

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	101081520 - VIESOJI ISTAIGA ATVIROS LIETUVOS FONDAS (OLF)
PIC number:	908898634
Project name and acronym:	COVIDemocracy in the Baltics — COVIDemocracy

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	WP7 – D7.1
Event name:	Participation in the open democracy festival, Birštonas, Lithuania
Type:	conference
In situ/online:	in-situ
Location:	Birštonas, Vilnius
Date(s):	August 26 th , 2023
Website(s) (if any):	https://olf.lt/en/covidemocracy-the-impact-of-the-pandemic-on-democracy-in-the-baltic-states/
Participants	
Female:	51
Male:	18
Non-binary:	
From country 1 [Lithuania]:	69
From country 2 [Estonia]:	
From country 3 [Latvia]:	
...	
Total number of participants:	69
From total number of countries:	1
Description	
<i>Provide a short description of the event and its activities.</i>	
<p>The discussion titled „Condemned to live in our own bubbles: can we still talk to others?“ happened during the annual discussion festival „Būtent!“ It’s a festival that attracts close to 5000 people every year, where different organisations and companies have their own discussion tents and can attract people who are familiar with their work, but also attract many others who are attenders of the festival.</p>	


The discussion was one of several discussions hosted by Open Lithuania Foundation in its tent. It happened at a prime time – 12:30, and compared to all the other discussions had a really good attendance. The calculations of people listening to the discussion have been made based on the analysis of photos, so the numbers are approximate and might be different, but they are well beyond the required 25 people.


The topic of the discussion was as follows: We live surrounded by people similar to ourselves, and on the social networks we follow those leaders whose opinion we agree with. We easily attach derogatory labels to others who are less "correct". This is a "watnik", that is a "Marchist", and here is "gay propaganda".


And while this labelling is neither new nor unusual, when we find ourselves in critical situations like the COVID-19 pandemic or war, things only get worse.

How does labelling divide society, what are the dangers to the state when groups in society not only don't talk to each other, but stop talking to each other? How to restore dialogue, learn to listen and hear?

The Participants of the discussion were these:

 Neringa Rekašiūtė - art activist, opinion maker, photographer, creator.

 Antanas Kairys is an associate professor at the Institute of Psychology at Vilnius University.

 Mažvydas Kunevičius - communication specialist and reserve officer in the fight against disinformation.

 Sandra Adomavičiūtė - Head of the Open Lithuania Foundation.

The discussion was moderated by:  Mindaugas Jackevičius, head of the LRT.lt portal editor

Sandra Adomavičiūtė reviewed the trends of societal division, what academics and experts say about the impact of crises on our democratic culture, she highlighted the role of media and elites in polarising society and the effect that labelling creates of pushing certain groups to the margins. Sandra also presented the latest research results: she discussed the omnibus questionnaire outcome, that has just been collected throughout the three Baltic states and highlighting that people across the three Baltic countries notice an uptake in negative responses to one's personal views.

Neringa Rekašiūtė - art activist, opinion maker, photographer, creator. This year, Neringa completed the master's program in politics and media, and her master's thesis on the reconstruction of the identity of Lithuanian Russian speakers in the context of the war was recognized as the best master thesis of the course. Neringa talked how the war aggravated the relations with the Russian speakers of Lithuania, and also their internal debates on their identity. She talked whether the war has impacted the perception of Russian speaking population in Lithuania based on her interviews with the respondents for her master thesis.

Mažvydas Kunevičius - communication specialist and reserve officer in the fight against disinformation. He was a representative of the Lithuanian Armed Forces in the Ministry of Health of Lithuania during Coronavirus pandemic, supervising issues of disinformation serving in the emergency operations center. Mažvydas talked about the mistrust in media, medical establishments that pandemic period has created. How certain members of society would seek alternative sources of information and that social networks are the most futile grounds for misinformation bubbles to spread, to the point that they can be even fatal (someone deciding to drink anti-freeze as a cure for Covid).

The conversation shifted to discuss particular group concerned with preservation of so called traditional family values and how this group has been even more marginalised in the recent years because of its views, certain labelling assigned to members of this groups. The panellists talked about the dangers of such labelling and also its dehumanising nature, refusal even to engage with members of such groups. Therefore – the need for dialogue.

Mažvydas continued to highlight the need to pay attention to the role of social media and therefore the necessity to provide social media literacy education to youth and other users, but also some sort of external moderation and regulation of content on social networks.

Neringa talked about the necessity to get out of our comfort zones when engaging people with different views, more creative ways, one on one conversations.

Sandra cautioned that polarised groups can become dangerous when they are starting to take anti-governmental or anti-constitutional position, advocating for dismantling of state institutions.

Antanas Kairys - associate professor of the Institute of Psychology at Vilnius University – talked about the psychological processes that push people to go into social bubbles, that it is actually human nature to look for people with similar views, similar identity traits. How to talk people with opposite strong views – trying to look for similarities and what unites, rather than focusing on what divides.

Speaking of solutions, several aspects have been mentioned: the role of media outlets, taking care of psychological health of society, building up psychological resistance of individuals, create outlet for anger, give people the sense of power and control, more community buildings (smaller circles, clubs, etc), taking not to the most radical opinion holders, but those who are in the grey zone. Improve and educate about the discussion culture,

Facebook page of the event - <https://www.facebook.com/events/283734501045358>

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).