

## OBJECTIVE 04

To support the exchange of good practice, allowing the creation and expansion of citizen networks, initiatives and platforms, including support for voluntarism



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# FALLING WALLS: LOOKING THROUGH CONFLICT NARRATIVES IN CYPRUS

## Visual Voices

Photo Credit: Visual Voices

## THIS ACTION INVOLVED

Contributing to close the cultural divide between two communities of the island through arts

"Artist in Residence Program" and peace education workshop for young artists from the Turkish Cypriot community, held between 24 November 2019 to 13 February 2020 in Nicosia.

A study visit for the project team to Copenhagen, Denmark to create networks and incorporate lessons learned into the program (January 27-30, 2020)

Parallel public events including an exhibition of the works by the participating young artists (20-23 February 2020, at Saçaklı Ev), a one-day conference for relevant duty-bearers (22 February 2020, at Ledra Palace Hotel), a screening of the documentary, "Cultures of Resistance" (March 5, 2020 at Studio 21).

A short promotional film presenting the action objectives, a short documentary on "Artist in Residence Program" and the dissemination of the films through social media channels.

## ABOUT ÇATALKÖY ASSOCIATION FOR CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT (ÇADER)

Founded in 2018, Visual Voices is a non-profit organisation based in Nicosia and working internationally on arts-based peacebuilding. It recognises the important role of visual art in peace advocacy and sees young artists as "key change-makers" for social change. Its mission is to strengthen the capacity of young artists (18-35 years old) affected by violent conflict while building non-commercial platforms of expression for them to share their voice and advocate for peace through contemporary visual art. It defines itself as "working at the intersection between strategic social art and peacebuilding."

## STORY OF THE ACTION

Through this action, Visual Voices aimed to support the civic participation of local youth through artistic expression. By introducing new voices into the peacebuilding discourse, the project aimed to challenge the existing nationalist narratives and enable youth artists to advocate for peace and positive social change in Cyprus.

To this end, the initiative's "Artist in Residence Program", a unique thematic residency brought together five talented Turkish Cypriot visual artists and artists with Turkish descent who have lived in the northern part of Cyprus for at least 10 years. These artists were given an opportunity to engage with peace education, attended cultural management workshops and participated in studio time with professional artist mentors to produce visual art pieces promoting peace advocacy.

*"The participating artists together created a very unique and safe space for expression around the challenges and hopes they face when living in a divided island... Bringing young artists, mentors and experts from the peacebuilding sector together enabled for a powerful contribution to change perspectives and supporting visions for peace."*

Marina Neophytou

The artists presented their work in a group exhibition, featuring performance, digital remix, fashion, mixed medium and painting. The results shared on non-verbal space, promoted dialogue and better understanding by challenging the prevailing nationalist narratives within their communities.

*"The group exhibition was a proof of the authentic expression of each of the artists on the ongoing peace dialogue in Cyprus and their desire for action to fill the 'emptiness' of a never-ending transitional phase. We were very excited by how the artists embraced the concepts we were talking about during the peace education workshops but also the level of interest they expressed in pursuing socially engaged art beyond the action's timeframe."*

Marina Neophytou

In addition to the exhibition, the other public events, the conference named "Arts-Based Peacebuilding in Theory and Practice: The transformative power of art in community dialogue and positive social narratives", the screening of the documentary "Cultures of Resistance" and the short documentary film on the action's objectives, allowed interactive communication and wider awareness on arts-based peacebuilding.

*"Representatives of civil society, as well as other identified duty bearers who attended the public events, had an overall positive response to this action. The way the artists used their expression created new opportunities for exchange and as a result, has stimulated a fresh atmosphere for social change across the divide."*

Marina Neophytou

Thanks to the four-day study visit to Denmark, the project team created new contacts within the European Union, sharing the same ideals. The initiative exchanged ideas and best practices and had the opportunities for further collaborations with other organisations like Freemuse and IMMART.

## RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

The action promoted human rights and democracy by involving young artists' perspectives into the peacebuilding discourse through a unique program combining art, storytelling and peacebuilding. The Artist in Residency program, which worked at the intersection between strategic social art and peacebuilding, strengthened the capacity of young artists in their journey as peace advocates. The action also gained support from the duty bearers, including representatives of the education system, civil society organisations, media and politicians involved throughout the process. It also strengthened the partnership with other art-based peacebuilding organisations both in Cyprus and in the EU.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Visual Voices is committed to strengthening peace, supporting narratives in communities affected by violent conflict both in Cyprus and worldwide through contemporary visual art.



Photo Credit: Visual Voices



TO FIND  
MORE ABOUT  
THE ACTION



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