

Media as a Means of Education: Nurturing Youth Skills

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Media as a Means of Education: Nurturing Youth Skills

A unifying problem in the Balkans: youth skill shortages

In the Balkans, youth unemployment is a persistent problem. While, globally, more young people are staying in school, rather than entering the labour market and one in five of them are NEET: not in employment, education or training. In developing economies, the situation is even more troubling, as two out of five young workers live on less than \$3.10 a day.¹ According to the World Bank, with more than one fifth of the youth population in NEET, the Balkans' unemployment rate is twice as high as the European Union average.²

Across the Balkans the main challenges hindering private sector progress are outdated educational approaches, lack of state-of-the-art facilities to accommodate innovative teaching methodologies, brain drain, corruption, mentality, cultural influences, and environmental degradation. The notion of skills shortages and deficiencies in the Balkans' region encompasses a multitude of interrelated variables, needed to improve in order to overcome skill shortages.³

Kosovo's problem with skills shortage and deficiencies stems predominantly from the poor and ineffective primary, secondary and tertiary education system that has led to the country being listed as one of the lowest average performers among all countries tested in OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018.⁴ The school system struggles to prepare the future workforce to be of long-lasting value to the market. Job candidates, even those with tertiary degrees (master level), often lack both soft skills (professional etiquette, basic writing, presentation, interpersonal or strategic communication skills) and basic hard skills (Microsoft Office, Cloud services, and/or CRMs for professional daily work). Specialized skills in any field are very hard to find among potential job candidates and once developed, serve as an opportunity for candidates to move abroad to Western Europe, U.S. or Canada.

The lingering problem lies in the reality that candidates ultimately do not know how to learn new skills, may not have the patience nor desire to put in the effort and are not built mentally over their lifetime to approach personal or professional development through life-long-learning. Schools and universities have not been cultivating such a mentality and mainly focus in encouraging blank memorization of content material and simple "completion" of tasks, regardless of value.

The problem thus is not only in the skills shortage or deficiencies, but in the mentality and the cultural structures as a whole, which discourage life-long-learning and encourage short-cuts to achievement, bypassing a merit-based system. This may just be one of the major forces that has prevented sustained progress, in spite of the many interventions, trainings and approaches that have aimed to enhance skills for employability in the Balkans and especially Kosovo; yet, have been unable to fulfill demands, transform the market and bridge inefficiencies sustainably.

¹ "World Youth Skills Day." *United Nations*, United Nations, July 2020, www.un.org/en/observances/world-youth-skills-day.

² "Western Balkans Labor Market Trends 2019." *Worldbank.org*, World Bank, The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, July 2020, documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/351461552915471917/pdf/135370-Western-Balkans-Labor-Market-Trends-2019.pdf.

³ "PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT Project Insights: Assessment of the Kosovo* Innovation System." *Www.oecd.org*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Mar. 2012, www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/programme/Kosovo%20Innovation%20Report%20English%20Version.pdf.

⁴ Avvisati, F, et al. "Country Note: Kosovo." *Oecd.org*, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), July 2020, www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_KSV.pdf.

Market demanded skills: an enduring difficulty

Multiple variables have been preventing skill development providers (both public/private and formal/informal) to struggle to respond effectively to the requirements of the market and employers. Some of which, we have recognized through our work and are listing below.

Lack of systemic thinking in approaching skill development among providers:

There is a clear discrepancy between the market needs and what, how and why a certain curriculum is taught in public, private, as well as formal and informal institutions. The most qualified educators and behavioral-change professionals are often not necessarily the ones that are designing the curriculums and making these decisions on the national level.

Unfortunately, due to the high level of corruption and brain drain of talent in the region, qualified individuals are not working in these high-level, often politically influenced positions. Thus, innovative educators, who might integrate systemic thinking approaches to curriculum design and delivery, may not be included in such high-level planning, as many might have migrated from the country, or may be working for international organizations or leading businesses.

The private education system is considered more than often a money-generating endeavor from entrepreneurs. There is unfortunately little competition between public vs private institutions. Vocational and professional schools, even though they usually provide better tangible qualifications for needed market skills, than some universities, are not still viewed highly among parents and children alike. They are often associated with “*zanate*” (professional schools), which are deemed as of a lower rank than a university degree, even though the market demand, may be much higher for skills provided by these vocational schools.

Across both students and young professionals, specifically in Kosovo, a mentality of simply “completing a degree”, a “course”, “receiving a certificate” rather than “gaining skills” is widespread, inhibiting the pursuit of education and personal advancement as an end in itself. This unpromising mentality stems from the lack of a merit based system across not only Kosovo, but also the region, where there is little motivation to strive for value, but more so for connection and association and more often than not to political parties.

Lack of qualification of skill providers

Due to the high brain drain from the region, the most qualified educators and skill-providers are not involved in crafting behavioral-change strategies in the region. The high nepotism in public institutions and political-interests among private institutions, often damage merit-based recruitment of skill providers themselves, which results in the offering of trainings or programs, which are ineffective and do not contribute to any long-lasting transformation of knowledge capabilities among those in the receiving end.

Lack of a value-distinguishing factor between public/private or formal/informal providers of skill development

There is little real competition between public and private skill providers, as more often than not, whoever does not qualify or cannot find connections to be accepted into the public universities/schools, may resort to go to one of the many private universities in the region. Some private institutions, claiming themselves as universities, have unfortunately created a reputation and a culture that students need to only make the payment to get the degree.

Thus, there is even little incentive for students to be challenged by quality universities or skill providers, and needless to even pay to be challenged and actually learn something. This

resistance to challenge then transfers to the workforce and translates into low valuable productivity. Universities and private institutions that have managed to somewhat breakthrough this common practice in Kosovo and the region, by developing and sustaining a bare minimum standard, while going against the current, could serve as a replicable guide.

Governmental bureaucracies

General governmental bureaucracies and the length involved in making any substantial transformation of skill provision entities poses a real problem in any short-term intervention plans. Rapidly advancing technological developments are changing market demanded skills at an unprecedented speed; yet, government bureaucracies still use methods of functioning meant to address technological innovations, at a rate that used to happen a hundred years ago.

Corruption and nepotism

Short-lasting government coalitions have enabled the flourishing of corruption and nepotism, which further enhance governmental bureaucracies and hinder progress. This pushes high performing professionals, no matter how much they can be compensated, to solely be interested in leaving the region or outsourcing their services to multinational companies with little value for the local private sector.

High migration of skilled workers

Clan-based mentality, political infiltration, environmental degradation (high air pollution and water stress), poor educational opportunities for children, political instability, isolation, lack of long-term economic prospects and dissatisfaction with the mentality and the direction in which the culture is developing, are some of the contributions to the high migration of skilled workers. There is need for sustained systemic transformation in multiple levels that needs to occur in order to slow-down the migration of skilled workers, which goes beyond economic factors and depends much on subcultural forces that drive certain social dynamics.

Provision of labour market skills: interventions for improvement

Across the years that KosovaLive has been working in creating interventions for improvement of youth employability skills, some problems have been recurring in multiple contexts. While some barriers have been clearly capital in nature, others have been rooted in subcultural patterns. We list some of our insights for possible interventions that may help in addressing the high NEET (not in employment, education or training), percentage of youth in the Balkans and Kosovo.

Investment in infrastructure that transforms mentality, encouraging life-long learning and professional development

The infrastructure in the region does not encourage the development of a culture that embraces life-long learning, innovation, artistic creation or entrepreneurialism. There is lack of sufficient state of the art, comfortable, inspirational and appealing spaces such as innovation centers, maker spaces or hubs for youth to safely nurture their talent and mentors to guide their development.

In Kosovo, the traditions and cultures have been developing for a very long time around cafes/wedding restaurants/halls and increasingly shopping malls. The former, are often even used as spaces for holding skill for employability trainings, since with the exception of a few

urban areas, there is still lack of suitable spaces for holding hands-on trainings appealing to youth.

There are few spaces, such as *Innovation Center Kosovo*, *Bone Vet*, *Termokiss*, *Kosovo 2.0*, *Lumbardhi*, *Dokufest*, *Anibar*, and increasingly *KosovaLive*, especially through the *GlobalGirl Media Kosova* hub, that have managed to offer a space, which can transform the daily lives of youth in the country, where they can go back to learn and develop themselves personally and professionally, nurturing entrepreneurialism, creativity and critical thinking. To a degree, these spaces have enabled youth to see an alternative and more promising reality to life in Kosovo and even prevented many of them from leaving the country.⁵

Investment in transformational short-term programs that enable rapid inclusion in the market force for youth and fulfill needs of local businesses

In order to prevent massive youth, young professionals and even the high-performing older entrepreneurs from migrating from the region, investment in such alternative learning and innovation spaces should be a priority. Connecting these spaces and talent with local businesses and encouraging the development and reliance in local markets may somewhat prevent massive migration, encouraging a different type of mentality, while embracing the local cultures.

Engagement of talent and high-performing, at-risk of migrating, population groups

Super-talents and high-performing individuals are to a great degree omitted (some also purposely exclude themselves) from active participation in society and the market, due to high levels of corruption and nepotism. Often, they willingly do not enter decision making positions in the public sector, simply because they do not want to engage in cultural politics. Even if they are not actively engaged, they act as influencers in their communities, often influencing the rest to seek migration out of the country, as a means and end in itself. Enabling these youths to find long-term value in investing their time, knowledge and skill in the local economy, may help in speeding up skill development among the rest of the youth.

Private sector growth: barriers and constraints

There are clearly interrelated systemic macro and micro constraints that relate to barriers to entry in international markets, fueled among others through high corruption, lack of a skilled work-force and increasing brain drain. While country isolation may be a unique barrier for Kosovo, corruption and brain drain are plaguing the whole region. The latter is a result of much more than solely economic wellbeing and perspective. It entails fear for the future of the Balkans, desire to offer a more peaceful and secure life to children, escape from the local mentality and culture, politics and increasing concerns over environmental degradation and health (high air pollution, disorganized construction, lack of urban planning, healthy entertainment spaces) and even self-actualization opportunities.

Of concern is also the direction of the development of the economy. The region and Kosovo are still predominantly following the old, linear mentality for economic development (with only isolated eco-interventions), making the same mistakes that have been made for decades, when the technology was not advanced to choose otherwise. There is meager and almost non-

⁵ Maxhuni, Qamile, and Besarta Breznica. "Eljesa Beka: E Kisha Lënë Kosovën Për Mirë Njëse Nuk Kish Qenë Termokiss-i - Kosovo 2.0Kosovo 2.0." *Kosovo 2.0*, 7 Aug. 2019, kosovotwopointzero.com/eljesa-beka-i-would-have-left-kosovo-for-good-if-it-wasnt-for-termokiss/.

existent focus in developing a circular economy, predominantly because there is vast misunderstanding about what the model entails, as we have seen from our Circular Economy in Kosovo study and while organizing the first Circular Economy in Kosovo conference.

While developed and large economies are switching to circular economy models, designing products and services in harmony with nature, as well as building supply-chain management models that demand environmentally conscious raw materials, local companies in the region are still to a great degree simply copying old methods of operation. But, this approach may prevent private sector growth because it limits exports to certain markets, where consumers are environmentally conscious and pay attention to certain aspects of production, consumption and processing. Moreover, the private sector is limited with lack of holistic knowledge, skills and the know-hows of adapting to rapid technological advancements that transform market demands for products and services.

The problem seems to lie in the way the process of learning and the process of working have evolved among youth and have been influenced by historical developments that have contributed to the NEET outcome. Sustained transformational change in ameliorating skill shortage in the region can be achieved if the culture of learning (life-long learning and unprejudiced learning of crafts crucial for local economies) and the process of working (focusing on effectiveness, efficiency and value) can eventually merge.

Persistent co-existence: constraints and solutions

The vast majority of the systemic problems that linger in the region are rooted in the mentality, which is a remnant of historical developments and forces that have given it form from internal and external influences. There are problems that to a great degree are influenced by locals, their subcultures and approach to life, which heavily depend on them for adjustment.

Even though the region to a degree has always suffered from brain-drain, this massive brain drain that we are seeing is different. After the Balkans' wars, many people returned to their homes, hoping for a better future for them and for their children. Instead, they were forced to confront a different level of frustration from political, social, economic, environmental, and health problems. The disappointment this time around was more significant to these people, as now the problem was among their own. Thus, the only perceived way for a great number of locals to solving the problem of their dissatisfaction and helplessness nowadays seems to be out of the country.

Solutions have tried to emerge with various qualified individuals going into politics, but the enthusiasm subsided quickly, as they often ended up being caught in the whirlwind of the regional culture of politics, influenced by interests beyond their power. Seeing the demise of qualified individuals that perished by going into politics or taking office and being unable to make a change, others resorted to keeping themselves out of the public sector.

Transformational innovation of products and services has lagged behind, mostly due to a lack of ecosystems that enable the flourishing of ingredients (ideas, materials, capital, mentoring, access to markets, or talent) needed to innovation. For those seeking innovative self-actualization in the private sector, beyond financial rewards, the Balkans has still been struggling to provide the space.

The high corruption, lack of governmental protection, and small market purchasing power, has forced talent, high-performing and skillful individuals to see their only way to self-actualization and a better life outside of the country. Many that leave do not want politics to be such a central part of their lives or direct their fate to the degree it does in the Balkans. Others do not want it to even be a central point in their daily conversations.

The decision to migrate is multifold and is driven by continual disappointment in various aspects of life, not only economical. Thus, an increase in income or a successful business may not prevent one from migrating. But, it may do tremendous damage to the potential economic, social, cultural and political prosperity of a country and the region to lose that high-performing individual.

Moreover, many interventions that have been made over the years, specifically in Kosovo, have had a short-term and short-lived impact, yet have not been able to fuel transformational holistic change. In order to achieve transformational change, multiple variables need to change.

Many professional skill-building trainings over the years have been focused on short or few day isolated trainings or the traditional theoretical courses, where the lecturer is the central figure and the participant a passive consumer of information. If we only provide these isolated, or theory-based courses in restaurants or similar spaces, we are not doing much, since for participants that is an isolated experience, which may take them out of their comfort zone once or for a few days, expose them to some ice-breakers, a power point presentation, a teacher and some new materials for them to think. But, once it is over, they go back to their daily lives with no support in implementing what they learned. Thus, it is extremely difficult for them to actually take into practice what they were meant to learn, even more there is no incentive for them to do so, as there is no apparent reward.

Investments have struggled to be effective in transforming the holistic process of learning (so the space, the methods, the equipment and the culture) and the holistic process of working (there is a preconceived notion of how certain jobs need to be done, as they were always done in that way, or certain expectations among families and people that certain jobs are more worthy than others).

There also seems to be a lack of understanding among the masses about the functioning of a market. That's why we have a misbalance of lawyers, economists and political studies graduates in Kosovo, who remain unemployed, because there are too many of them, while we have a shortage of engineers, computers scientists, doctors (many who leave the country) and other specialty professionals, or even craftsmen and handymen. Yet, there is a belief that simply because one possesses a Bachelor's diploma or a Master's one needs to be employed, placing all the blame on the market that is not adapting to them, while removing any pressure from oneself about producing actual individual value for the market.

In order to ensure sustained change, we need to provide youth with spaces, be it virtual or live, where they can attend such trainings/workshops/events, but can keep going back, escape their everyday lives and build a new reality, based on continual learning and development. This is fundamentally the reason why constraints that lead to skill shortages, especially in very remote areas, have not been overcome and continue to be a major problem to the livelihoods of people and risk communities.

Private sector growth and job creation

The development of tangible and intangible infrastructure that leads to a mentality change and a refocus on life-long learning and innovation may be able to significantly assist in sustained transformational private sector development. Strengthening the private sector, while supporting informal education, has proven to quickly ameliorate market inefficiencies created by the poor primary, secondary and tertiary education system. Investments in addressing damaging stereotypes towards vocational schools could contribute positively to decreasing the NEET percentage in Kosovo and possibly the region.

Sustained and long-term interventions that tie youth to their local context, while giving freedom for transformation, by also providing ownership to them, may help decrease the dangers of brain drain and local migration. Support to the construction and sustainability of maker-spaces, hubs, innovation centers, vocational schools, cultural centers, centers that contribute to developing critical media literacy mindsets would be beneficial assets to remote and at risk communities, just as much as to urban areas.

Increasing the number of such alternative learning spaces will prevent migration, as it has proven to do so, prevent violence/radicalization, and other delinquent behaviors that youth may fall prey to, all while refocusing the energy of youth and young professionals to creating long-lasting change through innovation in the private sector. Financial models should be designed to create local ownership of such spaces and decrease their existence volatility on other political or economic forces.

While trainings are being held across all regions, they are often ineffective because they are held in inappropriate spaces, such as cafes, restaurants or wedding halls, uncondusive to learning or behavior change. Investment in local youth centers, empowerment of local hubs, support to the sustainability and operational costs of non-profits that can create such co-working spaces, where such trainings can be made interactive and hands on, would transform these local communities.

Youth are mentally, emotionally and often even physically detached from the traditional schooling system. They are individually seeking alternative ways of inspiration or schooling, many resorting to religious institutions, while others to online self-learning, innovation or cultural hubs or outside of the country.

The trainings aimed at ameliorating the skill's gap have proven to be effective if they are done in spaces conducive to learning and inspiring a different mindset – not in isolated short-term trainings done (because of lack of good infrastructure and lack of funding) in restaurants, wedding halls, conference centers, or the likes. This has been the norm for much of the last twenty years, because there was no other way to hold these trainings. Nowadays, having an online component is no longer innovative, but a necessity. Many trainings and schools have lacked this component, until the COVID-19 pandemic shocked the education system and forced it to adapt. Including technology in trainings is much more doable if the space is conducive to accommodating the equipment and enabling participants to go back and practice their learning consistently. To be effective, interventions would need to make a holistic transformation of a space and draw people to that space through curiosity, just like innovation centers, cultural centers and other popular spaces have done.

The education system in the region and Kosovo has not been providing youth with an “inspirational experience”, thus has lost its ability to be influential in their development. The infrastructure, the teacher-student relationship, the materials taught, the schedules, the homework and even the peer-interaction, does not suit the needs of youth nowadays and does not prepare them for the market. Thus, for the educational system to be transformed, investing solely in one or only a few variables do not seem to be sufficient. Holistic transformation of the education approach, not solely the education system, is necessary to build a strong, sustainable, healthy and environmentally conscious private sector for the future to come.

Youth centric interventions

While private sector development is tied strongly to various variables that impact it, our focus for the proposed interventions is based on ensuring that the percentage of youth not in employment, education or training decreases, while keeping them engaged proactively in society.

- Investing in revitalizing cultural heritage sites, to serve as innovation hubs, maker spaces, cultural and critical media literacy development centers in remote, isolated and urban/high population areas, may nurture belongingness, preserve heritage, and create sustainable local employment for youth, while increasing tourism. Due to daily frustrations with lack of self-actualization opportunities, many youth across the region idealize migrating abroad. With the exception of those who are interested in political participation, the vast majority of others see the possibility of achieving their dreams mostly abroad. With talent shortage, the local economies of areas with tourism potential are left empty, abandoned and in the vicious cycle of poverty. Among the many reasons for investing in isolated and remote areas is also the prevention of intraregional-national migration and abandonment of rural areas and villages. Investment in cultural heritage sites in these areas, especially due to intraregional-migration, is essential for encouraging innovation and preventing brain drain outside the country. These cultural heritage sites can be turned into social enterprises or social businesses that engage youth to further their mission through the private sector (by building products, services or even revitalizing similar spaces).
- While office work may not be as enthusiastically looked upon in many developed countries around the world, stereotypes around agriculture and farming, discourage many youths from Kosovo and the region in engaging in land cultivation. Investments in local areas focused heavily in making farming and agricultural production cool, could also change the course of private sector development and food security for the region.
- Support to the development of social businesses and social enterprises that take innovative approaches to solving market and social demands, while adapting to the needs of youth, utilizing their skills and insights, could decrease NEET and strengthen the private sector. With the exception of some tech initiatives, the vast majority of the private sector in the region is heavily focused on developing through the linear-economy, due to: cost, easy replicability of tried technology, or easy access to existing knowledge. Often, businesses, especially those women-owned or minority-owned have a very limited local market, as the products and services they have the technology, skill and capacity to produce may already be outdated or becoming obsolete, due to changing market preferences or needs.
- Sustainable economic development in the region can be achieved if investments are made for the long-term future, based on a circular economy mindset, rather than for the immediate short-term future. This is especially important considering the social distress that environmental degradation has been placing on public health.

KosovaLive's approach: using Media as a Means of Education

Investment in technological infrastructure, has enabled Kosovo to have the highest household internet penetration rate in the region and Europe.⁶ With 93% of households having home-based internet, access to online media information and content has become an inseparable part of life for Kosovars.

Yet, 80 percent of 15-year olds in Kosovo are functionally illiterate, meaning they can technically read and write, but cannot use those skills meaningfully for personal or professional advancement in school, play or work. The 24/7 access to a democratization of media creation, distribution and consumption among youth as empowering as it has been, has also created a widespread problem of sub-mediocre content production, disinformation, bias, bullying, and personal and data privacy issues.⁷ We have seen the functional illiteracy demon take many forms in our work in media.

Camouflaged in perceived capability, among participants in mentorships, internships, trainings, and even prospective job-seekers and job candidates, this omnipresence of functional illiteracy eventually forced us to address it more intently by using media as a means of education. Beginning from our early days, as the first subscription based online news agency, we were tasked to find quick fixes, to a deeply rooted problem, residing in lack of critical media literacy and functional illiteracy.

The newly-established Kosovo market, following the end of the 1999 Kosovo-Serbia war, inherited a workforce that had been trained in a segregated-parallel schooling system, aimed at predominantly preserving the language and passing down history. These early entities providing any service or product, were perplexed with creating value for the market, while educating and training for work a large portion of their staff, who had been trained mostly from older generations that had completed their schooling under the Yugoslavian education system.

The lack of stable market skill base has thus been an on-going battle for Kosovo before and growingly after the war, at all times crippled by the high brain drain. While after the war, a great focus was placed in decreasing illiteracy, the problem nowadays is the functional illiteracy, which is equally damaging for the person, as well as any prospective employee.

To address functional illiteracy, as one of the major contributors to private sector stagnation, KosovaLive has been working intensively with public, private and international actors to use media as a means of education among youth, young and mid-career professionals. A combinatory approach has been taken to solve functional illiteracy among at risk population groups, from both urban and rural areas, as well as minorities, based on continual engagement, with both peers, trainers and professionals. Immersive experiences, integrating technology as a central focus, individual delivery, and team-work responsibility, as well as holistic mindfulness of internal and external factors have enabled youth, who prior to KosovaLive were very disengaged, to enter a pathway of active pro-social engagement.

Cohesive thinking and writing have been one of the most challenging skills to develop among youth in our programs. A vast number of our program participants from very underserved communities have such severe deficiencies in general knowledge that many struggle to even begin jotting down ideas on paper. Many struggle with basic spelling and sentence structure. To manage to enhance skills for employability for these participants, many of whom are pursuing higher education in social sciences, journalism, media or political sciences, we needed

⁶ "Kosovo Agency of Statistics." *Kosovo's Internet Access Is Higher than the EU Average* |, July 2020, ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/kosovos-internet-access-is-higher-than-the-eu-average.

⁷ Shahini, Besa. "Functionally Illiterate: Why Did Kosovo Perform so Poorly in PISA?" *Prishtina Insight*, 7 ec. 2016, prishtinainsight.com/functionally-illiterate-kosovo-perform-poorly-pisa/.

a team of tutors, mentors, trainers and professional evaluators, who try to challenge, while trying to offer endearing support, in spite of the overwhelming problem, which they faced to try to mend decades long of educational damage. Active engagement in production of articles and videos of their interest, has tremendously helped to develop their critical thinking, critical media literacy, articulation, presentation, public speaking, and writing skills.

The establishment of a space, a virtual and live peer network, as well as the availability of a mentor for longer periods of time, has proven to be effective in ameliorating the lack of basic skills among new graduates. The provision of equipment for use and the development of a protocol of responsibility, carried out by peer-tutors, has enabled youth to practice professional etiquette. The Global Girl Media Kosova succession model, which engages alumni as leaders of the educational and professional bureau, has built ownership among young women and given them a place to go back to get their voices heard, while opening doors to other women.

KosovaLive also has established a clear reward system for youth, who demonstrate exceptional talent, dedication, and interest for positively contributing to society. Participating youth in several of our programs, internships, workshops, and trainings have been given additional project engagement opportunities, employment and job-placement. Many beneficiaries have brought friends to other programs and have encouraged their networks to engage in conferences and events held by the organization. The greatest professional and skill transformation has happened among the youth that have stayed the longest engaged, as participants, but also as co-producers of our various programs, activities, and events. Technology and the internet continue to transform the notion of media, making it an ever-more present part of our daily lives. Meanwhile, *media as a means of education* remains a central part of the development of the skill base of youth, transferable to any profession.

About KosovaLive

KosovaLive's mission is to utilize media as a means and promoter of education, dialogue and equality. As the first online subscription based news agency in Kosova, established in 2000, right after the end of the Kosovo-Serbia conflict, KosovaLive has had a long history of being one of the few independent, unbiased and reliable sources of information in Kosova. Since its inception, KosovaLive has played a crucial role in the development of skill and professionalism of youth from across Kosovo and beyond, offering mentorship, internship, one-on-one tutelage, training and fast-track learning to young and mid-career professionals to bridge the gap between market demanded skills and their previous academic training. Our work is driven by three pillars:

Media as means of dialogue: Designing projects that relate to using media as a means of dialogue between interethnic communities within the country and the region, KosovaLive works in building long-lasting understanding, cooperation and peace. From high level Kosovo-Serbia forums, involving politicians, journalists, community leaders and other dignitaries, to journalist conferences and exchanges, KosovaLive has been a leader in breaking the ice in inter-ethnic communication, ever since the early days of post-war.

Media as means of education: By using innovative mediums of communication, KosovaLive works on building critical thinking abilities and critical media literacy in youth, women, civic servants, officials, and journalists. Projects encompass a broad array of topics from Fakenews, Disinformation, Voting, Public Engagement, Women Empowerment, to Circular Economy, Design Thinking, and Social Entrepreneurship. More than decade long partnerships with higher education institutions in Kosova and the U.S., enable KosovaLive to educate and engage individuals from various backgrounds in multilingual and multinational activities, events, programs and initiatives.

Media as means of equality: Award winning innovative programs for increasing social, economic and gender equality, have improved the lives of hundreds across the country. The award winning all girls educational and professional bureau, part of internationally renowned GlobalGirl Media, focuses on women's empowerment through programs that enhance women's public and economic participation, through media.

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