

Building Social Bonds

As part of our Building Social Bonds project, FERI is proud to have partnered with the young and dynamic organization **Leaders Without Borders from Skopje**, founded by motivated young people who focus on digital skills, leadership, innovation, youth development, partnerships, and social progress.

Today, we have the pleasure of speaking with representatives from our Macedonian partner, **POZITIVO**, and **Youth organization Leaders Without Borders** to explore their perspectives on fostering dialogue, building social ties among young people, and addressing the challenges of interculturalism in today's world. This initiative aims to promote dialogue, intercultural understanding, tolerance, and strengthening social connections in the face of growing cultural tensions and weakening societal bonds.



Let's dive into our interview to learn about their inspiring journey and insights.

01. What inspired the creation of Leaders Without Borders in Skopje?

Leaders Without Borders:

The inspiration for Leaders Without Borders came from observing the unique struggles of Generation Z in a multicultural society. As young people ourselves, we understood the challenges of navigating cultural diversity, the pressures of digital transformation, and the need for genuine connection in an increasingly virtual world. Part of our team had already participated in Erasmus+ Mobility, which gave us valuable insights into the power of intercultural exchange, collaboration, and personal growth. These experiences inspired us to bring similar opportunities to our community, fostering connections and creating meaningful change among young people. Our founding team includes a young psychologist and IT students who recognized that many of our peers lacked the tools to bridge emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and cultural divides and express themselves meaningfully. This understanding drove us to create a platform that fosters dialogue and leadership and integrates digital skills and emotional intelligence to offer something relevant and impactful for our generation and the wider community.

POZITIVO:

We were drawn to collaborate with Leaders Without Borders because their mission perfectly aligns with our inclusivity and people empowerment values. Their ability to tap into the needs of Gen Z, made them a natural partner for us. Supporting initiatives that give young people the tools to navigate cultural diversity and build social bonds is at the core of our work. It resonates deeply with our commitment to creating lasting, positive change.



02. How do your organizations address cultural tensions and weakening social bonds among young people?

Leaders Without Borders:

It's all about creating spaces where young people feel heard and valued. Imagine a room full of young people from different backgrounds sitting together, sharing their personal stories and discovering how much they have in common. We aim for that with our workshops and open discussions. These aren't just events—they're experiences encouraging young people to embrace diversity and build bridges of connection, mutual respect, and personal growth.

POZITIVO:

We bring our expertise in designing programs that feel personal and community-driven. For instance, in one of our co-hosted events, we created meaningful opportunities for young people to break down barriers. We're building a mosaic of shared experiences that foster empathy and mutual understanding.

03. What challenges have you faced, and how have you overcome them?

Leaders Without Borders:

Gaining trust and visibility as a new organization was initially a challenge. It takes time to encourage participation and engage diverse audiences. Consistency, collaboration with partners like POZITIVO, networking, and creating meaningful events have helped us build a strong foundation in a very short time.

POZITIVO:

We've faced similar hurdles, so our role has been to mentor and support Leaders Without Borders. By sharing our experiences and resources, we've worked together to overcome these challenges. It's a partnership rooted in mutual growth.



04. Can you share a success story or highlight from your activities?

Leaders Without Borders:

One highlight was organizing a “Women Talks” event last week, where girls and women from different backgrounds came together. It was inspiring to see participants share their stories, suggest future activities, and share ideas on community projects that symbolize unity.

POZITIVO:

Recently, we contributed by facilitating a workshop in Tetovo with an inspiring group of young people that encouraged open dialogue, effective communication, teamwork, leadership, and living meaningful lives. The feedback we received—about how the experience changed participants’ perceptions—was enriching. At the beginning of December, we hosted Avely Austa, a youth worker and coach from Estonia, as part of her professional development, providing us with a priceless opportunity to bring rich multicultural perspectives, learn more about young people from Estonia and their needs, and gain fresh insights to enhance our work.



05. How can young people effectively build social bonds in today’s world?

Leaders Without Borders:

For Gen Z, authentic connection often means blending digital interactions with real-world experiences, creating spaces where they can express themselves openly, collaborate meaningfully, and feel genuinely understood. Social bonds flourish when people have real opportunities to connect personally—whether working together on a community project, sharing stories during a cultural exchange, or using online platforms to build understanding rather than division. It’s about creating spaces where people feel safe to open up, share their experiences, and truly listen to one another. These moments of connection are where trust, empathy, and lasting relationships are born.

POZITIVO: We also see the potential of collaborative activities, like volunteer programs or joint creative initiatives. These experiences build bonds and teach empathy and teamwork, which are key to strengthening communities.

06. What competencies do young people often lack, and how can these skills be developed?

Leaders Without Borders: I would say, effective communication and social intelligence are rare but essential skills. Many young people also need better conflict resolution and emotional intelligence training. These can be developed through workshops and hands-on experiences that emphasize collaboration.

POZITIVO: I completely agree. Many young people struggle with soft skills, but youth camps and mentorship programs have proven to be incredibly effective in bridging this gap. By pairing young people with experienced mentors, we can create a supportive environment where they can learn and practice these skills while tackling real-world challenges. It's this hands-on, guided approach that makes a lasting impact.

07. What are the biggest challenges in fostering dialogue, tolerance, and understanding amidst intercultural tensions?

Leaders Without Borders: Fake news and misinformation are major hurdles. They reinforce stereotypes and deepen divisions. It's hard to address these issues effectively without proper platforms for dialogue reinforced with critical thinking skills.

POZITIVO: Another challenge is overcoming the fear of the unknown. Experiential learning—such as cultural immersion programs and conflict management skills—can help them overcome these fears and embrace diversity.



08. How do young people handle intercultural challenges, and what opportunities exist?

Leaders Without Borders: While misunderstandings can happen, many young people are eager to learn when given the right tools. The challenge lies in creating structured, meaningful opportunities for engagement.

POZITIVO: Exactly. With proper education and access to platforms for intercultural exchange, these challenges can turn into opportunities for growth. It's about creating environments where curiosity and openness are celebrated.

09. What are your plans, and how do you see your organizations evolving?

Leaders Without Borders: We're excited to grow by building partnerships with schools and universities, reaching more young people, and inviting them to join our journey. We will continue organizing experiential workshops and webinars. At the heart of it all is our vision to inspire and empower the next generation of young leaders to continue building bridges and creating a more inclusive world.

POZITIVO: For us, the goal is to deepen our collaboration with Leaders Without Borders and other local and international organizations. We're also exploring ways to scale our joint initiatives, such as creating regional youth camps and integrating our programs into educational and training curriculums. Together, we believe we can make a lasting impact.

The collaboration between **FERI**, **Leaders Without Borders**, and **POZITIVO** demonstrates the power of partnerships in driving social change. By fostering dialogue, promoting tolerance, and building social bonds, these organizations are paving the way for a more inclusive future. Our work reminds us that remarkable progress is possible when young people unite across differences and geographical distances.



Funded by the EU. The views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the European Union or the European Executive Agency for Education and Culture (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the EACEA are responsible for them.

All the results generated by the project “Building Social Connections” are available under open licenses (CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED). They can be used free of charge and without restrictions. Copying or reusing these materials in whole or in part without the author's consent is prohibited. In case of reuse of the results, the source of funding and its authors must be cited.