

MOZAIC A - M

“EVALUATION OF “MENK ENK”
YOUTH PROGRAM”

FINDINGS OF QUALITATIVE SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY

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**PRESENTED TO
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18 BAGHRAMYAN AVE., 2ND FLOOR, 375019 YEREVAN, ARMENIA
TEL: 374 10 561491, FAX: 374 10 561410

The given research aimed at revealing the opinion of the Armenian teenagers about “Menk enk” youth program, their interests and preferences, as well as their attitudes towards certain issues and events.

The research has been carried out through focus-group discussions, conducted with teenagers aged 12-18. The discussion participants were split up into two age groups: 12-15 and 16-18 years old. Two focus-groups have been conducted with the representatives of each of the age groups.

Before starting the discussion, the participants watched three “Menk enk” programs, after which they discussed the materials presented in the programs, the way they were presented, etc.

Younger age group (12-15 years old)

First of all, the participants discussed when and why they have started watching “Menk enk”, and what exactly has attracted them. The representatives of this age group stated that the program has attracted them first of all with its stories about the neighboring countries, as *“we have no other information sources about the life of those countries”*. The participants say it is very interesting for them to know how do the teenagers live in Georgia and Azerbaijan, what are their interests and problems, or what do they think about various issues. The teenagers are also interested in culture, customs and traditions of our neighbors, the similarities and differences that we might have. Fourteen year old Mariam believes *“it is possible to find a lot in common and build relationships based on that”*.

Some of the participants also like the fact that “Menk enk” helps them to discover new and interesting details even about the Armenian history or about the places and events that they thought they know quite well.

The focus group participants are pleased that the program is prepared by teenagers, as in this case *“a great deal of attention is paid to the opinion of children, with no regard to their age”*, *“people of our age know better our interests and problems”*.

The overwhelming majority of the discussion participants state they have started watching “Menk enk” during the last 12 months. Most of them also say first they have seen the program by chance, and later started watching it regularly as it was interesting to them. And only a few of the discussion participants have started watching the program upon friends’ or relatives’ advice.

However, around half of the participants say they watch the program occasionally: they watch it either by chance or when they have nothing else to do. At this, the overwhelming majority of the

focus-group participants state they regularly watch Armenian or foreign soap-operas, comic TV programs and musical programs or channels.

Topics that are of interest or leave the teenagers indifferent: As it could be expected, the discussion participants show more interest towards the materials presenting the sports or art they have been or are going in for. However, all of the discussion participants, both girls and boys, are more interested in materials about sports, especially those presenting non-traditional types that are unknown for them. For example, almost all of the participants liked the material about three boys playing non-traditional basketball. The teenagers also stated they were happy and at the same time very surprised to know that this material is made in Armenia and presents Armenian young people.

The discussion participants also liked the materials about young racers and graffitiists. Summarising we can say that the young participants prefer materials, which present topics that are new to them, that are not presented by other programs as well, that tell about *“free-thinking”*, *“modern”* and *“progressive”* young people and their *“modern and progressive”* interests.

However, when suggested to offer their own topics for the program, none of the suggestions covered the interests of the discussion participants stated above. In particular, the participants have mainly stated they would present the daily life and problems of teenagers living in rural areas, the school-life, will make some material about children in playgrounds. Some of the participants would like to present the historical places of Armenia.

There are certain topics that were not mentioned by the participants to be interesting, but most of them have stated the importance and usefulness of these materials. In particular they have mentioned the materials about teenagers who have been acting as school principal and teachers for a day, teenagers writing articles for newspaper and participating in discussions on democracy, etc. The participants like the fact that the teenagers are given the chance to express their opinion on important issues, with no regard to their age and experience: *“Children can prove something if acting together: They can show the adults that they can do serious work with no regard to their age”*.

But the teenagers are a bit cautious regarding the topics that usually are not spoken about in Armenia. In particular, the majority of the participants stated that the material about young people taking Satanism as philosophy is very interesting to them, but at the same time many of them are not sure if it should be shown in the frames of "Menk enk".

The materials that the participants did not like or did not consider to be interesting, mainly tell about "ordinary" professions or events, as the participants have the chance of meeting those in their daily life or hearing about them from many other sources. In particular, the overwhelming majority of teenagers considered the material about blacksmiths, or young people singing in karaoke-bar to be uninteresting, as *“there is nothing new in the material about the guys singing in karaoke-bar”* and *“the material about the blacksmiths was boring and a bit sad”*.

Regarding the materials about arts and animals, we can state that the discussion participants did not have any general opinion on this. This is mainly conditioned with the difference of their interests and tastes.

The discussion participants talked also about the program moderators. Here all of them stated they are pleased with the fact that “Menk enk” is not only moderated by teenagers but also prepared by them, as *“the program becomes brighter when the moderators are young people”* and *“they are of our age and have the same interests”*.

The regional problems and our neighbors as the teenagers see them: The majority of the discussion participants believe that the aim of “Menk enk” is to help the teenagers of the three republics to get to know each other, creating positive attitudes towards each other, as well as presenting the culture and traditions of the neighboring countries. The young focus group participants also think that “Menk enk” reaches these goals: *“The future belongs to children, and if we are in good relations with hour neighbors still from childhood, the regional relations will be better and more peaceful in future”*, says twelve year old Silva, and fourteen year old Mariam is sure that *“if each of us starts changing the opinion of his/her family members about hour neighbors, later we will be able to change the attitude of the other societies as well”*.

The discussion participants state that the main source of information about the neighboring countries and nations are their relatives and friends, television, and also internet for some of them. Many participants say they have had the chance of meeting Georgian teenagers and making their own opinion about them based on this personal experience. But, naturally, none of them had ever met Azeri teenagers and have no opinion about them at all, as *“we hear only about political issues from adults and media, and nothing about teenagers”*. Hence, it is not surprising that the interest of the discussion participants towards the daily life, interests and problems of Azeri teenagers is very big. The participants state they knew nothing about the teenagers living in the neighboring country before watching “Menk enk”, which raised their

interest towards our neighbors. Most of the focus group participants say they were surprised to see that Azeri teenagers have almost the same interests and problems with them.

Talking about the attitude towards Azeris, the majority of the discussion participants say they feel no enmity towards them, especially towards young people: *“I think we should not have negative attitude towards the nation: it was a war of the republics and not the nations”, “Children have nothing to do with politics”, “Children are not responsible for what their ancestors have done”*. At the same time the discussion participants say they would like to know what the Azeri children are told about Armenians and if they have the same attitude towards them. The majority of the participants would like to meet Azeri teenagers.

However, those few participants who have stated they have negative attitude towards Azeris, also say they feel no enmity towards Azeri children. The participants also say they would not like “Menk enk” talk about politics, although they want to get more information about Azerbaijan: *“Trying to form positive attitudes and improve the relations with Azeris is already politics and that is enough”*.

It is worth mentioning that none of the focus-group participants have stated he/she has “warm” or “sympathetic” feelings towards Georgians; here the attitude of the teenagers can be described as “neutral” or “cautious”. Those of the participants, who have had personal contacts with Georgian teenagers, say they were surprised that the Georgians were very nice to them, and although they also have positive attitude towards them, they feel they are quite different.

We have also asked the focus group participants to evaluate the **new graphical design of “Menk enk”**: more than half of the teenagers think that it is too colorful. In particular the participants think that the new graphics *“contains too many colors”* and that *“the colors are too dense”*. This group of participants prefers the previous option of “Menk enk” graphics, as *“it is more placid and light”*. Another, smaller group of participants would like to see the new graphics but with the music of the previous one.

Before starting the discussion, the focus group participants watched also a short film about a summer camp of Armenian, Azeri and Georgian teenagers. The movie appeared to be extremely interesting for all of the focus group participants. Each of them found something interesting and new in it: *“It was interesting to see how the enemies communicate with each other”, “If the Georgians say that they could not differ Armenians and Azeris, it means that the nationality is not important for them, they are all just children”, “The Azeri teenagers preferred*

communicating with the Georgians, this means that their parents have expressed their negative opinion about Armenians”.

Some of the participants have mentioned that they would like to see how the children first met in the camp and how they said good-bye to each other, or would like to learn about their daily life in the camp. All of the focus group participants would like “Menk enk” to present such films.

Concluding the discussion, the participants tried to describe "Menk enk" in one word and here is what we got: *"interesting", "exploring", "intellectual"*.

Elder age group (16-18 years old)

The representatives of this age group have started watching “Menk enk” quite long ago, but most of them say they watch the program occasionally. The main reason for this is lack of free time and being overloaded at school and also with the private lessons that most of them take. The discussion participants state the program to be very interesting for them. But at the same time most of them believe that “Menk enk” would hardly be interesting for young people of their age, especially the boys, and that only a few of their friends watch it. Some of the participants believe the program to be targeted at younger viewers. The teenagers think that today people of their age have different interests: internet, magazines about show-business representatives, musical programs, etc.

The discussion participants say they like “Menk enk” as it gives the opportunity of *“presenting our art and crafts, getting acquainted with the interests of young people from neighboring countries, their culture, etc.”*, *“Sometimes, thanks to “Menk enk”, we discover new interesting things even about Armenia and Armenians”*.

The representatives of this age group also like the moderators of “Menk enk” to be people of their age. Some of the participants would like to see not only Armenian moderators, but also Georgian and Azeri, as *“this would symbolize the unity of young people of the three countries”*, which the discussion participants consider to be the main goal of “Menk enk”.

The topics and materials the teenagers liked or disliked the most: Here the opinion of the elder age group representative almost matches that of the younger participants of the focus group discussion. The representatives of this group as well liked the materials about people with unusual interests and occupations the most. And they considered the materials the heroes of which they meet quite often in their daily life and which *“are not different”* to be uninteresting.

Here as well, the participants liked the material about Armenian young people playing basketball with their own rules, young racers and graffitiists the most.

Summarizing the discussion results we can say that the teenagers classify the materials into three groups:

- Interesting materials, which tell about progressive young people and their unusual interests, that are not very popular in Armenia yet;
- Materials that are of no interest, as they tell about “*ordinary people and their ordinary interests or occupation*”;
- And materials, which are perhaps not very interesting, but are *useful*: for instance materials about democracy and human rights.

The representatives of the elder age group expressed also their opinion about the attractiveness of the materials and the way those are presented. They believe some materials would be more interesting, if presented in a different way. In particular, they did not like two of the materials (telling about young people who work as waiters and about young people singing in karaoke-bar), as “*there was lack of light, thus the material and its heroes seemed to be dull*”. The discussion participants also believe that the material about the blacksmiths, which almost none of them liked, would be more interesting if some interesting sides of the blacksmith’s work were revealed and if the material was presented in a different, a bit more dynamic way.

However, all of the discussion participants liked the material about young basketball players: they mentioned the interesting work of the operator. Some of the participants mentioned they especially liked the material as it tells about young people who have their own style and world-view, the mood and energy of which is transmitted to the viewers. The discussion participants think that the materials should inspire the viewers to do something interesting on their own, make them not to be scared of having and expressing their own opinion and ideas.

One of the materials of “Our advertisement” rubric, which tells about deaf and dumb young people, has captured the special attention of the discussion participants. They consider this topic to be very interesting, as “*it tells about the inner life of people who usually live in solitude. It is very interesting to see how they communicate with each other. Many of us could not even imagine that deaf people can dance without hearing the music, at least the way we do*

it". One of the participants suggested also making a material about disabled but talented young people.

Some of the participants would also like the materials to be presented in a way, which would show the adults that *"everything has changed now and help them to understand the teenagers"*.

Our "good and evil" neighbors: The discussion participants state that before they started watching "Menk enk", the only source of information about Azerbaijan for them were their parents and the media. But this information mainly covered the politics and Azerbaijan as a republic, but not its people, especially the teenagers. Hence, "Menk enk" is the only information source for the discussion participants about the teenagers living in the neighboring countries.

The young people state though they feel no enmity towards Azeri teenagers, nevertheless, their attitude is a bit cautious. However, almost all of the focus group participants say "Menk enk" has changed their attitude positively.

The discussion participants state they have many friends who are hostile towards Azeris. Moreover, the participants believe that "Menk enk" would be of no interest for these young people and they cannot convince them to watch it.

Some of the discussion participants are sure that the film about the summer camp for Armenian, Azeri and Georgian teenagers is much more effective in mitigating the mutual stereotypes and enmity, than "Menk enk" itself. Most of the focus group participants would like to meet Azeri and Georgian teenagers in such a camp themselves.

Regarding the other neighboring country, Georgia and Georgians, the majority of the teenagers have had the chance of communicating with young Georgians, and their attitude towards them is quite friendly.

The film mentioned above is definitely very interesting for the discussion participants. They mentioned they would like to see such films in the frames of "Menk enk", and suggested the films to be at least a bit longer, present the first meeting of young people and their daily life in the camp. Some of the participants would also like the young people from Turkey to be involved in the project. The discussion participants say they especially liked the sincerity of the heroes.

As it could be expected, teenagers are highly sensitive towards the opinion of the Georgian and Azeri teenagers about their Armenian friends. And most of the suggestions they made, were about making a better impression next time.

When discussing the graphical design of “Menk enk”, all of the discussion participants stated they definitely liked the previous option more, as it was “*kinder and transmitted positive emotions*”. And the new version “*contains too many colors*”. Besides this, the discussion participants did not like also the music of the new version.