

Narrative Vulnerability. The experiences of the pandemic transformed through art

For children and teenagers, the COVID-19 pandemic was a traumatizing life event. Schools were closed, their care givers were anxious, and they had to face the sickness and even death of their loved ones. The research team from the *Media and Epidemics. Technologies of Science Communication and Public Health in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (MEDEP) project addressed this issue in collaboration with the Romanian non-profit organization Fragile Society, facilitating a safe space for a group of high school students to process these complicated emotions through storytelling and film making.

The first part of the project was focused on writing original scripts based on the students' experiences. This involved making a timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic and placing participants' personal as well as media events on it to recreate the pandemic's story, while also integrating individual memories into a bigger picture. The writing sessions were a mix of storytelling, laughter, and tears as both the high school students and the facilitators, shared their COVID-19 experiences. The concept of autoethnography was introduced to students, elucidating the nuanced distinction between recounting and narrating personal stories. The wri-

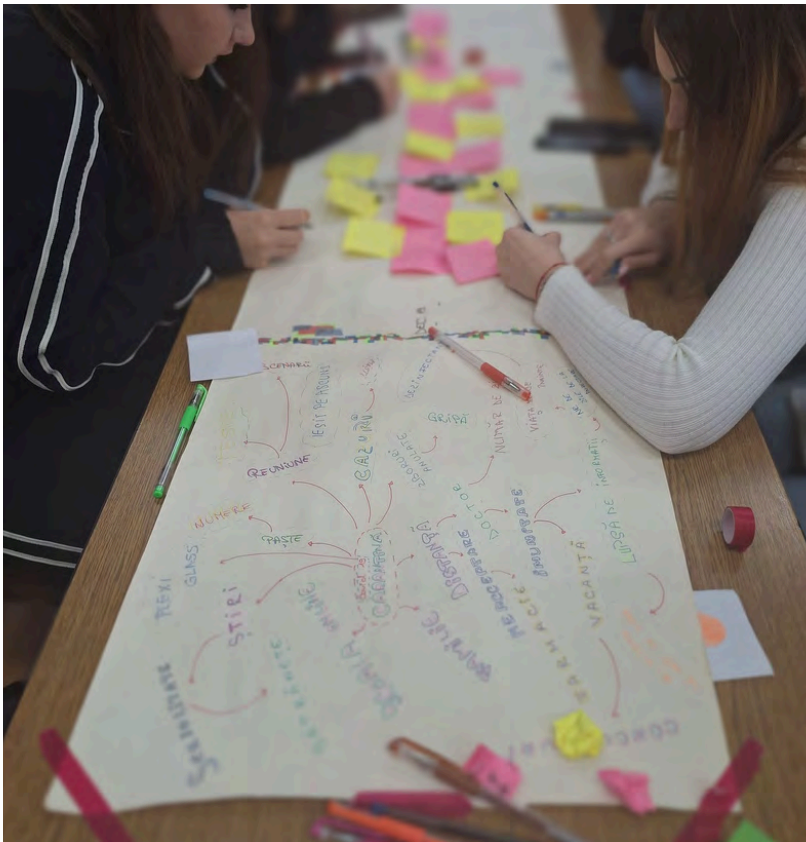
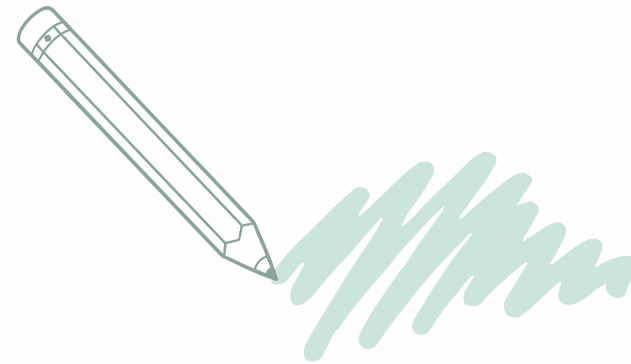
ting process was demanding, necessitating extensive feedback, primarily provided in group settings. The resilience and openness exhibited by these 17-year-olds were particularly commendable. Not only did they allow themselves to be vulnerable, they also welcomed constructive feedback from their peers on how to enhance their texts.

The individual narratives evolved from personal anecdotes into complex stories enriched with interpersonal tension. Ultimately, these evolved into four scripts:

- **“The Dove”** narrates the story of a small wounded dove that enters a girl's room during lockdown, profoundly impacting her and her family's life for a few days. This contemplative text delves into themes of confinement, familial responsibility, and hope for a better future.
- **“The Grandmother”** explores the strained relationship between a doctor, who is also a mother, and her two children as they strive to protect their grandmother from infection during the pandemic. The narrative culminates in the grandmother's death, leaving the family grappling with guilt.

- **“Vaping”** examines the development of old friendships during COVID-19, the emergence of new romance, and the protagonist’s struggle with the desire to live a normal life devoid of constant justifications.
- **“The Tree”** depicts the evolving relationship between a girl and her father as they plant a tree together, learning to establish healthy boundaries amid his fear of COVID-19 and her desire to visit a friend.

The second part of the project involved turning scripts into short films, directed and acted by the students themselves. As a result, three short videos depicting life during the pandemic were filmed in participants’ homes, the Fragile Society’s office, and public spaces.



This collaboration between the research consortium, the social organization, and the youngest generation with experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic allowed a challenging experience to be transformed into an artistic practice. It demonstrated an alternative way of narrating pandemic memory and its media entanglements outside of academia.

Photo by: The Fragile Society