

Learning to change: how did youth departments of the Croatian National Agency respond to Covid-19?

Dr Marko Kovačić
Dr Nikola Baketa



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

Introduction

- 2020: the year of turmoil
 - New programs
 - COVID-19 pandemic
- Croatian context: the absence of national funding, E+ & ESS only funding sources for youth organizations
- **Research questions:**
 - How did youth departments of the Croatian NA adapt to new circumstances in the midst of the new programs and the COVID-19 pandemics?
 - To what extent did a Croatian NA demonstrate organizational resilience in the year 2020?

Methodological remarks

- Qualitative case study → policy frame analysis
- Five structured qualitative interviews with the **NA representatives**; three managerial positions, two street level bureaucracy - E+ & ESC (Lipsky, 1980)
 - Internal point of view
- Five structured qualitative interviews with the **E+ and ESC beneficiaries** implementing projects during 2020
 - External point of view
- October 2021

Theoretical framework

- For organizations, it is sometimes assumed that disasters represent “the new normal” (Tierney, 2014: 238). In this context, resilience has become a desirable characteristic for individuals, communities, corporate organizations, and public authorities.“
- **Organizational resilience** „is a continuously moving target that contributes to performance during business as usual and crisis situations (Mitroff 2005). It requires organizations to adapt and to be highly reliable (Weick and Sutcliffe 2007) and enables them to manage disruptive challenges (Durodie 2003).“

Resilient organization:

- has a greater awareness of itself, its key stakeholders, and the environment within which it operates, both on a day-to-day basis and in emergency situations.
- it has an increased ability to identify and manage its keystone vulnerabilities including the positive and negative impacts that these could have for the organization in a crisis.
- has the ability to adapt to changed situations with new and innovative solutions and/or the ability to adapt the tools that it already

Preeliminary findings - dimensions

- The change of working patterns in the context of **new generation of programs**
 - Agents' adjustment to new working patterns
- Communication with Brussels about the new generation of programs
- **COVID-19** preparedness and response plan
- New measures for agents and beneficiaries and their levels of acceptance
- Communication with Brussels
- Leadership issues

Preliminary findings - content

New programs

- Information delay – political dimension + COVID
- Information partiality
- Examples:
 - IT tools
 - Quality label

COVID-19

- Digitalization
- Flexibilization
- Prior experience of working from home
- Equipment borrowing
- Trust
- Agents' wellbeing
- Enhanced communication with beneficiaries

Conclusion

- High level of organizational resilience – congruence of NA and beneficiaries POVs
- Strategic orientation, preemptive activities
- Business as usual
- Discrepancies in organizational culture between the NA and the rest of the public sector
- Exogenous vs endogenous factors (reaction to COVID-19 > new programs)