The restrictions during the pandemic were really stressful for many people but the videoconferences gave us the opportunity to get to know each other and to find new friends. Other people accepted the compulsory stay at home as an opportunity to relax, to devote time to their personal hobbies and engage in enjoyable activities around the house! As the English say, "Every cloud has a silver lining." My family members observed all the restrictions and protective measures with regard to Covid 19 and so far, fortunately for my family and friends, there is nobody ill or infected with this virus and I hope this will be the case till the end of the pandemic!

Pandemic Defeated by Joy

I was born and raised in a village. The people there are busy cultivating the land and raising animals. For them, any other event is something fleeting. The closeness to nature and faith in God makes them stronger, and helps them to overcome any obstacle in life.

Although I have lived in the city since I was 19, I have the blood of my ancestors. The worrying news about the deadly Covid 19 virus scared me at first. I had moments when I was afraid, but I drove it away through prayer and hope in the divine help. I solved the frustration that I couldn't go to church, that I couldn't see my parents and that I couldn't hug my daughters, in my own way. On Sunday, I was watching the religious service broadcast on television and I was feeling joy. One weekend I went with my brother to my parents' house. Even though I stayed away to protect them, as they were over 80 years old, I saw them again and helped them plant the garden. The previous lack of movement was felt. After that, I could barely walk for about two weeks, because I was bent over planting the whole day. But the joy of seeing my parents again and the fact that I helped them with the garden, vital for them, made up for the discomfort.

On TV, in all the stations, I saw only worrying news. I prayed for those in the hospitals, but I began to take my time to encourage myself. I couldn't go out on the street, so for a few weeks I had been sewing a traditional blouse. Making it lifted my spirits, I almost didn't feel the time passing. From time to time, I went to a plot of land on which I had begun to build a house. With a permission to leave my house in my purse, however, I was passing by the police at the end of the street. The way back passed through a park. I couldn't help but sit on a bench for at least half an hour, admire the flowers growing in the grass, and listen to the birds. One day the policeman chased me away, saying that the park was closed, but after a few days I went again. I was not endangering anyone, I was wearing a mask and the park was almost empty. I liked the smell of grass and flowers, the silhouettes of the green trees, not caring about the pandemic. The flowers in my apartment, which bloomed regardless of the Covid-19 situation, kept me company. I found another tapestry with a magnolia branch, which I sewed and wondered what to do after I finish it.

I was happy when Ana Zlibut called me and told me about the meeting on the Internet. I was very happy to see the German, French, Italian, English, Bulgarian, Serbian, Slovak friends again. There are joys that come with the departure of the pandemic. I did not get rid of the pandemic permanently, but got rid of the fear and despair. We have learned that the power is in us, and that life means more than the daily routine.

The real joy is to be in the community, to give ourselves to those around us, to keep in touch with God and what he created, the purity and beauty of nature, in the midst of which we feel truly free.



Turlea Tudor, Timșoara, Romania-> *Corona Experience*

...in Literary Processing

When I Leave, My Hometown Remains

God, the weather is with snow
The last wave freezes in the soul
It came through the blizzard to see me
When I leave, my hometown remains.

The roots of the forest come out to hear me
The winter returned on the horseback
My poem still sweats
When I leave, my hometown remains.

God, don't let people freeze
Dead from the virus in the first wave
The poem tears in the big squares
When I leave, my hometown remains.

Translated into English by Ana Zlibut

Love in the Corona Time

On the Equinox, I will summon the goddess SUNNA
The divine radiance of her aura will illuminate my heart
Her solar light will nourish me
She will revive the Earth and clear all cells of my being
She will shower me with her rays of gold and
bring Love and new Life
In this deadly Corona times
Eternal Rome is emptied – a ghost town from a painting by De Chirico
Milano bleeds. Bergamo weeps.
My own Belgrade allows only its young in its streets.
The lights are turned off on Broadway.
The lines of hungry workers disappeared in front of the food carts.
The subways emptied.
Corona crossed the Ocean
To eat the Big Apple from inside.
Global pandemic from Wuhan irrevocably changed the world
When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up
something to hold on to
like yellowed photographs, old letters, family memories used ticket stubs or theater programs as
you have time to roam your house
The pleasure of small things is upon us
leisure – a pleasure of another age
When hours were longer and days endless.
Quiteness and silence the concepts of bygone times
Are upon us – again!

Signs are here –
ducks appear in Fontans di Trevi, swans and dolphins in Venice!
As the smoggy skies above Wuhan
are blue and crystal clear now
and visible from above
so will the sun rays probe this darkness
and prove the old saying- Post Nubila Phoebus
and clear the path for the new life, the new light
for the world to change-
and unite!

Translated into English by the author

Spring at the Time of Corona

At the top of the larch
the nest is rocking,
wild pigeons.
Under my window
magnolia flowers.

I'm sitting alone under a walnut tree.
I open the box occasionally
where my friends live.
They are fine, they publish songs,
photos from their youth.

We received the packages:
oil, sugar, coffee, chickpea spread.
The mother rejoiced.
The president is yelling at us.

My brother is in the workshop.
He handed over the screws from the bucket,
arranges them by color and size.
That's how men tie Wiehler's gobelins.

I sent a message to one man.
He didn't answer me.

Seize the Moment!

A sunrise, a sunset... – a life.
People who hurry,
And don't find time to live,
Many wasted moments.

And seeing from far away,
How hurried we've been on our way
The life has decided to show us
What we have never been.

We weren't honest enough,
We weren't perhaps good enough,
We didn't live as the fullest,
We didn't appreciate enough!

The life said: STOP!
Seize the moment!
Enjoy every day!
Believe! Love! Sing! Shout!
Have the heart of a child!

Translated into English by Ana Zlibut

Inhale and Exhale

The window was only slightly opened, but part of the white muslin curtain slipped through that opening and swayed in the wind. Occasionally, like a small helium balloon, it fills with air, then retreats again and sticks to the window. Like a man who inhales strongly, quickly, impatiently, so that he does not miss anything in that inhalation, to fill his lungs because he does not know when the inhalation will be possible again. Like a man who exhales suddenly, without his will, and is left stunned by the lack of air, dismayed, lungs glued to the bed.

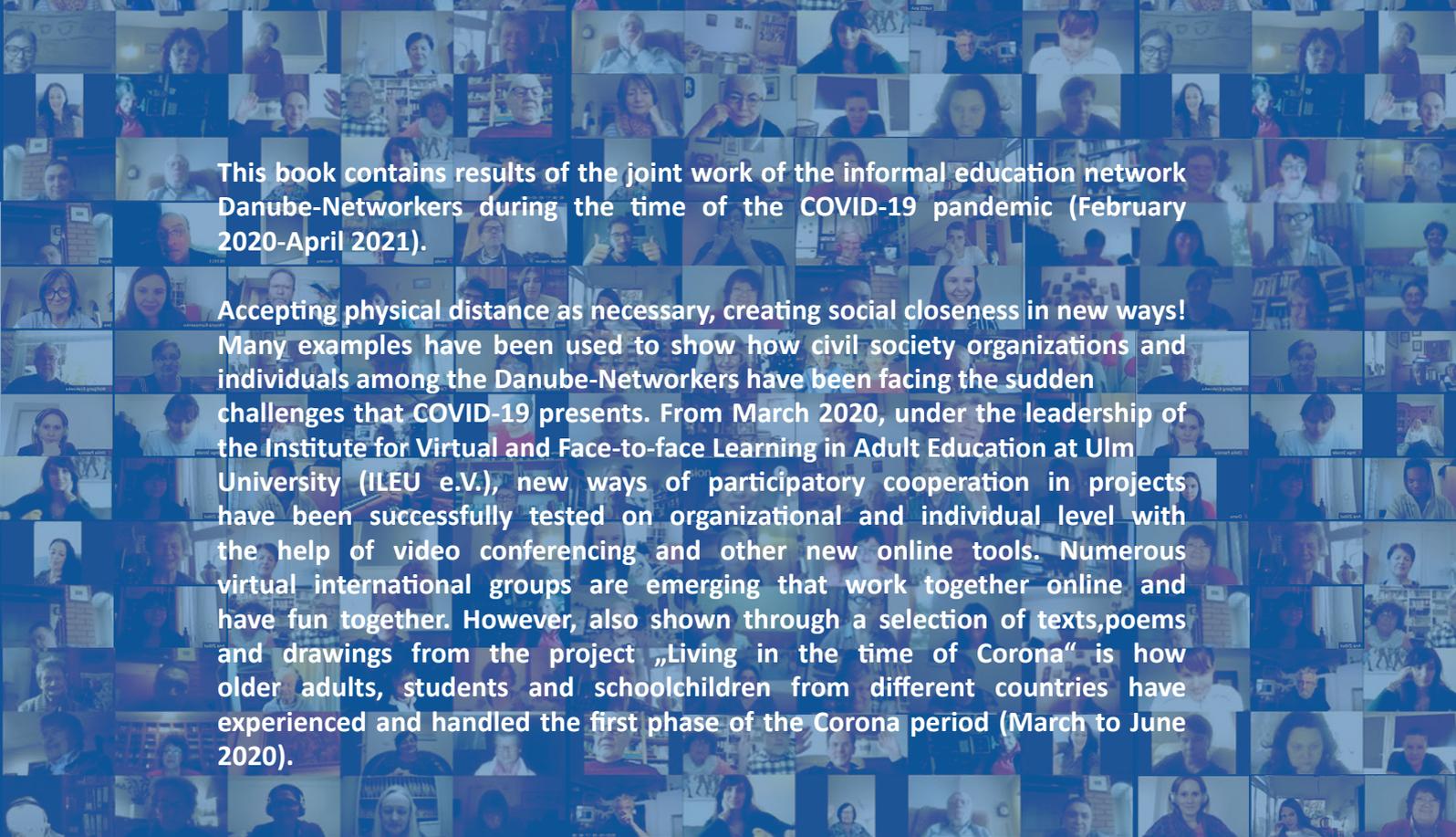
The scene repeats constantly. Inhale and exhale the now semi-wet edge of the curtain on the half-open window of the room on the ground floor.

Rare walkers, mostly with their dogs, stop and obscure the view of the breathing room in which his mother lies. A man in his late fifties then leans a little to the side, or steps out of the place where he got stuck himself a few hours ago to have a better view. He is bothered by reckless people and their four-legged pets. They act as if it is their park that they can walk through when they want, their lawn where they stop when they are pressed by need. Once, a woman with an aged slow Labrador stopped staring at a closed window with the curtains open. She approached him completely, almost touching the window with her nose, she blocked the light with her fists and stared curiously while the yellow dog with the torn hair lay in the grass next to her legs.

He was furious, offended, he got up from his seat and walked towards her, giving her signs with his hands, but she did not see him. He could not come closer, he was not allowed to speak loudly – he was afraid that his mother would hear him. He should not have allowed that. The dog raised his head just enough to let him know he had spotted him, but he did not move. That impossible, ignorant woman did not move away from the window, and the man had the desire to grab her by the shoulders and drag her away. But he did not dare. He did not dare.

When she finally continued her way, dragging the sluggish dog on a leash that was too long, he felt exhausted. The veins in his temples trembled and then struck with such force that he could see them under his eyelids every time he closed his eyes. He returned to his place, to the uncomfortable green bench, from which he had a good view of the window of his mother's room and continued to wait.

While the wind plays with the curtain on the eighth day the home for the elderly has been in quarantine, on the eighth day of not seeing his mother, he is still waiting for the window to open, to see her as she slowly approaches sitting in a wheelchair pushed in front of him by a nurse. For the woman to open the curtains, to open the window and to point to the small arranged pots, in which red and pink violets were blooming. For the mother to reach out and touch them, with the smile, to look at the flowers and to wave to her son who is waiting on the bench, clutching a bowl of fresh homemade cheese rolls in his hands. Her favorite.



This book contains results of the joint work of the informal education network Danube-Networkers during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020-April 2021).

Accepting physical distance as necessary, creating social closeness in new ways! Many examples have been used to show how civil society organizations and individuals among the Danube-Networkers have been facing the sudden challenges that COVID-19 presents. From March 2020, under the leadership of the Institute for Virtual and Face-to-face Learning in Adult Education at Ulm University (ILEU e.V.), new ways of participatory cooperation in projects have been successfully tested on organizational and individual level with the help of video conferencing and other new online tools. Numerous virtual international groups are emerging that work together online and have fun together. However, also shown through a selection of texts, poems and drawings from the project „Living in the time of Corona“ is how older adults, students and schoolchildren from different countries have experienced and handled the first phase of the Corona period (March to June 2020).

The projects and this publication were supported by the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, the Baden-Württemberg Foundation, the City of Ulm and the Institute ILEU e.V., Ulm.

ILEU

Institute for Virtual and
Face-to-face Learning in the
Field of Adult Education at
Ulm University

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