



By Youth for Youth - Design Centre - Youth Advocacy Platform

Innovations Lab Kosovo



Region	Global
Country	Kosovo
Organization	Innovations Lab Kosovo
Name	By Youth for Youth - Design Centre - Youth Advocacy Platform
Category	Civic engagement
Start date	2011
End date	Ongoing
Partners	Academia: University of Prishtina NGOs: Peer Educator Network (PEN) Kosovo Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health Other: Podio
UN involvement	UNICEF
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1. Background and description

Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe, with 53 per cent of its population under 25 years of age.³ While this group presents an enormous potential for the social and economic development of Kosovo, it is affected by a recovering, yet weak educational system that was severely damaged during the 1999 conflict,⁴ a high unemployment rate and overall limited participation of youth in decision-making processes. The Innovations Lab Kosovo is a unit within UNICEF Kosovo that was launched in 2011 with the primary role of creating a space for youth's positive civic participation and professional development. To achieve this aim, the lab advances the use of information and technology – mobile, open-source and social technologies – in youth-led innovative projects and products which empower youth to drive the change and become partners rather than beneficiaries.

1 Desk review (May-September 2014); Write up (9 December 2014); Final validation (October 2015).

2 All references to Kosovo in this publication should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

3 European Commission Liaison Office to Kosovo: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/documents/press_corner/education_for_the_future_en.pdf

4 Only 17 per cent of school buildings were left undamaged.



The lab programme is constituted of three pillars promoting youth empowerment, participation and professional readiness.

- By Youth for Youth: a training and mentorship programme that offers grants to youth with innovative project designs, programmes and social venture ideas that tackle the needs of youth. The programme acts as a pre-incubator that bridges the gap between ideas with meaningful social impact and a project. It provides funding, equipment, office space and capacity-building to young people.
- Youth Advocacy Platform: a platform equipping youth with skills to engage with decision makers and generating opportunities for the youth to engage in participatory dialogue through community outreach initiatives and high-impact public campaigns.
- Design Centre: a centre for designing and implementing technological innovations – mobile, open-source and social technologies – addressing key public institutional problems affecting children and youth in Kosovo.

Organization profile

UNICEF Innovations Labs are “open, collaborative incubation accelerators that bring business, universities, governments and civil society together to create sustainable solutions to the most pressing challenges facing children and youth. The Lab model creates opportunities for young people, who have a unique insight into the challenges that affect their communities, to team up with local leaders to develop

creative and sustainable solutions. The model also engages all of these constituents with UNICEF and its local networks of partners to facilitate best-in-class thinking, practices and applications necessary to enable and expedite systemic, sustainable change”.⁵



2. Goal and objectives

2.1. Goal

The overall goal of the lab is to empower young people in Kosovo through the use of technology and information, transforming them into responsible citizens and community advocates.

2.2. Objectives⁶

Each of the lab components has specific objectives:

By Youth for Youth:

- Increase youth's professional readiness;
- Increase youth's grit and resilience;
- Foster voluntary service with the community and the social and emotional growth of participants.

Youth Advocacy Platform:

- Increase youth's capacity to influence decision-making processes;
- Increase youth's inclusion in policy formulation;
- Improve fluency in rights and entitlements;
- Increase realization of the right to convene, debate, express dissent and maintain membership and leadership in youth organizations.

Design Centre:

- Serve the data and information needs of Kosovo's institutions, youth and children.

3. Target group

3.1. Age group

Innovations Lab Kosovo targets adolescents and youth, typically between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

3.2. Gender considerations

The lab encourages the equal participation of young girls and boys. The programmes are adapted, from outreach through service delivery and monitoring, to reflect and incorporate gender dynamics.

3.3. Ethnic / disability considerations

The Youth and Advocacy Platform works with non-majority communities—100 per cent of its programme participants are members of Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian ethnicity, who comprise approximately 1 per cent of the Kosovo population—equipping youth with the skills and tools which can provide them with avenues for having their voices heard and engaging in decision-making processes. Furthermore, as leaders of the projects, the youth address issues regarding ethnic minorities and/or young people with



disabilities if deemed pressing during their assessments.

3.4. Targeting the most \ marginalized / most at risk

The Youth Advocacy Platform works at the grass-roots level and with marginalized ethnic minority communities, supporting them in designing and carrying out their own advocacy campaigns. The youth receive resources and training, but the campaigns are run and owned completely by youth. They are responsible for conducting community needs assessments that identify pressing issues and devise awareness-raising campaigns.

3.5. Human rights programming

The lab adopts a rights-based approach, strengthening the capacity of youth to claim their rights and make their voices heard. The youth-led advocacy projects are an example of the enactment of this approach.

3.6. Youth involvement

In the lab, youth become users and partners rather than beneficiaries. They are at the centre of the intervention. As part of the lab, youth acquire the capacity to develop, grow and implement their own initiatives and projects, with the aim of building their capacities and triggering the replication of this type of intervention.

4. Strategy and Implementation

4.1. Strategies / theoretical approaches / methodologies

In line with UNICEF Innovation lab principles,⁷ the lab can take several directions: outreach/training (Innovations Lab Kosovo); product and service development (U-Report),

operational research (Copenhagen Innovation Lab); or broadcasting content (broadcasting information of value to the community).

The Innovations Lab Kosovo concentrates its work and research on community engagement and youth partnership, working in collaboration with the youth who acquire the capacity to develop their own projects and ultimately replicate the interventions. This process is guided by a theory of change which highlights the principle that social impact is achievable and sustainable when conducted in collaboration with the rights holders, the youth.

4.2. Activities

By Youth for Youth

By Youth for Youth is a mentorship programme that offers grants and guidance to youth participants who have an idea for a project to make a difference in their communities and to address the needs of youth. It supports youth-led social ventures and experimental learning.⁸

Phase 1 of the programme is the outreach and mobilization campaign. Interested participants join the ‘design thinking’ workshops, where they are invited to submit their completed problem identification, causal analysis and user research exercises. Submissions are reviewed and selected in an innovations review meeting. Ten teams of two to four accepted applicants join Phase 2, which consists of a ‘prep’ workshop to advance and iterate the user research and stakeholder map. Participants then join an intensive three-day workshop called ‘UPSHIFT’ where the young people learn and apply human-centred design, creative ideation, agile development and

⁷ UNICEF Innovation lab principles: <http://unicefstories.org/principles/>

⁸ Harvey J. (2014) Power Point presentation – UNICEF MENA Regional Network Meeting: Adolescent and Youth Development.





rapid prototyping principles to design and develop solutions to address the social challenges they have identified. Rejected candidates receive guidance on how to improve their submissions for the future. The budget for each of the initiatives is also finalized at this stage. The final phase is the implementation of projects. The youth project leaders receive a grant of up to 2,000 euros and meet with the staff mentors who assess each project's robustness and the individual's ability to manage the project and grant. Throughout the process, youth receive mentoring and guidance, and their mentors also are responsible for monitoring progress and conducting an evaluation at the end of the project, which assesses the overall effectiveness, lessons learned and garners strategies for overcoming limitations.

Networking and exchange of ideas with other participants are encouraged through regular café meetings and similar events. The lab is a collaborative environment and shared space where the youth project leaders are expected to be part of, and contribute to each other's work.

As part of the model, young people are trained to develop sustainability plans for their projects. Part of the 'incubator service' is the provision of a network of partners in which youth-led projects are located. The lab supports youth leaders in making connections with relevant institutions and private sector partners, among others, through and with whom sustainability is pursued. A number of projects also include revenue models and are therefore self-sustaining. Not all the initiatives are sustainable, but a number of them receive institutional backing, adoption by other NGOs or institutions, or private sector

investment. In line with the lab's principles, the sustainability of a given youth-led initiative is secondary to its impact; the primary goal is the engagement of youth and the learning process they undergo. The lab is currently working on revisiting participant outcomes for every project.

Youth Advocacy Platform

The platform focuses on participation through youth-led public and public policy advocacy. As part of this programme, youth are matched with social entrepreneurs to support the development of web-based applications and data visualization tools to amplify advocacy. In Phase 1, youth learn how to conduct a community needs assessment, gather the data and proceed to data analysis. In Phase 2, youth are trained on policy and advocacy, and develop an advocacy plan. In Phase 3, the youth develop and implement their campaigns. The project ends with an evaluation of the process and obtained results.

The Youth Advocacy Platform uses a variety of alternative evidence-based tools, training sessions and access points that enable youth to advocate for themselves and their communities. An example is the Youth Advocacy Training Activities, devised in partnership with the European Youth Parliament. The participants were trained on advocacy skills - issue identification, evidence-based advocacy, campaign development and digital activism/outreach. Training sessions were facilitated by a combination of international and local trainers and activities included: five-day intensive formal advocacy training in the Prishtina lab (modules: group dynamics, project planning, time management, media and public relations, crisis management, leadership,





political communication, evidence-based advocacy, introduction to advocacy tools); five on-site public advocacy workshops; and five mobile advocacy workshops.

Design Centre - in-house technology and design consultancy

Through this component, youth contribute to the development of an open-source technology hub for the region. The Design Centre explores challenges related to service delivery and use of information in Kosovo, and leverages advances in mobile, open-source and social technologies to prototype solutions. Youth collect data and participate in the development of projects. Past projects include a birth registration system, a Kosovo youth map, vaccine management and data visualizations on Kosovo municipalities. The source code and products are available for download on the Innovations Lab Kosovo website.⁹

The model followed by the lab is similar to the interaction between UNICEF, the authorities and partners in regular programming. It is a tenet of the Design Centre in Kosovo (this changes from lab to lab, but this is the approach given the lab's location within UNICEF and the overall cachet and strength of UNICEF in the Kosovo context) and no initiative is adopted unless it is prioritized and led by the relevant sections of the UNICEF office. For instance, the birth registration system is an initiative ran under the child protection section and powered by the Design Centre. A similar case occurred with vaccine management and the health section. The sections maintain ownership of the relationship with the authorities and partners on initiatives and the Design Centre connects at the operational level. From experience, this has proven a more efficient

way for mainstreaming and maintaining coherence with the programme.

The need for an intervention is determined in cooperation with the authorities and partners, pursuant to UNICEF advocacy on a given issue. In the case of the birth registration system, for example, the authorities did not recognize there was a challenge, but the lab advocated for improved access to the civil registration services – a need identified by UNICEF – while introducing the idea of a technological solution (a product intervention introduced by UNICEF). As a result, the lab built the tool in consultation with the authorities and partners, based on the requirements gathered through research with end users.

The lab also offers a three-month internship programme in partnership with the Electrical and Computer Engineering Faculty of the University of Prishtina and the University of Business and Technology. Students receive academic credit for the work they perform with Innovations Lab Kosovo, and create connections to innovation within and outside Kosovo. The focus is on the development of open-source technologies. The internship builds the capacities of the youth and fosters the development of open-



⁹ <http://kosovoinnovations.org/en/resources-products>



source technologies in Kosovo, supporting innovation for development.

4.3. Innovativeness

The main innovativeness of the lab is the concept of a pre-incubator for youth-led initiatives and innovative projects, designed by youth, that have a meaningful social impact for their peers and the community at large. The guiding principles are: design with the user; design for scale; build for sustainability; be data driven; use open standards, open-source; reuse and improve; be collaborative.

4.4. Cost and funding

The initial cost for setting up and launching an innovations lab is \$100,000. Grants for youth can be up to 2,000 euros.

4.5. Sustainability

The sustainability of products emerging from the lab is a major challenge.¹⁰ Indeed, the By Youth for Youth component is relatively resource-intensive, given the need for seed funds, but it is also attractive to donors and investors and finds champions in multiple administrative sectors such as education, labour and competitiveness, thus providing a multitude of entry points. Exit strategies for youth-led projects vary dramatically by project. While many may get picked up by NGOs which then scale them up, others receive institutional support and backing. A few others have consumer-facing revenue strategies built in and others win prizes or other support from organizations like Yunus Social Business.

4.6. Replicability

Innovations Lab Kosovo is part of a global network of UNICEF-led innovations labs. However, the model and approach of each

lab varies from one location to another.

5. Evaluation of effectiveness

No impact evaluation has been conducted, and the figures presented below are indicative and subject to update.

By Youth for Youth Component: 126 projects completed to date, 398 youth leaders and 18,202 beneficiaries.



By Youth For Youth, by the numbers	No. of Beneficiaries, Project Design and Development Training			No. of Youth-Led Projects Successfully Implemented	No. of Youth Project Leaders	No. of Beneficiaries, Youth-Led Projects		
	Total number of young people benefiting from project design and development trainings (e.g., Social Innovation Camp, Innovate Camp, UPSHIFT)			Total number of projects designed and developed during trainings selected for support and implementation and successfully implemented Beneficiaries, Youth-Led Projects	Total number of young people leading the implementation of youth-led projects	Total number of young people directly benefiting from the activities, services, and/or products delivered via youth-led projects		
Programme Year	Total	Male	Female	Total	Total	Total	Male	Female
2011	108	67	41	34	105	2,557	1,320	1,237
2012	143	86	57	36	114	11,251		
2013	117	46	71	20	68	2,341	1,256	1,085
2014	1,003	436	567	36	111	2,053	1,243	810
TOTAL	1,371	635	736	126	398	18,202	3,819	3,132

Of the youth-led initiatives initiated during 2014, 50 per cent received some form of institutional support, nearly 80 per cent remain active and 65 per cent of participants have attributed to their experience progress in education, employment, joining a working or reference group or other representative body, and/or initiating a new volunteer engagement.

Youth Advocacy Platform: five Youth Community Advocacy Project campaigns, 89 youth leaders and 1,313 participants.

Design Centre: five software programs released; two software development projects; six interns. Some of the tools developed by the centre have been used by UNICEF Lebanon. The projects developed in the Design Centre are available on the lab's website and their source code is publicly available (see: <http://kosovoinnovations.org/en/resources-products>).

The lab has also produced a youth advocacy toolkit that is available on the website. It consists of 10 comprehensive modules which are meant to provide solid training. The toolkit includes advocacy training cards, a take-home resource for the training participants; a training facilitation guide; a community needs assessment training; and an advocacy training toolkit with the main concepts and practices.

6. Strengths and opportunities

- Youth are considered partners rather than beneficiaries.
- Youth are leaders of projects, allowing them to build their capacities as drivers for change, a process which has the potential for long-term impact at the individual and community levels.

7. Challenges

- Capturing the impact and conducting regular monitoring of activities. The most important challenge resides in capturing the sustainability of youth-led projects and the impact they have on the individual and the community.
- Sustainability of the youth-led projects beyond the initial funding.

8. Next steps and the way forward

The exit strategy for the lab is under discussion, but there are several possibilities. A likely, sustainable and replicable model includes mainstreaming the By Youth for Youth component into school- or youth centre-based clubs, wherein:

- 1) Mentors would be trained and certified by a central body;
- 2) Mentors would lead school- or youth centre-based groups in the UPSHIFT methodology;
- 3) A regional or national competition (in two tiers—one for younger and another for older students) would provide networking opportunities for youth;
- 4) Selected projects would enter the incubator and receive support from the central body.

A second strategy would spin off the By Youth for Youth component into a small international NGO, for which UNICEF would serve as a board member, that would be available to country offices to deliver the component as a service. This model has met with success in the case of the OneMinuteJrs, which are one-minute videos created by youth.¹¹

In contrast, the preferred strategy for the Design Centre and Youth Advocacy Platform components of the lab would be to continue to act as a UNICEF support section working respectively on information and communication technologies for programming, and on communication for development, and adolescents and youth. Another option is the creation of a United Nations country team (UNCT) joint entity, responsible for providing these services to all UNCT members.

9. Lessons learned and recommendations

- 1) Traditional incubator / accelerator models do not address equity issues well because many of them conflate crowdsourcing with capacity-building. For instance, a global social innovation challenge soliciting the ideas of youth which is advertised on a university campus will typically attract university students. The ideas pushed forward will be from young people who already have confidence in themselves and are prepared to create a 'winning solution', some of which are already familiar to UNICEF. As a result, the process entails no training or capacity-building. The young people who already possess the right skills are the ones who participate and take part in the scale-up process. This approach is

¹¹ <http://www.theoneminutesjr.org/>



very useful when crowdsourcing ideas are intended to save lives and safeguard rights. However, the lab aims to build the capacity and resilience of youth. Therefore, the By Youth for Youth approach is more adapted to advancing equity and supporting the marginalized.

2) The lab has developed a youth-led identity, which is of significant importance in contexts where United Nations agencies may be viewed with scepticism.

3) The form of the lab is second to its function. The space and strategies adopted by the lab must be shaped by the objective of the lab.

- In the case of Kosovo, the main objective is its responsiveness to the end user and agility in order to serve the dynamic of Kosovar youth. Virtual work – predominantly digital/online – is one of several strategies to achieve that. Remote staff and pop-up locations (temporary spaces) are other strategies.
- Labs with other objectives and constituencies – for example, a lab focusing on academic cooperation and incubation of student-driven innovations – might better achieve their end through a physical co-location with the academic programme.
- Labs that exist to connect ‘insurgents’ and ‘incumbents’ (activists and government, or public and private sector, for example) might also be better served by a physical location where the authority and neutrality of the convening body reinforces its role as facilitator.

It is important to remember that one approach is not inherently superior to the other; ideally, what a lab is, should be second to what a lab does.

10. Components to consider for scale-up in MENA

The lab’s approach in working with youth as partners rather than beneficiaries, and the empowerment of youth through participation and professional readiness.

11. Resources

Youth and advocacy toolkit:

<http://kosvoinnovations.org/en/resources-products>

12. References

Website: <http://kosvoinnovations.org>

Harvey, Joshua (August 2014). Kosovo Innovations Lab presentation during the UNICEF MENA Adolescent Development Network meeting at the Dead Sea, 18-21 August 2014.

E-mail exchange with Joshua Harvey, Innovations Lab Manager, 3 December 2014.

Photo credits: Innovations Lab Kosovo.