Reactive Youth

PROMOTING POLICIES AND YOUTH DIALOGUE

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

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INTRODUCTION - or **why** and **how** to foster youth participation in rural areas?

In today's rapidly evolving world, the **voices** and **perspectives of young people** have become increasingly crucial in shaping the future of our societies. However, one demographic that often goes unnoticed in the discourse of participation and development is rural youth. Living in rural areas brings its own unique set of challenges and opportunities, which are especially felt by young people. For example, the majority of young people consulted for this Policy Brief mentioned that there aren't enough opportunities in their regions, when it comes to job and community engagement. Many show interest in leaving their territories as well. Put this, it is essential for local authorities to recognize and actively foster the participation of young people in these communities. By doing so, **the untapped potential of rural youth can be unleashed**, igniting a transformative force for sustainable development and rural revitalisation.

For **local authorities**, **there is a significant responsibility to actively engage and empower rural youth**, contradicting some tendencies which are often present in these settings.. For example, most of the entities which were consulted during this Policy Brief think that rural local authorities don't put enough effort in terms of policy making and young people engagement. The majority also mentioned that they feel that young people don't feel empowered to manifest their thoughts and young people themselves feel local authorities aren't interested in them. However, such can be tackled by local authorities, through recognizing rural youththeir potential, providing meaningful platforms for participation, and supporting their ideas and initiatives are key actions that can be taken to create a more inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable future for rural communities. **By bridging the gap between young people and decision-makers,** local authorities have the opportunity to foster a sense of belonging and ownership among rural youth. Besides that, this allows local authorities to become aligned with their citizens' needs and concerns, since youth participation reduces time and funding as it is more efficient than researching or other methods to create youth policies, etc.

A pivotal aspect of achieving this goal is the recognition of the **existing bridge between local authorities and youth**: local youth workers operating in the local environment. These youth workers, along with the organizations they represent, possess the necessary connections and understanding to effectively engage with young people while speaking the language of decision-makers. By empowering these local youth workers, local authorities can tap into their expertise to help bridge the gap and facilitate meaningful youth participation.

Empowering local youth workers involves providing them with the necessary resources, support, and training to effectively engage with young people and collaborate with local authorities. Investment in their professional development strengthens their ability to facilitate meaningful dialogue, develop innovative initiatives, and advocate for the interests of young people in rural areas.

Furthermore, creating an environment that values and respects the contributions of young people is crucial. **Local authorities must actively seek out their opinions, involve them in decision-making processes, and implement their ideas and recommendations**. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and active participation, local authorities send a powerful message to young people that their voices matter and that they have the power to shape their own communities, especially because, often, young people believe they indeed have this power, but they don't find the opportunities, tools or support to concretize it, as shown later on this Policy Brief.

In **conclusion**, by recognizing the importance of youth participation and actively engaging with rural youth through the collaboration and empowerment of local youth workers, local authorities can bridge the gap between young people and decision-makers. Together, they can create a future where rural areas thrive, and every voice is heard. Embracing the energy, passion, and innovative spirit of young people is key to achieving a sustainable and inclusive future for all.

By the end of this Policy Brief, **the reader will understand how to tackle these themes and how local authorities are central to making all that has been referenced possible.**

THE REACTIVE YOUTH PROJECT

What is it?

“The “Reactive Youth: Rural Entrepreneurship, Active Citizenship and Territories Identity Visibility through the Engagement of Youth” is an Erasmus+ cooperation partnership in the field of Youth that proposes to strengthen and leverage the role of young people in revitalizing rural areas. The Plataforma del Valle del Tiétar en Transición (PVTT) is the coordinator of the project and partners are: Neo Sapiens (ES), Alpine Pearls (AT), Βαρδάκειος Σχολή Ερμούπολης (EL), Polygonal (IT), Pista Mágica (PT), Mreža MaMa (SI).

What does it want to achieve?

“Reactive Youth” aims to empower youth living in rural areas as change makers of their communities towards more sustainable social and economic models. By promoting their civic engagement and structured dialogue with social actors, youth will be able to share their creativity and entrepreneurship to create employment and training opportunities for them in their regions by taking advantage of their natural and cultural richness, contributing to their growth and stopping their depopulation..

Where?

Project activities will take place in all the cooperating countries, in Spain, Austria, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia.

How?

The project's goals will be reached with concrete outputs:

- A **Policy brief** (this document you are reading!) that gathers and consolidates valuable practices, research, and policies concerning youth and environmental matters, establish accessible participation channels for rural youth, challenge the notion of rural youth as "fewer opportunities" through collaborations and opportunities, facilitate youth involvement in sustainable transformation, assist local authorities in implementing grassroots approaches, encourage structured dialogue and strategies for rural development, promote youth engagement in democratic processes, and enhance the recognition and quality of youth work through effective collaboration among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners.
- A **toolkit** to equip professionals and wannabe professionals in youth work, with relevant non-formal education methods, and strengthen the role of young people at local level. The project especially wants to encourage active participation, innovation, and creativity among young people, facilitating democratic engagement, and nurturing a sense of belonging at various levels. In this way, the project wants to showcase and foster collaboration with existing initiatives and practices related to youth participation in rural areas, fostering reference and synergistic collaborations.

- Developing identity maps, to cultivate a collective commitment among rural areas and their inhabitants, emphasizing the preservation of historical memory and promoting environmental consciousness. Through interactive and visually appealing materials, the rich cultural heritage and environmental value of each region are showcased to attract both residents and outsiders, encouraging their involvement in various activities. Emphasis is placed on participatory processes that recognize the pivotal role of youth as catalysts for change within their communities.

Who does it want to involve?
The project involves a diverse range of stakeholders.

Firstly, it targets young people between the ages of 14 and 20 living in rural areas, particularly those associated with partners and beneficiaries such as students in schools or members of NGOs. Special attention is given to engaging young individuals who are not part of any social entity or unorganized, as well as those under 18 who have not yet fully participated as citizens, encouraging their future engagement, including voting in local elections.

Additionally, local youth associations focused on cultural activities and youth engagement, along with entities involving professional youth workers or volunteers in the youth field, play a crucial role in the project. The project also encompasses youth centers in rural areas, enabling the development of new services to address local needs. Local authorities, including municipalities and regional public actors responsible for youth and environmental policies in isolated areas, are involved in shaping and implementing the project's recommendations. Decision makers who can benefit from the project's Policy Brief receive strategies to be adopted and incorporated into municipal and regional youth plans.

Furthermore, educators, teachers, and facilitators working in rural territories are targeted to promote youth participation, enhance their professional skills, and utilize non-formal education methods. Rural start-ups and informal groups aiming to promote rural heritage, culture, and the environment are also engaged in the project. Local experts in various fields such as culture, tourism, and other relevant thematic areas are involved to support young participants in decision-making processes and provide professional opportunities. Ultimately, the entire rural community and its members stand to benefit from the youth initiatives created through the project, fostering local development and engagement.

A STARTING POINT: Concepts to Bear in Mind

In the previous point, Reactive Youth was presented as a ERASMUS+ project which links 3 main ideas: “Rural development”; “Local identity”; and “Youth participation”. By their very nature, it’s fundamental to clarify their definition and create a common ground of perspectives.

Rural Development

The definition of rural areas isn’t a universal concept. In early years, the definition of rural was largely dependent on population metrics and their respective distinction from urban areas. Nevertheless, this has improved, giving place to a broader set of criteria, which takes into account qualitative characteristics, such as locational practices, attitudes, values, history and community (Hamilton, 1930). Employment also started to be considered (Smith & Parvin, 1975), as well as migration values, proximity to urban centers (Cloke, 1977), access to healthcare (Riddick and Leadley, 1978), education (Mao et al., 2015), resource allocation (Beynon et al., 2016), agriculture (Mitchell and Doyle, 1996), culture and subjective perspectives (Halfacree, 1993; Woods, 2009), among others. This promoted the circumscription of specific rural areas and respective heterogeneity, which resulted in an increase of customized policies.

In recent years, and taking Europe as a context, such a tendency has grown and SHERPA (2020) could differ at least 6 common approaches, when defining what a rural area is: administrative, morphological, locational, economic, landscape and combined (one than more) approaches. Each country usually has its own criteria when it comes to these, showing that the concept is broad and imbued with a variety of point of views. However, research and literature has also identified major tendencies which tend to affect these areas. Overall, worldwide rural populations have been decreasing and this can be attributed to a couple of factors, such as: limited job (Bell and Osti, 2010) and higher education and qualification opportunities (Crouch and Nguyen, 2020); narrowed healthcare (Zhao et al., 2019); weaker infrastructure systems (energy, transport, information and communications networks); entertainment and recreational activities (EUROSTAT, 2022); among others. With this in mind, the idea of "Rural development" grew as a way to tackle these challenges. As a concept, it accompanied the transformation of terms such as “Rural” and “Rurality”, as it’s considered now to be a participative and polyvalent notion, which goes beyond materialistic perspectives of growth. Such examples can be seen in the policy ideals portrayed in Europe, since it’s widely discussed by the European Commission.

According to them, rural areas are “...the least favoured regions in the EU, with a GDP per head significantly below the European average”. This greatly affects the people living within these territories, which “...equals to a total of 137 million people, representing almost 30% of its population and over 80% of its territory”. With this, European Commission has composed a long-term vision, up to 2040, to ensure rural area’s territorial and social cohesion in the economic, cultural, political, environmental and accessibility sectors.

1 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Urban-rural_Europe_-_demographic_developments_in_rural_regions_and_areas
2 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/themes/rural-development_en
3 https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en
4 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2021:345:FIN

This vision hopes to strengthen rural areas as places of diversity, sustainable growth, competitiveness and prosperity. To achieve such, the European Commission has underlined the need for: auscultation of authorities, entities and the rural community's perspectives and voices; creation of networks and common lines of communication and action; and execution of well coordinated commitments.

Local Identity

The concepts of "Rural" and "Rural development" are, in the present days, highly connected to a broader and qualitative conception, which takes into account the rural area's own values and attributes. As such, it's important to understand the concept of identity and how it can be an important factor in rural areas, which are imbued with diversity when it comes to history, patrimony, religion, culture, practices, natural resources and landscapes, community relations and everyday life.

Overall, and according to Lawler (2014, p.7), identity is multifaceted, referring to adoption of social roles and identity categories, sense of self and people's own and outer perception of themselves. Since it's a concept which manifests subjectivity, it must be said that it's a result of a confluence of social and personal factors, which then help shape people's values and conduct. Besides, identity and the shaping of it is an ongoing process, considering one's lifetime and their own experience of events, relationships, challenges, among others. When applied to a local setting, one must take into account the number of cultural, historical and community factors, which allow that territory to have unique characteristics, not repeatable under exactly the same circumstances, in other settings. In rural areas, this can lead to the emergence of many lifestyles, network patterns, social roles and values which directly influence one's sense of identity and are modified by them. In other words, the individual also shapes their surroundings and the structural processes which are intrinsic to them.

Youth Participation

"Youth participation" is a concept that connects directly to active citizenship, democracy and society. As such, it's a term that allows one to measure the involvement of young people in their communities and nations. On this matter, Roger Hart (1992) has conceptualized a "Ladder of Young People's Participation", which consists of 8 rungs and that's considered in this Policy Brief. According to his work, youth's degree of engagement depends on the representation of youth's main thoughts, ideas and challenges and how that's transfigured into society. In the higher levels of this ladder, young people have direct influence over the planning, organizing, executing and evaluation of activities which serve their purposes and help shape their opportunities in the fields of economy, politics, culture, health, networking, education, among others.

**Adapted from USAID and YouthPower Learning. Youth and Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Programming: A Technical Guide.*

ROGER HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION*

RUNG 8- Youth initiated shared decisions with adults: Youth-led activities, in which decision making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners.

RUNG 7 - Youth initiated and directed: Youth-led activities with little input from adults.

RUNG 6 - Adult initiated shared decisions with youth: Adult-led activities, in which decision making is shared with youth.

RUNG 5- Consulted and informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions.

RUNG 4- Assigned, but informed: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, decision-making process, and have a role.

RUNG 3- Tokenism: Adult-led activities, in which youth may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback.

RUNG 2- Decoration: Adult-led activíties, in which youth understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned.

RUNG 1- Manipulation: Adult-led activities, in which youth do as directed without understanding of the purpose for the activities.

As such, rural youth and their respective participation are indeed highlighted in the rural vision, mentioned before, especially when it comes to "Actions for stronger rural areas" and "Actions for prosperous rural areas". With this, the European Commission hopes to promote actions which encourage education, training and employment opportunities for young people in rural areas and participation of rural young people in EU funded programmes. Besides, the European Commission has the EU Youth Strategy, which has "Moving Rural Youth Forward" as one of its set goals. With this in mind, the European Commission aims, with these efforts, to ensure the creation of opportunities that allow higher levels of youth engagement, in order to tackle problems which directly affect them in rural areas and that have an elevated impact on European societies as whole, especially when it comes to resource distribution and equality.

How do they connect?

Now, it's important to understand the connection between these 3 concepts. Just as was discussed earlier, rural settings have well documented challenges which can compromise their overall long-term sustainability and maintenance of local and cultural heritages, which are unique. Young people are also one of the groups more affected by phenomena, such as social exclusion, and are one of the forces who can contribute to rural areas' revitalization. Because of this, youth participation is pivotal for rural development, since their perspectives and main experiences should be taken into account during policy-making, ensuring that those are well adjusted to their realities. To warrant this, it's important to reinforce a sense of local identity within youth, since it contributes to the likelihood of self initiative participation and engagement within the community. Besides, this is a mutual shaping process, as youth engagement and participation also fortifies their local identity.

EUROPEAN UNION: Overview of Data and Initiatives on Youth Engagement and Rural Development

In the previous chapter, it was possible to discuss 3 different concepts. During their run-through, European reality was taken into account and, with them in mind, it's now necessary to engage in the discussion of some data and tendencies, especially when it comes to demographics, employment, rural development and youth participation. Here, it'll be important to refer to what exists in terms of initiatives and give an overall contextualization, which will allow a better understanding of the data collected on the rural territories mentioned by this Policy Brief.

Total number of inhabitants:
In the year of 2021, there were 447 199 800 people living in the European Union Territories.

Young people (14-30 years old, if available) living in these territories:
Between the years of 2001 and 2020, there was an overall decrease in young people.

Reduction of the population in recent years:
Between the years of 2001-2020, population increased from 429 million to 447 million, a growth of 4%. However, between the years of 2020-2021, population decreased by 312 000 people.

Unemployment rate:
Between the year of 2008-2013, the unemployment rate in Europe went up from 16% to 24.4%. Since 2013, it has been lowering, with record lows of 14.9%, but it remains twice as high as general unemployment. Stable labor market integration started to take longer as well: many job-to-job transitions and precarious work, which greatly affected vulnerable groups (e.g. racial and ethnic minorities).

When it comes to young people, with ages between 15-24 years old, in the year of 2020, the unemployment rate was a total of 15.9%; 19.4% (born inside EU) and 27.5% (born outside EU). In the year of 2021, these last values were higher: 31.1% (born outside) to 31.3% (born in the EU).

What are the main youth employment programmes in these territories?:

1.Youth Guarantee, created in 2013, and its respective reinforcement (job offering, vocational education and training...).
2.2020 Youth Employment Support package (vocational education and training).
3.European Alliance for Apprenticeships (job offering)
4.Funding from the NextGenerationEU (youth entrepreneurship, vocational education and training...)
5.YEI (Youth Employment Initiative: until 2023, support to young people living in regions where youth unemployment was higher than 25%).
6.ERASMUS+ (funding for education, training, youth and sports initiatives).

Regional policies on rural development (and if youth participation is considered):

1.Common Agricultural Policy (funding of actions to support rural development, in terms of agriculture, forestry, sustainable management of natural resources, climate action and employment).
2.European Network for Rural Development (share of knowledge and good practices when it comes to rural development, in order to improve policies, programmes, projects...).
3.LEADER (rural agents, from different sectors, come together to form local, national and european action groups, in order to develop strategies for rural development).
4.Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 – presents common rules applicable to the European structural and investment funds (ESIF).
5.Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD).
6.Regulation (EU) 1306/2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy.
7.Regulation (EU) 1310/2013 on support for rural development by the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD).
8.Commission Delegated
Regulation (EU) 807/2014 on support for rural development by the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD) and introducing transitional provisions.
9. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 809/2014 outlining how Regulation (EU) 1306/2013 the administration and control system, rural development measures and cross compliance should be applied.

Advocacy efforts in the region related to local policies:

1.European Rural Parliament (partnership between civil society organizations from many rural areas, across Europe).
2.European Committee of the Regions (representation of local and regional authorities across the EU, in order to suggest laws; potential to create a Rural Agenda, in themes such as decarbonisation, climate change, digitalisation, active management of natural resources, sustainable mobility and fair job and income opportunities, generational change, integration of new migrants and social innovation).

Youth participation models:
1. EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (focused on youth participation, democracy and social/civic engagement).
2.Eleven European Youth Goals (identification of goals, by young people, identify cross-sectoral areas that affect young people's lives and point out challenges).

Data related to obstacles to youth participation and stakeholders that try to reserve them:
Overall, data from the Eurobarometer survey tells us that 58% of young people are active in terms of civic and institutional participation. In fact, there was an increase of 17 %, since the last Eurobarometer, in 2019. Besides, young people's most common expectation for the 2022 European Year of Youth is: decision-makers to listen more to their demands and act on them, and to support their personal, social and professional development (72%).

2.Obstacles (young people and youth-led organisations have voiced unease with the European-level institutions and processes, feeling these are unfit for their participation, due to hierarchical structures, inaccessible processes, lacking transparency and shrinking spaces for civil society collaboration).

Advocacy efforts in the region related to youth participation:
1.EUROPEAN YOUTH WEEK (happens every two years. Consists of a broad range of events and activities organised in all 33 countries participating in the European Union's Erasmus+ programme).

2.EU YOUTH DIALOGUE (a way of making young people's voices heard in European policy-making processes. The aim is to create a dialogue between young people and youth organizations with policy and decision makers, as well as experts, researchers and other members of civil society).

3.EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM
(Provides a platform for its member organizations to participate in – and influence – policy-making, to involve young people and youth organizations, given that young people have also changed the way they engage with politics. Young people must be involved from design to implementation to the follow-up and evaluation – on issues that affect them).

4.THE EYP
The European Youth (represented in 40 countries across Europe and around 25,000 young people take part in our events every year).

5.ERASMUS+ (brings such opportunities to all - students, staff, trainees, teachers, volunteers and more, in terms of studying abroad, improving language skills, gaining self-confidence and independence and immersing themselves in a new culture. Erasmus+ also helps young valuable experience in the workplace by supporting traineeships abroad, higher education students and recent graduates, as well as vocational education and training students, apprentices and recent graduates).

Our Territories of Action and The Overall Tendencies

The rural territories which were selected as focal points of action were:
Syros Island (Greece);
Brežice (Slovenia);
Tietar Valley (Spain);
Arouca (Portugal);
Cori (Italy); and
Werfenweng (Austria)

Thereby, it was possible to identify a group of overall tendencies, which will be taken into account during this Policy Brief. These tendencies range from demographic considerations, to youth participation patterns and advocacy efforts.

Total number of inhabitants of the region:
All areas have less than 40,000 inhabitants, each. Together, the areas represent 0.03% of the European Union.

Number of youngsters (14-30 years old, if available) living in these territories:
In all cases, the percentage of young people seems to be lower than 16% of the overall population.

Unemployment rate:
In most cases, recent data related to youth unemployment rate seems to be lower than the EU overall tendency (2021). However, it still represented at least over 9% in all cases, but Werfenweng (no data), La Adrada (no data which allows distinction) and Arenas de San Pedro (no data which allows distinction).

Reduction of the population in recent years:
Most areas are following the EU tendency and losing population, but Tiétar Valley (no specific data to back up) and Werfenweng.

What are the main youth employment entities/programmes in these territories?
In many of the cases, there is a prevalence of sectors such as the secondary and primary. Services related to the tertiary sector are common too, especially when they involve tourism, during the high seasons. There also seems to exist, in most cases, entities who support young people looking for jobs.

UE's programmes focus mainly on training and could be used to potentialize young people's knowledge and skills, for example, when it comes to youth entrepreneurship initiatives in these fields.

Regional policies on rural development (and if youth participation is considered):
All areas have policies on rural development, but they don't seem to involve young people in their conceptualization (at least there isn't a direct mention to that). However, it's understood that young people are referenced, directly and indirectly, in certain policies. While some are related to education and employment, others mention the need to create services and responses to vulnerable groups, for example.

Besides, it can be seen that some areas often mention tourism and activities from the primary and secondary economy sector often, which are sectors which employ most people in these regions. There is also a need to focus on the specific local resources and products. Sustainable development is also implied as a need which seems to be valued in these policies, which means major needs of training, education and good practices in the main sectors of the economy. Youth participation is valued and directly mentioned in certain regions, such as Brežice and Cori.

Advocacy efforts in the region related to local policies:
Overall, we can see that some regions head advocacy efforts related to sustainable environment, responsible use of the natural and endogenous resources (Arouca and Syros), youth participation and gender equality (Arouca). In relation to the UE, these aspects are compatible, especially when it comes to a sustainable environment.

Youth participation models:
In all regions, there seems to be efforts in terms of youth participation models. In most cases, these are headed by local governments or other State related entities. The most common examples are councils which can involve young people (Arouca, Tietar Valley, Cori and Brezice, for example). In other regions, there are interesting initiatives, such as the case of Tietar Valley, which mentions youth organizations, creation of synergies to promote youth participation.

Data related to obstacles to youth participation and stakeholders that try to reserve them:
The EU tendency shows that young people are participating more, in hopes of being heard by the decision-makers. However, they have a hard time getting involved with them and the respective entities which would allow them to participate more, due to hierarchical structures and bureaucratic processes.

This was reinforced in Syros, for example, especially when it came to claiming public spaces as their own and undergoing bureaucracy processes. Werfenweng also mentioned the difficulty of engaging young people in decision making and Arouca brought out the issue of the lack of young organizational representation in the territory (organizations, initiatives, social movements...).

Advocacy efforts in the region related to youth participation

Overall, the UE tendency is to create systems and platforms which allows young people to identify problems and claim certain rights, according to their needs. In many of these initiatives, young people are involved, not only individually, but also through organizations which they might be a part of.

On this point, there is only direct data about Brezice, Cori, Arouca and Werfenweng. With Brezice, we understand that most of the initiatives, which can somehow recall advocacy, are done inside youth participation models. These were already mentioned above and that are related to authorities as main prosecutors. When it comes to Arouca, we can also see that young people don't seem to promote advocacy initiatives themselves, acting within the ones which were created by local authorities. It's also important to mention Cori (Lazio), who shows examples of initiatives directed at young people which consider entrepreneurship efforts, training needs, culture, volunteering and traveling. This doesn't seem to be dynamized by young people, however, and are headed by the local authorities. In the case of Werfenweng, there are local authorities which focus on claiming youth rights.

As such, once more, these advocacy efforts aren't headed by young people themselves and are related to regional policies, mentioned before. With this, we can see an overall lack of advocacy attempts which are implemented by young people themselves.

Field Research

The field research for this project was conducted in all six participating countries: Spain, Austria, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Slovenia. Two methods were employed to gather information and insights: surveys and desk research of existing good practices.

1. Surveys

The first method used for collecting feedback from the field was surveys. Two distinct surveys were developed for this purpose. The first survey targeted representatives of local authorities or civil society organizations. The second survey was aimed at youth between the ages of 16 and 29 who reside in rural environments.

1.1. Survey for Young People

The "Reactive Youth" survey questionnaire is a comprehensive tool designed to gather in-depth feedback and opinions from young people aged 16 to 29 who reside in rural areas. Its primary objective is to gain a deep understanding of the experiences, needs, and aspirations of this specific demographic.

The survey covers a wide range of important topics related to the respondents' local environment. It explores their overall satisfaction with their living situation and aims to identify the factors they value the most about their surroundings. By assessing their perceptions of existing issues in their local environment, the survey also seeks to pinpoint areas that could be improved. Furthermore, it investigates whether the respondents have taken any actions or expressed their opinions regarding these issues, providing valuable insights into their level of engagement and civic participation.

An essential aspect of the survey is to explore the relationship between the respondents and local authorities and civil society organizations. It aims to understand their perceptions of local authorities and whether they feel connected to or distant from them. The questionnaire also investigates the respondents' awareness of initiatives and projects initiated by these entities in their local environment, shedding light on the level of engagement and involvement of young people in local community activities.

The survey delves into the respondents' beliefs and attitudes regarding their own agency and the power of youth to effect change in their local environment. It seeks to ascertain whether young people perceive themselves as active contributors to their community's development and if they believe in their ability to bring about positive transformations.

In addition, the questionnaire explores the respondents' familiarity with the European Union and its strategies, programs, and initiatives. It aims to gauge their understanding of the EU's influence on their local environment and policies. The survey also investigates the respondents' interest in participating in Erasmus+ experiences, which provide opportunities for personal growth, learning, and cross-cultural exchange.

By gathering comprehensive data on these various aspects, the "Reactive Youth" survey questionnaire is providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the experiences, opinions, and aspirations of young people living in rural areas. The insights gathered from the survey play a vital role in informing the project's activities and recommendations. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the voices and perspectives of rural youth are taken into account in decision-making processes and policies that have a direct impact on their lives and the development of their communities.

1.2. Survey for Local Authorities and Civil Society Organisations

The "Reactive Youth - Local Authorities Questionnaire" aims to gather insights and perspectives on youth empowerment, participation, and the role of local authorities in the development of rural areas. It consists of several key sections to explore these topics in-depth.

In the first section, the questionnaire seeks to gauge whether young people feel empowered and motivated to express their thoughts on potential improvements in their local environment. Participants are asked to rate their agreement on a scale from strongly disagree to highly agree. The following question asks respondents to provide reasons for their beliefs, allowing for a deeper understanding of their perspectives.

The next section focuses on the respondents' perceptions of job opportunities, learning opportunities, access to activities in their free time, entrepreneurship possibilities, and their aspirations to leave or stay in the local area. By assessing their agreement or disagreement with statements related to these topics, the questionnaire aims to uncover insights into how young people perceive their current situation and future prospects.

The questionnaire then explores the interests and aspirations of young people in terms of settling in the local area, moving to a different area within the country, or even moving to another country. By understanding their motivations, the survey aims to shed light on the factors influencing their decisions.

The following section delves into youth participation and initiatives. Participants are asked to share their thoughts on youth participation and identify any initiatives they are aware of or have personally been involved in. The questionnaire also assesses the perceived influence of young people on the development of their local environment and whether local authorities prioritize their engagement.

Moreover, the questionnaire investigates the respondents' knowledge of youth-led initiatives in their local environment and asks for a brief description of one initiative if applicable. It also assesses the efforts made by local authorities to involve young people in policy-making processes and their perceived level of effort. Participants are encouraged to provide insights into why and how local authorities engage with young people.

In terms of policy areas, participants are asked to indicate the areas in which they believe local authorities put more effort into policy-making and engaging young people. The provided options include employment, environment and sustainability, human rights, equality and democracy, science, education and training, health, sports, culture, and an option to add their own answer.

The questionnaire further explores the influence of the European Union (EU) on rural areas' development. Participants are asked to rate their perception of the EU's influence on a scale from very low to very high. It also inquires about the respondents' knowledge of specific EU-related public policies, programs, actions, or authorities dedicated to rural area development.
Additionally, the questionnaire examines whether the entity has any initiatives financed by European funds and requests a brief description if applicable. Finally, participants are asked to provide their insights on how the European Union authorities can be made more accessible.
By gathering comprehensive data on these various aspects, the "Reactive Youth" survey questionnaire has provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the experiences, opinions, and aspirations of young people living in rural areas. The insights gathered from the survey have played a vital role in informing the project's activities and recommendations. Ultimately, the goal was to ensure that the voices and perspectives of rural youth were taken into account in decision-making processes and policies that had a direct impact on their lives and the development of their communities.

2. The Good Practices

The second method used was desk research, which involved analyzing existing sources of information to gather knowledge and insights about good practices and initiatives related to youth engagement and development in rural areas. The purpose of desk research was to identify and understand existing good practices, lessons learned, challenges, and innovative solutions in youth engagement and development.
During the desk research phase, the research team examined practices that were recognized by each partner as applicable in their respective countries. This approach allowed for a comprehensive overview of the approaches and strategies that have proven effective in promoting youth participation, addressing their needs, and supporting their development in rural contexts.
By analyzing these recognized practices, the research team gained valuable insights into successful methods and approaches used in different regions. They were able to identify common themes, strategies, and innovative solutions that have been implemented to engage young people in rural areas effectively.
The findings from the desk research complemented the survey data and contributed to the overall understanding of youth engagement and development. They provided a broader perspective on effective approaches and practices, considering the diverse experiences and expertise documented in existing initiatives.
By leveraging the knowledge and insights gained through desk research, the project will be able to build upon successful practices and adapt them to the specific needs and contexts of rural youth. This approach ensures that the project's activities and recommendations are informed by evidence-based approaches, improving the effectiveness and relevance of the interventions.

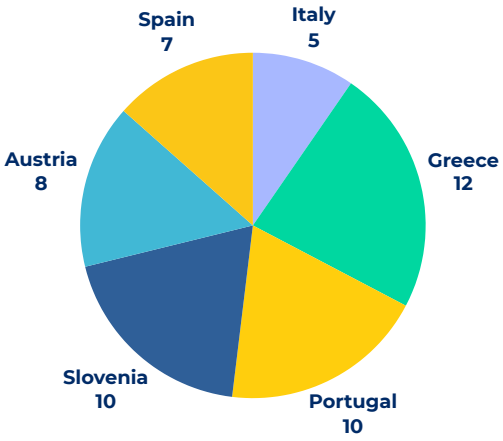
Results

1. Data gathered

1.1. Local Authorities and / or Civil Social Organisations

Regarding entities from Local Authorities and/or Civil Social Organisations, it was possible to collect data on: their outlooks on young people's living opportunities; perspectives about young people's participation on their territories; and Europe Union and rural development.
On here, we had a total of 52 answers:

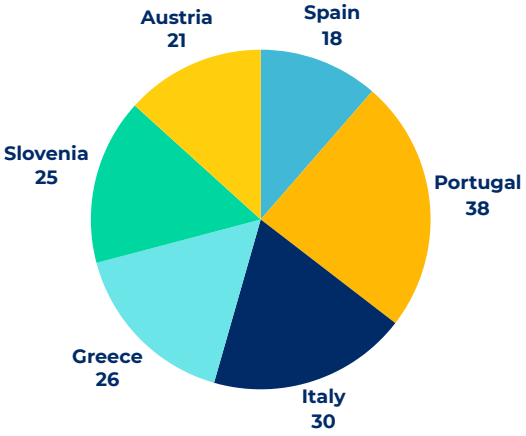
- 5 from Italy
- 7 from Spain
- 8 from Austria
- 10 from Slovenia
- 10 from Portugal
- 12 from Greece



1.2. Young people

Regarding Young People, it was possible to collect data on: overall perceptions about the living conditions on the territories they live in; their participation models; and European Union and local development.
In terms of young people, we had a total of 158 answers:

- 18 from Spain
- 21 from Austria
- 25 from Slovenia
- 26 from Greece
- 30 from Italy
- 38 from Portugal



Young people and Local Enviroment

1. Overall perceptions about the living conditions on the territories young people live in

1.1. Are they happy in the territory they live in?

Overall, 90% of the young people whom we questioned were happy living in their respective territories.

"That I am surrounded by meadows, fields, forest and good friends".
- Brežice, Slovenia

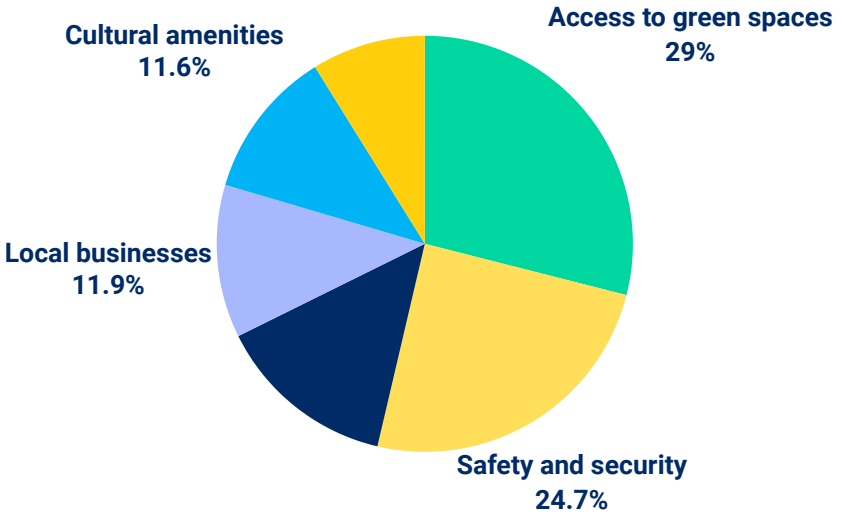
"Multiculturalism".
- Tietar Valley, Spain

"Slow life, strong relationships with fellow villagers".
- Cori - Italy

"One characteristic of the area is quietness".
- Syros Island,Greece

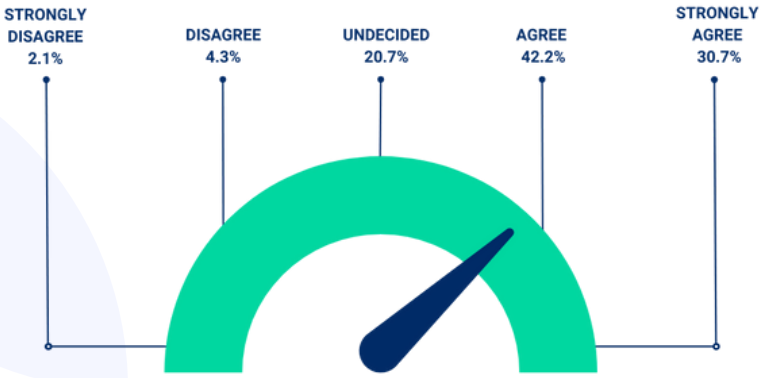
1.2. What do they value the most about their territory?

The young people primarily report that what they value the most in their local environment is nature and familiarity. With this, it's possible to see a strong affinity towards their territories' natural resources, green landscapes, overall sense of safety and community proximity, usually associated with rural territories and their respective lifestyles and values.



1.3. Do they think that there are things that could be improved in their territories?

Even if most young people are happy living in their territories and can identify positive aspects about it, 72.9% reinforces that there's details and dimensions which could be improved. Some young people (Tietar Valley - Spain) gave the example of transport, leisure, training, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities.



Key takeaway:
Young people see the value of their local environment, but it is primarily connected to the nature and safety of the rural environment. There is still a need to develop local businesses and cultural amenities better.

2. Opportunities for young people in their territories

2.1. Local authorities taking a position about their point of views, young people and the place they live in.

On a first stance, the 52 entities were invited to take a position on a couple of affirmations, regarding their territory and young people. They were asked to take a position on the following affirmations:

A. I believe young people have access to adequate job opportunities.
There's a mixed point of views when it comes to adequate job opportunities for young people. 34.6% believe there aren't, while 30.7% believe so.

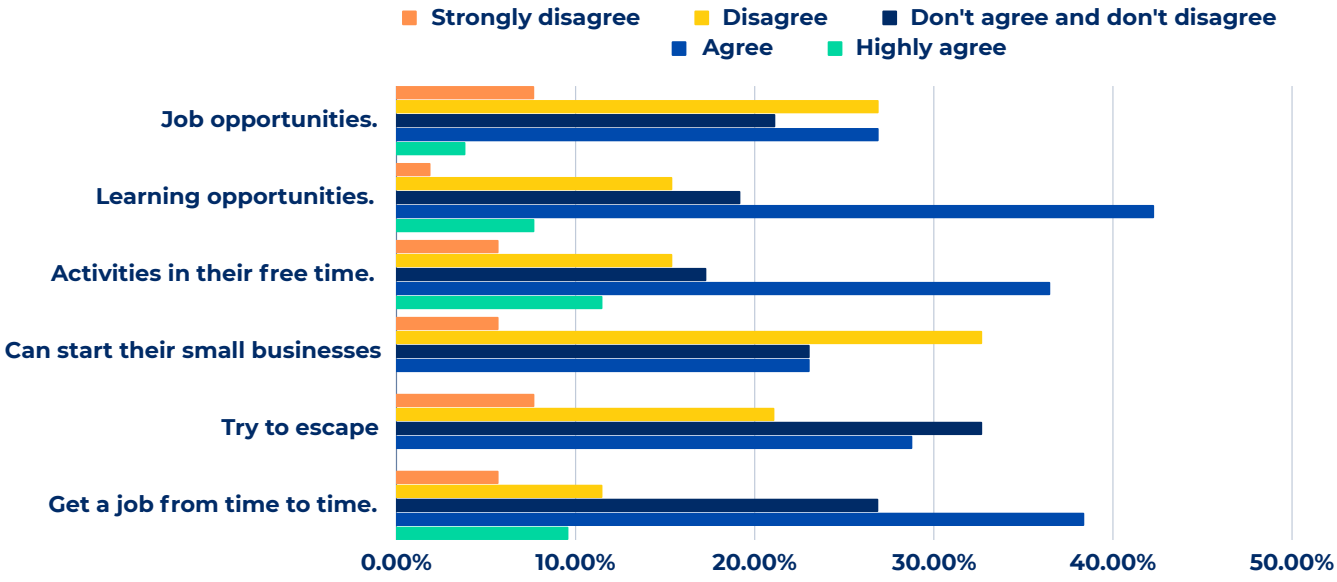
B. I believe young people have access to adequate learning opportunities.
50% believe that young people have access to adequate learning opportunities.

C. I believe young people have access to adequate activities in their free time.
48% believe that young people have access to adequate activities in their free time, while around 21% disagree.

D. I believe young people can start their small businesses using local assets, as well as technologies and their own creativity, as there are no competitors.
Around 38.4% don't think young people can start their small businesses, using local assets, as well as technologies and their own creativity. At the same time, 23% were neutral and the other 23% believed young people could so.

E. I believe young people try to escape from here as fast as they can.
There's differing points of view. 28.8% think young people won't migrate from these areas, while other 28.8% have the opposite opinion. The big portion, however, 32.7%, was neutral towards the question.

F. I believe young people mostly get a job from time to time to get by.
48% think young people will mostly get a job from time to time to get by, while 26.9% were neutral.



Key takeaway:
According to these points, it was possible to see that there's a considerable portion of LA and CSO who believe that young people have adequate access in terms of education opportunities and recreational activities, in these territories. However, this doesn't seem to translate to other fields, as it's the case of employment and labour possibilities. This shows that there might not be a match between what young people can learn in their territories and the chances they have to consolidate such knowledge and skills into proper job and work conditions. In the long term, this affects their interest in staying in such territories.

2.2. Young people taking a position on a couple of affirmations, based on the territory they live in

Just like it was done with LA and CSO, the young people were invited to take a position on a couple of affirmations regarding their territory. They were asked to take a position on the following affirmations:

A. I have access to employment opportunities:

When asked about their employment opportunities, a high number of young people (31%) felt that they didn't have adequate access to them. 27.2% felt that they did, while the other 32.3% were neutral on the matter. With this, we can see that the major part either couldn't take a position on it, or feels that the employment opportunities aren't indeed well adjusted.

B. I have access to learning opportunities

In the theme of learning opportunities, 22.1% of the surveyed young people felt that they didn't have adequate access to them. However, 43.7% understood that they did indeed, with 25.9% being neutral. With this, we can see that young people felt more assertive towards their opinion on learning opportunities and that a high percentage understood that they were well adjusted.

C. I can start small businesses, using local assets, as well as technologies and their own creativity, since there are no competitors

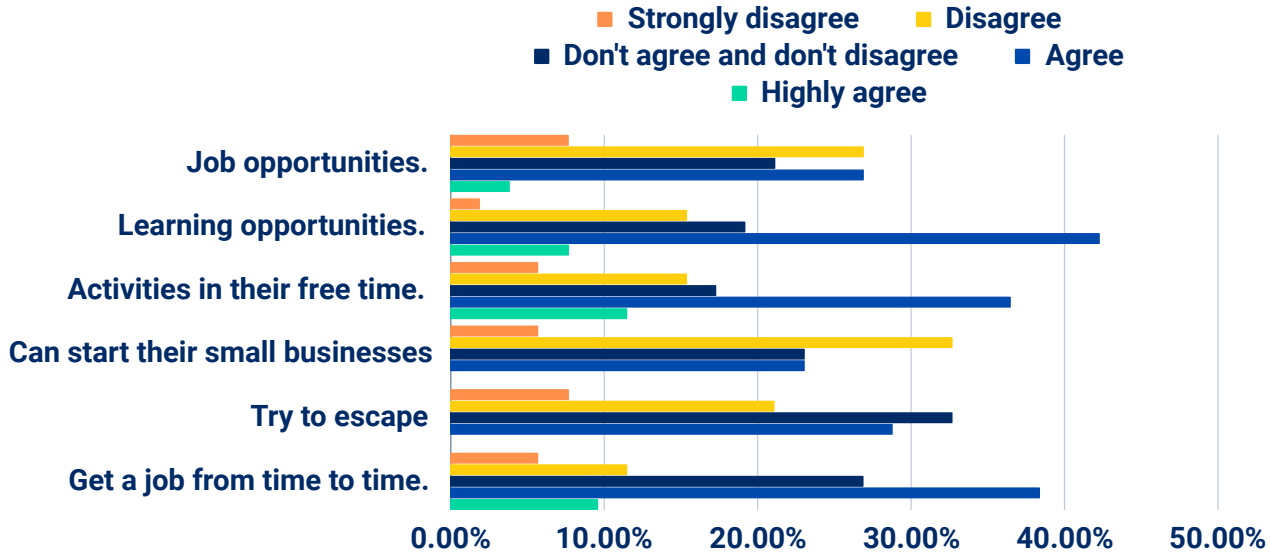
In terms of entrepreneurship opportunities, 27.2% of the young people mentioned that they didn't feel like they could start initiatives of their own, within their territories. 37.3% were neutral on the matter and 24.7% reinforced that they saw possibilities for doing so. As such, once more, the higher portion of young people showed uncertainty about the opportunities that they have, on this matter, not being able to choose a position.

D. I'll try to escape from here as quickly as possible

Overall, when asked if they would migrate from their home territories, 29.1% of the young people mentioned that yes. 26.6% were neutral on the matter and 35.4% indicated that they wouldn't. With this, we can see that, even if there's a tendency of young people seeming to be uncertain about the possibilities they have, in terms of employment, a high percentage would still consider staying in their respective territories.

E. I'll mostly get a job from time to time to get by

Given the previous themes, it was also important to ask young people if they thought that they would get a job from time to time, only to get by. This aspect needs to be taken into account, since it reinforces if young people see potential for utilizing their assets and degree of education, as most thought that their education opportunities were fit. As a result, 43.7% said that they wouldn't get a job just to get by, while the other 26.6% defended the opposite. This might imply that young people understand there's potential, in their territories, to get a stable job.



Key takeaway:

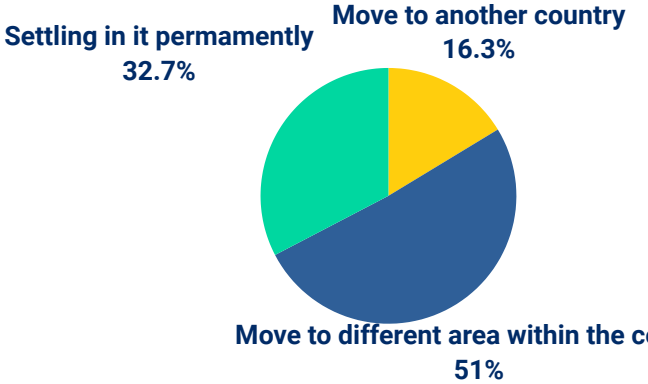
With this information, it's feasible to see that young people seem to have a harder time envisioning their future, within their territories, when it comes to job and employment opportunities. On the education matter, the doubt isn't as predominant and a high percentage felt that they had, at their disposal, well-fitting possibilities. As such, this might indicate that there's much to be done in order to approach young people from rural settings to their future and what's available to them.

3. Remaining or leaving their territories

3.1. Local authorities taking a position about their point of views, young people and the place they live in.

As such, at a second stage, these entities were questioned about would they say that, youngsters, from their local environment, would be mostly interested in:

When given the option to choose more than one option, on this question, 48% of the local authorities and civil society organizations mentioned that young people would prefer to move to a different area, within the country, reinforcing what was discussed before. Many of them also mentioned that this would be due to lack of leisure, job opportunities and overall quality of life. Others said that young people would indeed be interested in staying on their territory, but due to their family and a strong sense of local identity.



"Many young people prefer to stay to be able to be with their parents"
- Cory, Italy

"Because Arouca lacks qualified work".
- Arouca, Portugal

"Young people are interested in moving to other areas for the sake of education; after that, it is difficult for them to return to local environments with less happenings"
Brežice, Slovenia

"Young people growing up here would logically seek 'escape' - I believe that the interest in returning is logically linked to the possibility of work rehabilitation - it would be interesting to look for return/stay rates". - Syros Island - Greece

"Because there is a widespread idea that things can never change for the better here".
- Cori, Italy

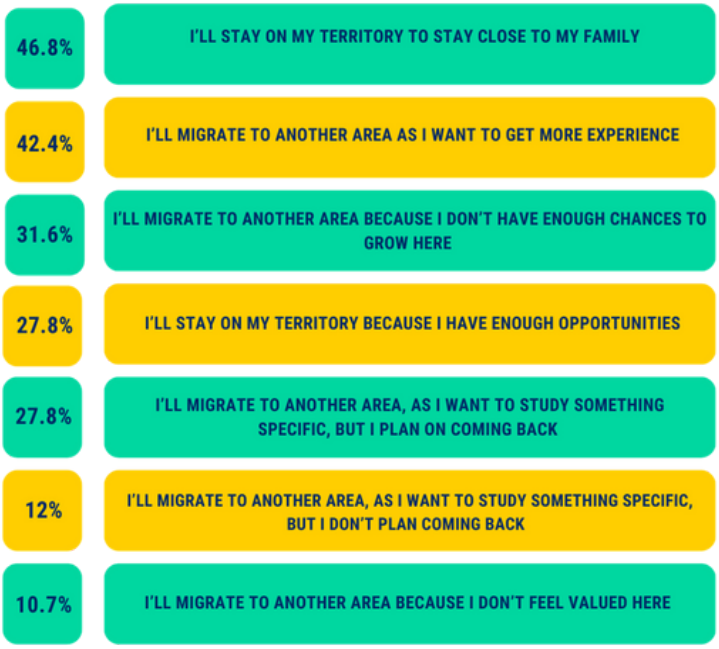
"For educational reasons, often they return after to have their own families".
- Werfenweng, Austria

"For the opportunity of emancipation and labor advancement".
- Tietar Valley, Spain

"Young people like to stay in the local environment, but due to the lack of opportunities, they choose jobs in another place or country"
- Brežice, Slovenia

3.2 Young people and their interest in staying in the local environment

On a later question, young people had the chance to select many affirmations from a single list. According to the results, the options which gathered the highest numbers were: "I'll stay on my territory to stay close to my family "(46.8%); "I'll migrate to another area as I want to get more experience" (42.4%); and "I'll migrate to another area because I don't have enough chances to grow here" (31.6%). With this, it's possible to see a clear affinity with options which imply leaving their home territory. However, the highest percentage implies that many intend to stay, but due to attachment to their families.



"I stay in Cori because it is a quiet village, not chaotic, with no traffic and no smog, I live in the countryside in a large house with a parking lot. Even if there are no job opportunities for someone like me who has studied, and even if there are no services and a vast choice of shops, the quality of life is better than that of a city".
- Cori, Italy

Key takeaway:
Both young people and local authorities recognise that there is a big part of young people that will migrate out of their territory. The reasons for this fact differ, but generally we can say that reason for leaving is search for growth and opportunities. Young people are mostly staying in their territories because of family and friendship ties.

Young People and Local Authorities

1. Local/CSO overall perception of young people's participation in their territories.

LA and CSO were also questioned about their perspectives about young people's participation in their territories. On a first instance, they could reveal what came to their mind when they thought of youth participation.

1.1. What comes to their mind when local authorities think of youth participation?

In this segment of the survey, it was feasible to understand that, while some entities instantly thought of negative aspects, such as their lack of participation and interest, the major part highlighted ideas and criteria which must be followed in order to promote it.

Overall, many associated youth participation, above all, with the creation of opportunities for young people. These opportunities could be felt at different levels. At first, it's clear that some of LAs and CSOs referred to the importance of educating young people in themes, which would allow them to identify problems and solutions within their communities. Such is the example of human rights, citizenship and equality.

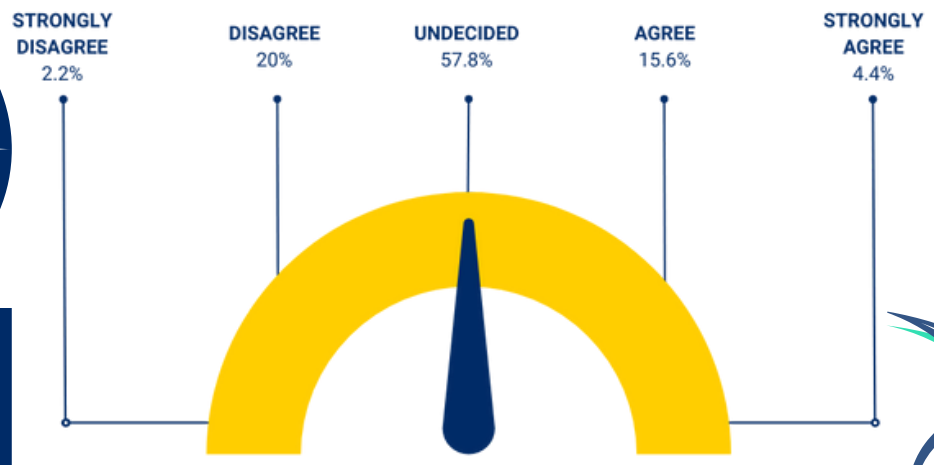
On a second level, many indicated that initiatives of effective participation and auscultation of youth's interests, within the territories, must be created and reinforced. Such can be materialized through events, programs, strategies and activities, which would allow young people to directly influence decision and policy making, resources utilization and the action of many territorial CSO, within their objectives' frame.

On a final level, many of the respondents mentioned the potential of such actions for local development and innovation.

1.2 Do local authorities believe young people feel empowered and motivated to manifest their thoughts on what could be improved in their local environment?

From the people we consulted, from LA and Civil Social Organisations, 57.8% showed a neutral position regarding young people and if they feel empowered and motivated to manifest their thoughts on what could be improved in their local environment. As such, we can see that there isn't enough proximity between these entities and young people, as there's a level of unfamiliarity.

Plus, we had more people mentioning that young people weren't motivated (at least 22.2%), when compared to the ones who did find them engaged and confident, when it came to their point of views and local development. When asked why, some entities mentioned that there aren't enough channels open for young people to express their opinions on the matter and that young people aren't sensibilized enough to actively participate in their communities. Besides, many times, young people might feel instrumented and not think that their points of view actually matter in order to modify the policies. Along with this, many young people don't have the instruments, information or self-esteem which would be decisive for their participation to increase.



"Young people are apathetic and I don't think they can find "established or official" ways of expressing their opinion about improvements, which are often not adapted to younger generations".

Brežice, Slovenia

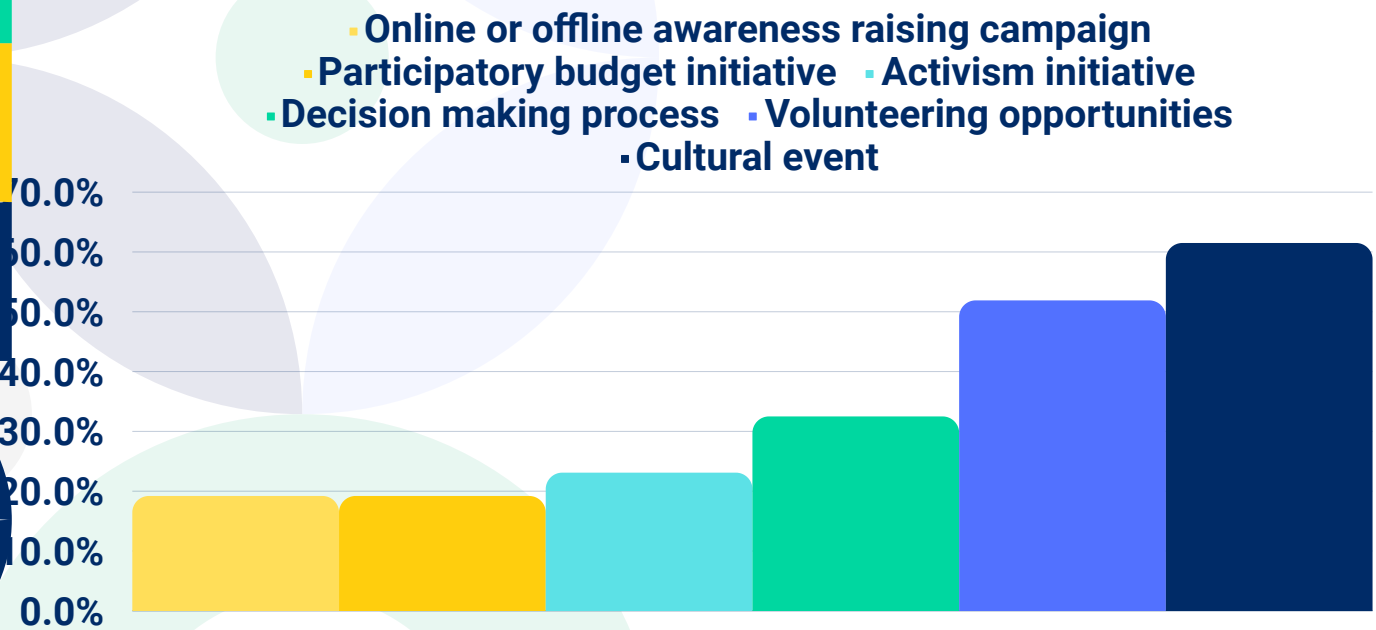
"I"I have the impression that no community is particularly active - that there are no, for example, community/municipal youth/youth centers within which community processes and identities could be structurally developed, it`s rather telling".
- Syros Island, Greece

1.3 Do they promote initiatives that promote youth participation, in fields such as politics, environment, culture, etc.? If so, what kind of initiatives?

On a third stage, participants were asked if they promoted initiatives, revealing youth engagement, and which ones.

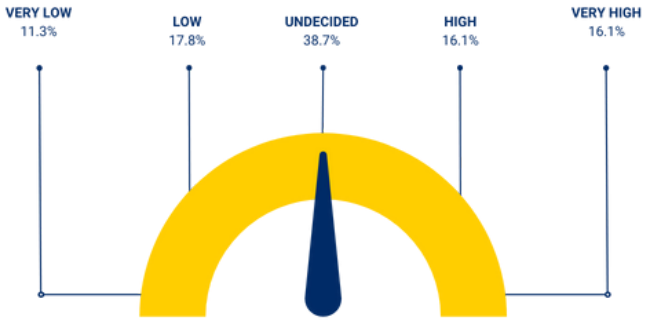
84.6% of the entities mentioned that they promote initiatives regarding youth participation, in fields such as politics, environment and culture. This means that these entities tend to reinforce what they believe in, when it comes to youth participation and the number of opportunities which they think should be promoted.

When looking at the initiatives protagonized by the LA and CSO who answered the survey, we could see that the major part focused on cultural events (61.5%) and volunteering opportunities (51.9%). There was 32.5% of the respondents mentioning, as well, decision-making processes. If we also take the participatory budget initiatives into account, both represent 51.7% of the total, which means that more than half of the entities do promote initiatives which allow young people to exert direct influence over political and resources matters.



1.4 How much influence do they think young people have in the development of their local environment?

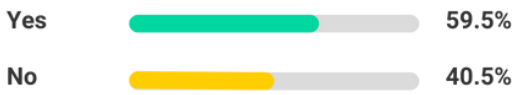
Then, LA and CSO were asked about the degree of influence that young people had in the development of their local environment. This is important to consider, since, as we have seen before, at least 19% LA and CSO think young people aren't motivated enough.



Here, we could see that 38.7% of the entities picked a neutral position when asked about the amount of influence youngsters have in the development of their local environment. Even if the entities believe that their participation needs to be reinforced and have made efforts in that sense, this seems to hint that youngster's influence might be hard to track or evaluate, overall.
However, there was a higher percentage of entities mentioning (32.2%) that young people had a considerable influence in the development of their local environment, when compared with the opposite notion (around 29%).

1.5. Do local authorities know of any youth-led initiatives in their local environment?

After being queried about young people's overall influence in the development of their local environment, LA and CSO could say if they knew about youth-led initiatives.



The major part of the entities (59.5%) remarked that they were familiar with youth-led initiatives, in their local environment. As such, this validates the existence of initiatives, in these territories, which are planned, organized and executed by young people and which might ensure their participation in the development of their territories.
When asked to give examples, these entities mentioned initiatives which focused on themes such as human rights, climate, culture and arts, tradition, economy and entrepreneurship.

Key takeaway:
Even though local authorities are striving to reach young people and listen to their opinion, there seems to be a divergence between activities that would enable young people to express their own opinions and aspects, and the reactions of young people. Many central answers point to the fact that local decision-makers do not have concrete data on the active participation of young people.

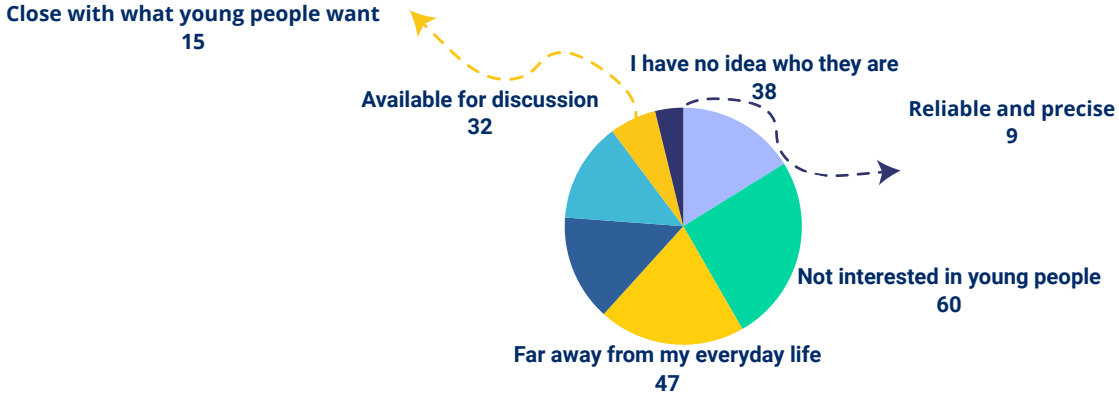
"Who watch over the well-being of a few and do not follow truly democratic behaviors".
- Tietar Valley, Spain

"Often use the argument that they want to do something for the "young people" in order to get votes".
- Werfenweng, Austria

"Sometimes I get the impression that they don't value young people".
- Arouca, Portugal

2. Young People overall perception of local authorities and their initiatives

2.1. When they think of local authorities, what comes to their mind?



As such, in this theme, a considerable lump of young people picked options which demonstrated a negative perspective or overall unfamiliarity on LA: 37.9% mentioned they weren't interested in young people; 29.7% said that they were far away from their everyday life; and 24% mentioned they didn't know who they were..

2.2. Do young people know about the initiatives promoted by local authorities or civil society organizations that are taking place in their local environment?

On this dimension, young people reinforced their unfamiliarity with LA, since 72% mentioned that they didn't know about initiatives promoted by local authorities or civil society organizations, in their territories.

2.2.1. If yes, which initiatives promoted by local authorities or civil society organizations do they know about?

"Environmental protection, art festivals".
- Syros island, Greece

"An organization for young people that host events and plans activities for us young people mostly for free (because it's funded by public money)".
- Werfenweng, Austria

"I am aware of initiatives related to sports and education"
- Syros island, Greece

"Sustainable development (to work/school by bike, on foot, public transport...), Blood donation".
- Brežice, Slovenia

"Youth city council".
- Arouca, Portugal

"Library, Asbuc, village festivals, naturalistic initiatives for the lake".
- Cori, Italy

"Parsifal to help young people"
- Cori, Italy

"Breakfast for homeless people, Collecting clothes for people applying for asylum".
- Werfenweng, Austria

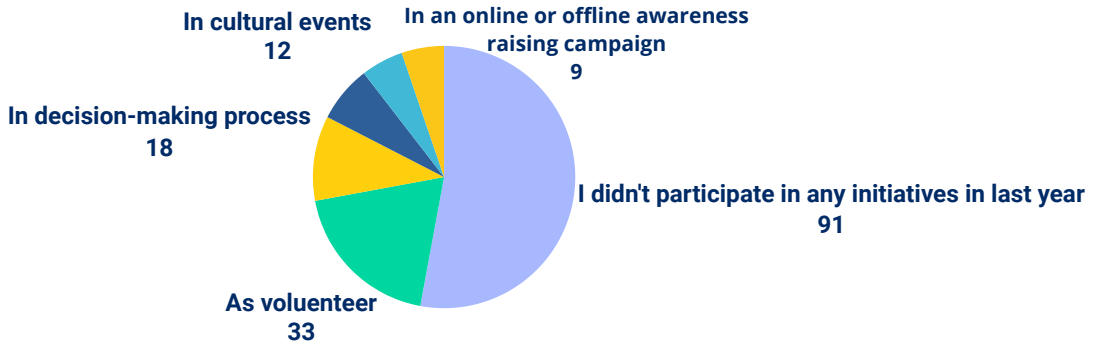
"Protests and marches for the local hospital, march for the railway victims, volunteer at Anima Festival".
- Syros island, Greece

"Participatory budget initiative".
- Arouca, Portugal

"The town hall runs a series of free sports courses such as yoga. Events are held, mostly of a religious nature (Christian and Catholic) but also cultural (battle and rap concert in summer, or the annual exhibition at the Palace). Other organizations not associated with the council carry out a greater range of activities and events, especially the AJS association".
- Tietar Valley, Spain

2.3. Have they participated in initiatives promoted by local authorities or civil society organizations, during the last year?

After the previous question, young people were queried about their participation in initiatives promoted by local authorities or civil society organizations, during the last year. Here, the majority (57.6%) mentioned that they didn't participate in such activities. Among the ones who did, their participation as volunteers surfaced (20.9%).

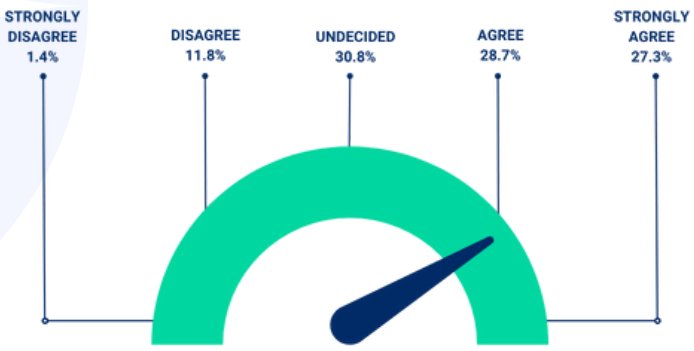


2.3.1. What is the reason that they haven't participated?

When it came to the reasons why they haven't participated, many identified aspects such as: it taking time from their studies/work (29.1%); not having time (24.7%); being unsure about where to find the opportunities (19.6%); and feeling they can't change much (19%).

2.4. Do they believe that they have the power to promote change in their local environment?

In order to understand if young people felt enough confidence about their role in the community and what they can do to improve it, they were asked to position themselves towards this theme. As such, we can see that a high percentage (30.8%) of young people took a neutral stance on the matter, while the other 56% were confident about their power to promote change in their local environment. Such means that there's a tendency for young people to be positive about their potential of reach, knowledge and skills, if given the necessary opportunities.

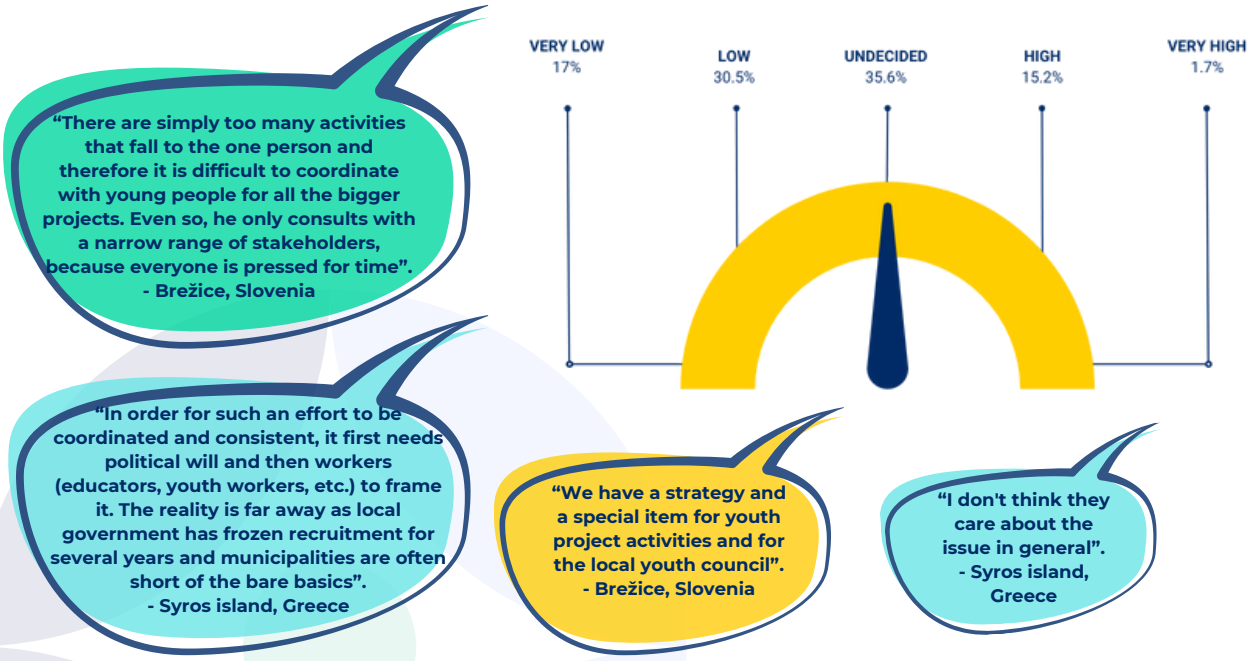


Key takeaway:
Young people feel like they can promote change. However, they're having trouble envisioning how and aren't familiar with LA and CSO's work.

3. Local Authorities effort to have youth participate in policy making

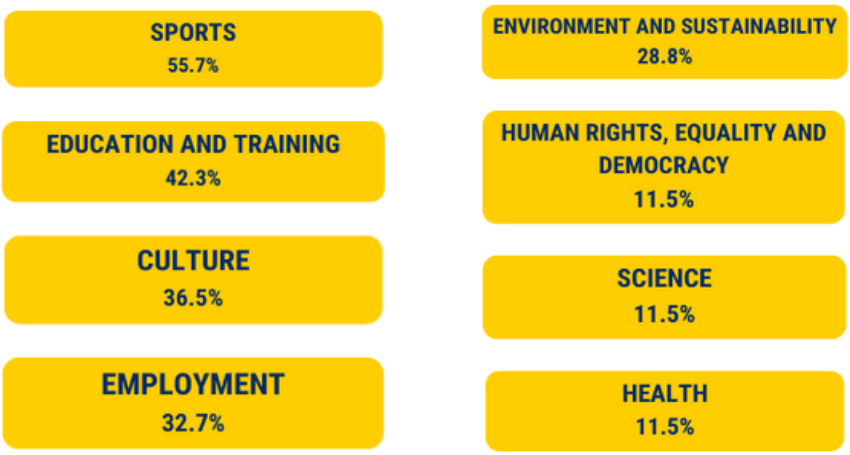
3.1. How much effort do they think local authorities put into having youngsters participate in policy making in topics that impact them in their local environment?

On this theme, LA and CSO had the opportunity to externalize if, in their opinion, LA put effort into young people having opportunities to participate in policy making.
When questioned about the level of effort that LA put into having young people participate in policy making, regarding themes that could impact their local environment, a big portion (35.6%) took a neutral instance. However, 47.5% of the people said that LA didn't put enough effort into promoting effective youth participation in policy making. This might hint that, even if there's local initiatives which try to engage young people, from their point of view, more effort can be made in order to improve young people's actual weight on the decision making processes.
Some entities give examples of problems such as lack of motivation, time, budget, resources, synergies and youth auscultation.



3.2. How much effort do they think local authorities put into having youngsters participate in policy making in topics that impact them in their local environment?

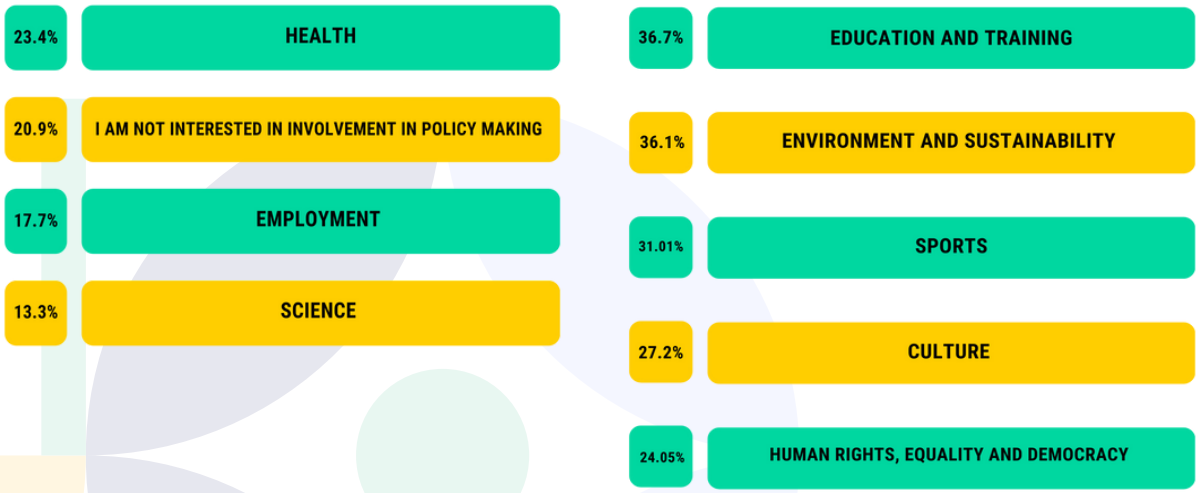
The entities in question also identified some of the areas which they believe LA put more effort on, when it comes to policy making and young people engagement. As such, areas such as sports (55.7%), education and training (42.3%), culture (36.5%) and employment (32.7%) were the ones with a higher percentage of mentions. Areas like health, human rights, equality, democracy, science (11.5%), environment and sustainability (28.8%) were the ones with less investment, from these entities point of view.



4. Young People involvement in policy making

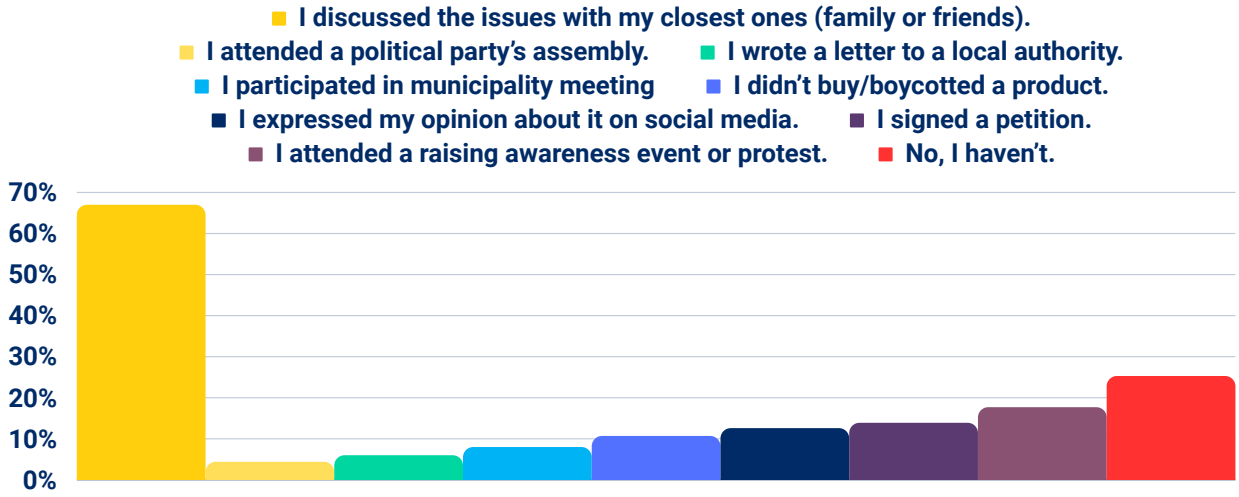
4.1. Would young people like to be involved in policy making for their local environment development? In which areas?

Given the fact that a high portion of young people believe in their potential to change their local environments, they were questioned about the areas that they would like to intervene in. With this analysis, areas such as Education and training (36.7%), Environment and sustainability (36.1%) and Culture (27.2%).



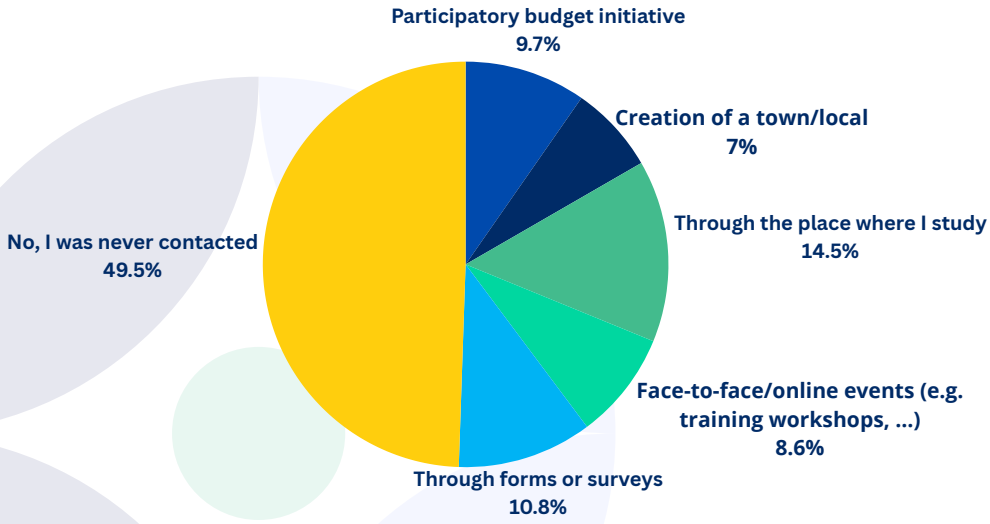
4.2. Did young people ever manifest their point of view regarding the aspects which could be improved?

Even if most young people can think of aspects to improve, a big portion of them don't engage in the activities which are often affiliated with active democratic and political participation. In fact, 25.3% mentioned that they never manifested their point of view. When it comes to the ones who did, 67% underlined that it was within their inner social circle, referring to family and close friends. This shows that, within the groups we spoke to, there's a tendency of not externalizing their points of views and postures through the traditional and expected channels of protest



4.3. Did local authorities (e.g. city or parish councils) ever try to reach out to young people and listen to what you have to say regarding the development of their local environment?

After asking about the participation of young people in initiatives led on their home territories, they were also queried about being contacted by LA to exchange ideas and points of views regarding the development of their areas. With this, we could see that the biggest part (49.5%) of the young people mentioned that they were never contacted by LA. Within the ones who did, some mentioned (14.5%) that it was through initiatives which were implemented in the place where they study, forms or surveys (10.8%) and participatory budget initiatives (9.7%). Given this propensity, it's clear that it's important to create more initiatives of auscultation and intervention when it comes to young people.



Key takeaway:

Match between the areas Young People want to participate more, in terms of policy making, and the ones LA seem to promote: Sports, Education, Training, Culture, Environment and Sustainability.

However, Young People are still overall unaware of LA and CSO's work and mention they don't reach out to them.

Young people have very low recognition of the local authorities, but that doesn't mean that they are not active. They see the issues in their local environment and are willing to contribute.

The insides of young people confirm that there is lack of dialogue between young people and decision-makers. Task at hand is on HOW to successfully, long-term connect unorganized youth and decision-makers.

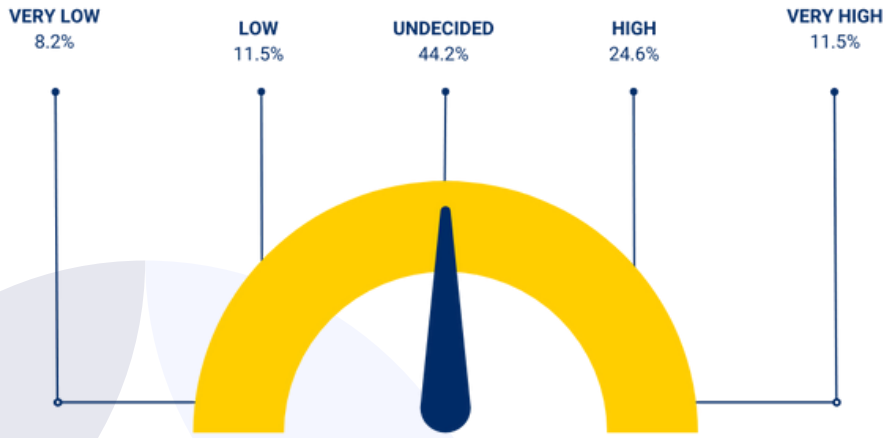
Local environment and European Union

1. Local Authorities/Civil Social Organisations perspective about European Union and Rural Development

The final theme of the survey was Europe Union and Rural Development. Here, the main idea was to identify the level of familiarity of LA and CSO with European initiatives and policies, when it came to rural development.

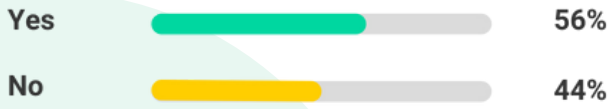
1.1. How much influence do they think the European Union has in the development of rural areas in Europe?

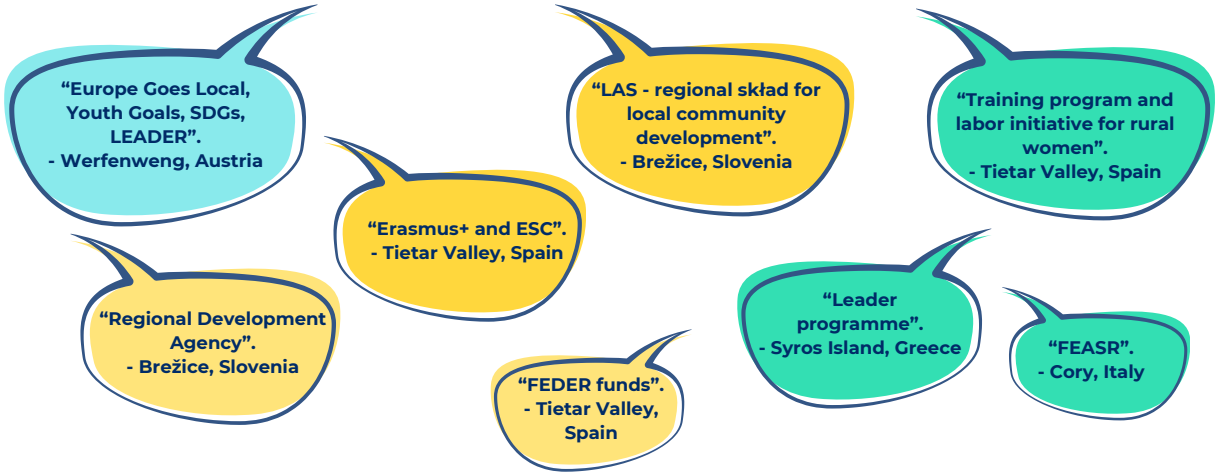
When asked about the degree of influence that the European Union had in terms of development of rural areas, in Europe, 44.2% of the entities chose a neutral position, while 36.1% mentioned that the European Union was influential in such matters. In general, this hints that most of the entities aren't familiar with the European Union's degree of influence on this theme. This might hint at a lack of information, research and data on the matter.



1.2. Do local authorities know about any public policy, program, action or public authority related to the European Union specialized on the development of rural areas?

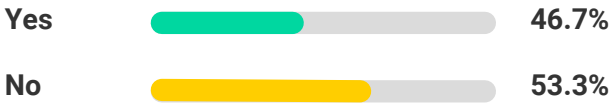
However, 56% of the entities mentioned that know of at least 1 public policy, program action or public authority related to the European Union, specialized on the development of rural areas. This shows some level of proximity with initiatives from the European Union, on the subject. In other words, the entities in question seem to know about some of the solutions which the European Union implements but, as seen before, it's defiant to them to conceptualize the extension of their impact and how the role they play in local policy making.

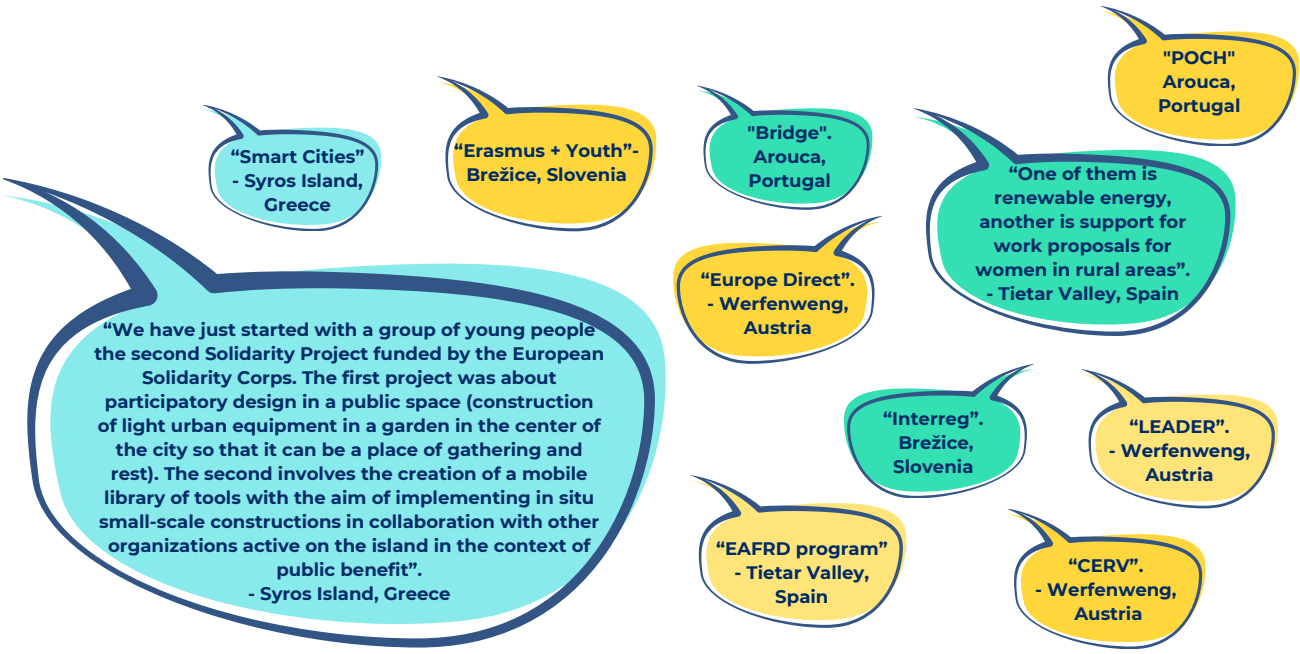




1.3. Does their entity have any initiative financed by European funds?

Along with this, the major part of the entities (53.3%) mentioned that they didn't have any initiative financed by European funds.





1.4. How would you imagine more reachable European Union authorities?

When asked to imagine more reachable European Union authorities, the entities mentioned the need to adopt an approach which resulted in direct interactions, presential or online, between authorities and citizens. Some entities also highlighted the need to simplify overall language and bureaucracy, especially when it came to the number of opportunities they offer. It could be important to create more local offices or places where people could clarify their questions with ease. On par with this, entities also considered the need to improve overall dissemination of their initiatives, through channels which are effective.

"Better communication". - Syros Island, Greece

"Creation of offices / help and explanation sessions". Arouca, Portugal

"More presence at local level". - Werfenweng, Austria

"I do not believe that the authorities of the European Union apply in practice, I believe that they remain "empty talk". I believe that in the European Union - as everywhere - only the law of the strong applies". - Syros Island, Greece

"Things should be simple and understandable. There is still and always will be more red tape. This is also the biggest obstacle". Brežice, Slovenia

"I would imagine them with less bureaucracy". - Syros Island, Greece

"Regional European offices to support European projects and promote EU values". Brežice, Slovenia

"With the dialogue between generations". - Cory, Italy

"More effective information". - Cory, Italy

"Working visits to the countryside, physical contact of representatives with residents, young people, live discussions". Brežice, Slovenia

"Perhaps if they had offices to inform young people about the opportunities offered through participation in local volunteering, exchange, vocational training etc., something like the Youth KEP (Citizen Service Center) in the EU. It would help to provide assistance in writing the proposals as well, as it can having ideas but not having access to the technical language required to write a sentence". - Syros Island, Greece

"Better network points, which are reachable when you have questions". - Werfenweng, Austria

"Greater use of digital platforms to communicate with the public. More public events, consultations, etc". Brežice, Slovenia

"Combination of online tools with presence on the territory". - Werfenweng, Austria

"Supporting more implementation projects and not just the creation and design of educational material". - Tietar Valley, Spain

"Through local entities".- Tietar Valley, Spain

"Get the young people to get to know the authorities by themselves and increase political education explaining the mechanisms how these authorities can positively influence their own environment and home area. - Werfenweng, Austria

"Communication and promotion in schools and town halls." - Tietar Valley, Spain

"Open to the community. Clear and objective speeches and actions". - Arouca, Portugal

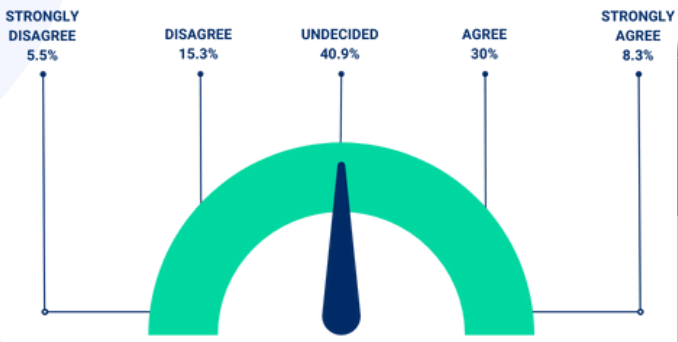
"Starting from local authorities and awareness raising in schools". - Cory, Italy

2. Young People perspective about European Union and Local developmentt

Just like it was done with LA and CSO, it was important to know young people's perspective about the European Union's impact on local development and if they were acquainted with their initiatives.

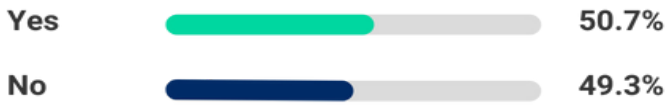
2.1. Do young people believe that the European Union has a strong influence on the place they live in and their policies?

When asked about their perspectives on the European Union and their influence on the place they live in and respective policies, 40.9%, the highest percentage, was neutral about the matter, while 38.3% believed so. In a way, this showcases that many young people aren't familiar with the degree of intervention which the European Union has in such matters.



2.2. Would young people like to be involved in policy making for their local environment development? In which areas?

According to this data, most young people (50.7%) know of the European Union's strategies, programmes and initiatives. Still, there's a high portion (49.3%) who aren't familiar with such notions.

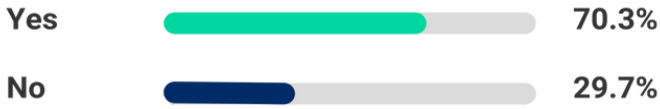


2.2.1. If the answer is yes, did they ever participate in an Erasmus+ experience (either as a student, trainee, volunteer or exchange participant)?

Other subject which needs to be taken into consideration is that most young people (65%) didn't ever participate in initiatives such as ERASMUS+, which might reveal that, while there might be enough information for young people to retrieve about these actions, it doesn't translate in a higher scales of effective participation.

2.3. Would they consider joining an Erasmus+ short term experience on a topic they're interested in?

Finally, most young people (70.3%) revealed that they would be interested in joining an ERASMUS+ short experience, which underlines the potential of utilizing the programme to promote higher degrees of youth participation, when it comes to local and rural development.



Key takeaway:The recognition of the initiatives of the European Union in rural environments is mixed both among young people and among decision-makers. This fact clearly tells us about the further need to foster a common European spirit, both through financial incentives and through holistic communication of the possibilities offered by EU programs.

Bridging the Gap: Fostering Dialogue and Collaboration between Rural Youth and Local Authorities

In today's rapidly changing world, the challenge of bridging the gap between young people and local decision-makers in rural areas demands attention and action. Young people often feel excluded from decision-making processes and lack opportunities to contribute their ideas and perspectives. This disconnect between rural youth and local authorities can hinder community development and limit the untapped potential that young people bring. This chapter explores the importance of fostering youth participation in rural areas and discusses strategies to actively engage and empower rural youth in shaping their communities.

1. Understanding the Challenges

1.1. Exclusion and Lack of Opportunities

Rural youth frequently face exclusion from decision-making processes, leading to a sense of disengagement and frustration. They often lack access to meaningful, sustainable opportunities for participation and struggle to find platforms to express their ideas. Addressing these challenges is crucial to foster active involvement and empower rural youth. With this in mind, it's important for LA to make a reflection process on what they offer young people in terms of decision-making processes and activities. For example, in this field research, it was possible to register that there are many obstacles in this sense and that the communication channels, between both parts, aren't effective or recurrent, even when there's compatibility of perspectives. Put this, LA must take this into account and compile all present efforts, while taking into account tools like the "**Ladder of Participation**", that offer concrete guidelines. After this process, it's important to also consult young people to evaluate their relevance and if they agree with the dissemination processes which were elected to promote them and what they would need to participate in them. By ensuring the previous steps, LA will be able to reach the following objectives:

1. **Ascertainment of the level of involvement of young people in their region's policy making;**
2. **Evaluation of the adjustment of the existing activities and the respective dissemination platforms;**
3. **Creation of strategies to improve the existing activities and dissemination platforms;**
4. **Understanding of the necessary conditions which need to be ensured for young people to participate;**

1.2 Migration and Retention

Another significant challenge is the tendency of young people to migrate out of rural areas in search of better opportunities. Understanding the motivations behind this trend, including the desire for personal growth and perceived lack of prospects in their local environment, is essential.

By addressing these factors, local authorities can design strategies that encourage young people to stay and contribute to their communities and, at the same time, promote a shared local identity which can endure in the future. As a result, it's important to engage in auscultation and diagnosis practices that allow for the collection and analysis of organized information, from both young people and CSO.
This information must point to themes such as: employment, culture, sports, local identity, patrimony, environment, sustainable development, education, health, human rights, politics and infrastructures. Such efforts should be regular and planned accordingly, while trying to involve representative samples from the region's population and taking into account minority groups. For this to happen, it's important to outline a local diagnosis and auscultation strategy, which refers to the possibilities in terms of sample's identification, communication channels, reaching, mobilization and collection of information. On these, it's important to collect quantitative and qualitative data, while engaging strategic stakeholders who can offer the best support. Doing this, allows LA to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Identification of recurring problems felt by young people and other important local stakeholders;**
2. **Comparison between the auscultation and diagnosis data with the local strategies, in order to understand their compatibility and necessary adjustments;**
3. **Promotion of new local strategies, which address issues and certain nuances which weren't been taking into account before and that mention how young people can actively participate and appropriate them;**
4. **Creation of frequent communication channels which approach LA and their region's young population.**

2. Creating an Inclusive and Representative Environment

After understanding the challenges that young people face in their regions and how adjusted the efforts of LA are to tackle them, it's important to start creating new participation opportunities and initiatives, as well as supporting all the necessary agents who can ensure youth participation and engagement, in the long term.

2.1 Empowering Local Youth Workers

Local youth centers and organizations play a crucial role in bridging the gap between rural youth and local authorities. Empowering and supporting these youth workers is important, as they are well-positioned to engage with young people and advocate for their needs. By providing resources, training and accessible facilities, local authorities can enhance the capacity of these youth workers to facilitate dialogue and create inclusive environments for youth participation. This means that youth workers can emerge as important mediators between both parties and that they can work alongside young people, by providing them the necessary tools for them to vindicate for changes, within their interests, perspectives. Because of this, youth workers are also key figures when it comes to sensibilization and raising of awareness efforts, especially given their proximity with young people and the challenges they face. With this in mind, LA can achieve the following objectives:

1. **Local Youth Workers who are aware of the importance of engaging young people to openly participate in the community and in decision making processes;**
2. **Local Youth Workers fully capable of engaging and mobilizing young people to act on their interests, given their own needs and the community's;**
3. **Proper coordination between youth initiatives, activities and entities and the need to create conditions for youth political engagement, within them.**

2.2 Establishing Dialogue Platforms

Developing youth dialogue platforms is vital for fostering meaningful engagement between young people and local decision-makers. Youth councils, community forums, and workshops are effective approaches that provide spaces for young people to voice their opinions, contribute ideas, and participate in decision-making processes. These platforms create inclusive environments that value and encourage youth participation, contributing to the sustainable development of rural communities. As such, LA can create these opportunities based on the information which was collected during auscultation efforts and understand which ones are the best suitable, according to the characteristics and tendencies of their territory and the specific challenges that young people face. To ensure that these are appropriated, it's important to think of discussion spaces which are accessible to young people from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and that aren't imbued with disproportionated formality, or the utilization of a language that relies heavily on complex decoding. As such, these Dialogue Platforms must rely on informal settings that allow young people to feel comfortable, by shortening the distance which tends to be felt between LA and citizens (*See Recommendation 2.2*).

Creating opportunities for contact between young people and local politicians is the first important step, but it is not enough. It is necessary to create permanent dialogue platforms and create virtuous circles to involve more and more young people and to enable them to actively engage in the realization of their projects.

Youth Councils such as the "Consulta Giovani" installed in Limone Piemonte are an excellent tool to ensure constant interaction between young people and local politicians. Young people meet regularly to exchange opinions about local issues and to develop project ideas and they have periodically the chance to directly discuss them and their possible implementation with the municipality council.

With these ideas, LA can ensure the following objectives:

1. **Language barrier breaking between LA and young people;**
2. **Increase of the proximity between LA and young people, through regular activities and exchange of ideas;**
3. **Creation and promotion of adequate youth dialogue platforms, which perdure in the future;**
4. **Establishment of platforms that allow young people to create and implement solutions, which have a direct impact on their region.**

2.3 Promoting and supporting youth-lead initiatives and activities.

When young people feel connected with their local environment, they tend to engage with it by potentiating what they like the most about their region and looking for solutions for recurring problems. Often, this leads to autonomous intervention initiatives on their part and, in order to create a truly inclusive environment which potentializes youth engagement, it's important for LA to support youth-lead initiatives, activities and leaders, especially in terms of dissemination, action coordination and resources. This support can be done through partnerships, for example, in order to ensure that young people have full control over the planning, organization, execution and evaluation of their own activities. Doing so will ensure the implementation of initiatives which match with higher **rungs,** visible on the "**Ladder of Participation**", achieving the following objectives:

1. **Alignment of LA and CSO's strategies and activities with young people's perspectives and autonomous actions;**
2. **Extension of the scope of opportunities for young people to appropriate their region and make choices according to what they envision and respective needs;**
3. **Increased engagement of young people and vindication over themes of interest, which directly affect them and their quality of life;**
4. **Emergence of relatable young activists and role models, who utilize suitable communication and youth mobilization methods, reaching and engaging even more young people;**
5. **Creation of collectives, composed fully by young people, who can bring awareness and revindicate over themes which aren't considered by LA and CSO, and that play an important role on the creation of future conditions for young people to live fully in their local communities;**
6. **Improvement of policies involving young people, given their increasing visibility and interest;**

3. Leveraging European Union Initiatives

3.1 Capitalizing on Opportunities

Recognizing the potential of European Union initiatives (such are transnational opportunities for youth, youth workers and local authorities), both young people and local authorities can benefit from the resources and programs offered. By fostering a common European spirit and effectively communicating the possibilities provided by EU programs, rural communities can maximize their engagement and participation in sustainable development efforts.

Fostering youth participation in rural areas requires a collaborative effort between young people, local authorities, and community stakeholders. By recognizing the challenges faced by rural youth, creating inclusive environments, and leveraging EU initiatives, we can empower young people to contribute their unique perspectives and ideas. Through their active involvement, rural communities can thrive, creating a brighter and more sustainable future for all. As such, it's imperative for LA to become familiar with the EU's framework in terms of initiatives that promote youth participation and rural development, while understanding how they can coordinate their region's strategies with them. Besides that, LA need to create the necessary conditions for young people and other entities to engage in these initiatives, by promoting, for example, dissemination efforts and creation of local support structures (e.g. offices where people can consult these opportunities and have access to simplified information about them). This will allow for the fulfillment of the following objectives:

1. **Recontextualization of the region's needs and potentialities, given what has been identified, at European level, for rural areas;**
2. **Approximation of the regions with the EU framework, objectives and line of action;**
3. **Implementation of local initiatives which can be combined with EU already existing efforts;**
4. **Broad access to good practices which are implemented in another rural regions and that can be discovered through the participation of young people and the community in EU's initiatives;**
5. **Promotion of an European sense of identity within the region.**

4. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 -> Understanding the challenges

RUNG 6 -> Developement of Strategy for Youth in Brežice -> A Example from Slovenia

Title of the good practice
Strategy for Youth Brežice

Entity responsible for its promotion
Municipality of Brežice in cooperation with partners

Topic (Participatory budget; Ecotourism, etc.)
Youth participation

Brief description
The process of developing the Youth Strategy of Brežice Municipality involved several steps. It began with a survey conducted during the summer, where all young people aged between 13 and 30 in the municipality were invited to share their opinions on youth life in Brežice.
Based on the survey findings, a weekend workshop was organized where a group of young people analyzed the survey responses and developed proposals and measures for the youth strategy. The workshop focused on various areas such as employment, education, housing policy, active participation in the local community, healthcare and social services, information and culture, mobility, and leisure activities.
The workshop participants collaborated in formulating goals and measures for the strategy, contributing to the development of young people in Brežice Municipality. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to share their ideas, address current youth issues, and create realistic solutions that could be incorporated into future local projects.
The next steps in the strategy development process involve finalizing the proposed measures and goals, conducting a public discussion on the strategy, preparing an action plan, and obtaining approval from the Municipal Council. Young people who participated in shaping the proposed measures will also be invited to the Council meeting.

Number of young people involved
The survey received responses from 930 young individuals. Furthermore young people cooperated in following steps of the design of the final Strategy.

Degree of influence* these young people have on the initiative:

- **Did young people develop the idea for initiative?**
  No.

- **Did young people organise and plan the initiative?**
  No.

- **Did young people prepare the initiative?**
  Yes, in cooperation with the municipality.

- **Did young people execute the initiative?**
  Young people are executing activities that are happening as a consequence of the Strategy.

- **Did young people evaluate the initiative?**
  Yes.

Frequency of good practice (is it a sporadic initiative or a continuous one?)
To be repeated, after the end of current Strategy in 2030.

To which extent does the initiative involve other stakeholders? How so?
The development of the strategy was facilitated by the European project Europe Goes Local (EGL), within the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program. The project aimed to strengthen youth work at the local community level. Trainers from the Slovenian Youth Council and representatives of the MaMa Network led the strategy planning workshop.

Recommendation 2 -> Understanding the challenges

Democratic and inclusive societies need the active participation of young people in decisions and actions. Apart from the right to vote and be voted, it's also extremely essential to have the right, the means, the opportunity, and the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a vibrant society.
The following good practice is an example of an activity planned and organised completely by young people with the support of local authorities that creates space for young artists to claim public spaces and transform them in areas of open dialogue on pressing current issues.

Recommendation 2.1. -> Understanding the challenges

RUNG 8 -> An Example from Syros island (Greece)

Title of the good practice
Stray Art festival

Entity responsible for its promotion
A group of students, “SPINTHIRAS” from the Design Engineering Department of the University of the Aegean, but also with the partnership of the civic, non-profit company "Ourios Anemos".

Topic (Participatory budget; Ecotourism, etc.)
Claiming public spaces, cultural and alternative tourism.

Brief description
The Stray Art Festival is a wandering celebration of young muralists, exhibitors, musicians and performers who bring street culture to the streets, squares and alleys in the capital of the Cyclades for 3 days every September. Walls of public spaces and buildings are filled with colors, music and events with themes such as the protection of nature and animals, and the ecological revolution against the climate crisis.
All in all, Stray Art Festival seems to be able to be temporally sustainable by being able to attract a critical number of returning visitors and locals, who, like the festival organizing team, live and perceive the city as a vibrant and constantly changing region, for which they are invited to contribute their knowledge, their ingenuity and ideas, or simply their constant presence, thus becoming active members of a creative community that aims to take the city back.

Number of young people involved
More than 30 young people (it varies each year).

Degree of influence* these young people have on the initiative:

- **Did young people develop the idea for initiative?**
  Yes. A group of students with the name “Spinthiras” from the Design Engineering Department of the University of the Aegean.

- **Did young people organise, prepare, execute and plan the initiative?**
  Yes, as mentioned above.

- **Did young people evaluate the initiative?**
  We think the evaluation comes from the local people of all ages that embraced the initiative.

Frequency of good practice (is it a sporadic initiative or a continuous one?)
It's an annual 3-day festival. The first festival was organised in September 2017.

To which extent does the initiative involve other stakeholders? How so?
The festival has each year the support of the following entities: “Ourios anemos” NGO (it`s the legal entity responsible for the festival), South Aegean Region/Culture Department and the Municipality Syros-Ermoupoli.

Recommendation 2.2. -> Establishing Dialogue Platforms

RUNG 6 -> An Example from Werfenweng (AUSTRIA)

Title of the good practice
Young people discuss with the mayors.

Entity responsible for its promotion
Regionalverband Flachgau Nord in cooperation with Akzente Salzburg.

Topic (Participatory budget; Ecotourism, etc.)
Discussions and exchange between young people and local politicians.

Brief description
The motto was not only to be asked, but also to have a direct exchange with regional politicians. For this purpose, two Youth-Regio-Talks were organised as part of the European Year of Youth in September 2022 to enable people to think, talk and eat pizza together and to promote the issues that are important to young people in the region.
The young participants were able to formulate and prepare their wishes and concerns together with the initiators from the Regional Association Flachgau-Nord and akzente Salzburg. When the regional politicians joined them, this was the opportunity for the young people to present their concerns. During a cosy pizza meal together, many ideas were discussed in more detail or the possibilities for implementation. The expansion of leisure facilities (e.g. skate parks, football pitches, courses) or the improvement of public transport connections as well as footpaths and cycle paths were mentioned particularly often.

Number of young people involved
50 young people between 12 and 20.

Degree of influence* these young people have on the initiative:

- **Did young people develop the idea for initiative?**
  No.
- **Did young people organise and plan the initiative?**
  No.
- **Did young people prepare the initiative?**
  Yes, together with the coordinating associations.
- **Did young people execute the initiative?**
  Yes.
- **Did young people evaluate the initiative?**
  Yes.

Frequency of good practice (is it a sporadic initiative or a continuous one?)
To be repeated.

To which extent does the initiative involve other stakeholders? How so?
The initiative involved young people as participants and local politicians.

Recommendation 2.3. -> Promoting and supporting youth-lead initiatives and activities

RUNG 8 -> An Example from Arouca (PORTUGAL)

Good practice name
Youth Association - 4540.

Entity responsible for the good practice
Youth Association - 4540.

Topic (Participatory budget; Ecotourism, etc.)
The topics are diverse, ranging from culture and environment to local identity, for example.

Description
Youth Association - 4540 works with culture and the environment, in the municipality of Arouca. They believe in culture as education and as a tool which allows them to open horizons. They also defend cultural policies and aspire to bring culture to all people and all places. It was in this line of thought that they created the "Cultura Aqui e Ali" initiative, with the objective of bringing the people of Arouca closer to our culture, as residents and portuguese. They also launched the magazine "Identidade 4540", which intends to broaden the coverage of the cultural panorama of Arouca, in order to: expand the coverage of subjects related to the 4540 Jovem Association activities; disseminate their work; promote the work of regional artists, so that the community can get to know and value them; encourage knowledge of local history and culture, contributing to the collective memory of the municipality; address issues related to environment, youth, associations and citizenship; share credible environmental information; and encourage the creative participation of young people and involve the community, through different dynamics.

In addition, they organize a humour festival, with the name of "Uma espécie de Festival de Humor", which aims to: make national comedians known to the community; promote dialogue between the art of humor; stimulate the community's critical spirit; create social and cultural dynamics; involve different community agents and guests; promote the sharing of ideas and humorous content and intergenerationality; involvement of local groups and stimulation of educational community for artistic/humorous creation, through dynamics which are taken to schools; promotion of non-formal education; contribution to expanding the cultural offer, aimed at youth; and expanding the offer of cultural initiatives for the active participation on Arouca.

In terms of the environment, they sponsor a forest area on "Monte da Senhora da Mó", with the objective of recovering the forest, contributing to the quality of the environment, based on the principles of a balanced forest. They're responsible for controlling invasive species, sowing and planting of indigenous species. This is done with the aim of raising awareness among young people and the community in general of the importance of caring for the environment, and contributing to reforestation and cleaning up the environment, in order to improve living conditions in the intervention territory.

Number of youths involved
30 young people directly (members of the association); 150 indirectly (participants in activities per year).

Degree of influence* young people have on the initiative:

- **Did young people develop the idea of the initiative/develop ideas within the initiative?**
  The 4540 Jovem Association was created by initiative of 15 young people from several parishes of the municipality of Arouca. The 4540 Jovem arises to respond to some needs.

- **Do young people organize and plan the initiative/ideas within the initiative?**
  Yes, young people organize and plan the initiative.

- **Do young people prepare the idea of the initiative/ideas within the initiative?**
  Yes, it is the young people who prepare the activities.

- **Do the youth execute the initiative/ideas within the initiative?**
  Yes, it is the youth who plan, organize and evaluate the organization's initiatives.

- **Do young people evaluate the initiative/ideas within the initiative?**
  Yes, the activities are evaluated directly by the young people who are in the organization of the activities, as well as by the partner entities.

Frequency of good practice.
Youth Association - 4540 has regular activity, spread throughout the year.

To what extent does the initiative involve other stakeholders in the territory? And in what way?
The Youth Association - 4540 has, as part of its activity, signed partnership agreements with several entities in the municipality of Arouca, including the Municipality of Arouca, Parish Council of Mansores, Parish Council of Escariz, Parish Council of Santa Eulália, Parish Union of Canelas and Espiunca, Archaeology Center of Arouca, AGA - Arouca Geoparque Association, Santa Maria do Monte Sports and Recreational Cultural Group, among others. These partnerships result in support in the organization of activities.

Recommendation 2.3. -> Promoting and supporting youth-lead initiatives and activities

RUNG 8 -> An Example from Valle del Tiétar (Spain)

Title of the good practice
LGTBI+ Events & Workshops.

Entity responsible for its promotion
Arenas Arcoiris Sierra de Gredos. (Arenas Rainbow, Gredos Mountains).

Topic (Participatory budget; Ecotourism, etc.)
Social activism, human rights, cultural events, arts.

Brief description
Activity created 3 years ago by a group of three young,now is much bigger, they offer support and assistance to vulnerable groups, through the organization of events, workshops, demonstrations and official claims.

Number of young people involved
The organizers are around 3 to 6 youngsters between 18 to 23 years old. The participation of young people at the events and/or demonstrations is quite large.

Degree of influence* these young people have on the initiative:

- **Did young people develop the idea for initiative?**
  Yes. A group of young people with the name of "Arenas Arco Iris".

- **Did young people organise, prepare, execute and plan the initiative?**
  Yes, as mentioned above.

- **Did young people evaluate the initiative?**
  The evaluation comes from them + young local and also all ages people.

Frequency of good practice (is it a sporadic initiative or a continuous one?)
It is an annual LGTBI+ demonstration and many workshops and even along the year.

To which extent does the initiative involve other stakeholders? How so?
Other collaborating entities are human rights groups such as Arenas8M or associations such as Jóvenes Solidarios and cultural centers from different towns in the Valley. Everyone is invited to the workshops and other activities such as "Orgullo" Proud demonstration. The annual event and workshops are more and more popular along the villages of the Tiétar Valley.

Recommendation 3. -> Understanding the challenges

RUNG 6 -> An Example from EU

Title of the good practice
ACORN: Empowering Young Rural Development.

Entity responsible for its promotion
Roscommon Leader Partnership (plus ID20, European E-Learning Institute, AJS, VISMEDNET, Momentum).

Topic (Participatory budget; Ecotourism, etc.)
Young Entrepreneurship, Development of rural communities.

Brief description
This is a good example of a project funded by the European Commission, with young people as a target group.

Activating Young Rural Development (ACORN) creates a new set of resources, including a transferable mechanism for youth inclusive rural development in Europe. The project aims to engage, empower, and inspire young people in rural areas to become active citizens, co-creators, and implementers of rural development initiatives. ACORN strives to create a more prosperous, interconnected, and strong rural Europe, particularly for rural youth. The overall objective of ACORN is to develop and implement a new suite of resources including a transferable mechanism for youth inclusive rural development in four European regions during the lifetime of the project. The ultimate goal is to engage, empower and inspire rural young people to become active citizens, co-creators and implementors of rural development initiatives that affect them and their future

ACORN does not only deliver on local policy but also national policies such as “Our Rural Future”, “Rural Development Programme Ireland 2021-2027”, “National Programme for Youth Slovenia” and “Spain’s Youth Strategy” which call for projects such as ACORN to actively involve young people in rural areas in the decisions that affect them and their future. It turns policy into practice by researching and promoting best practices for inclusive youth rural development and by providing a mechanism for young people to engage in rural development decision-making processes.

ACORN contributes to the Erasmus+ priority of common values, civic engagement and participation by engaging, empowering and inspiring rural young people to actively participate in democratic life and social/civic engagement. To achieve this objective, the staff conducted a research to uncover the specific issues causing rural youth depopulation in our regions and 20 European best practices to make rural development more inclusive for youth.

Via a programme of non-formal and informal learning, we will increase the rural leadership and community development skills of rural youth We will then open the door for them to engage and connect into the sphere of influence of local government and community development that shapes local rural development and policy. Many of the skills, which the staff of ACORN know, are needed for rural development are also recognised as key 21st Century skills for example creativity, collaboration, communication, leadership, initiative, and social skills. 21st Century skills are so-called as they are transversal skills necessary for modern workplaces. By enabling rural young people to develop these skills, ACORN not only increases their chances for civic engagement, but it also strengthens their employability.

PROJECT RESULTS:

Project Result 1
It explores the challenges and opportunities of engaging youth in sustainable rural community development. WP2 research leads to the development of a research report and compendium of good practices.

Project Result 2
It upskills and empower rural young people to actively participate in rural community development decision-making processes. ACORN partners achieved this objective by designing, developing and disseminating a young rural developer training toolkit and podcast.

Project Result 3
It upskills 40 rural development stakeholders about the importance of succession planning in rural community development. Activities focus on the development of a practical guide to creating a rural youth assembly. ACORN created 4 working Local Rural Youth Assemblies in Roscommon, Idrija, Castile and León and Malta.

Number of young people involved
This project has not been finished yet, so the number of young people involved is increasing.

Degree of influence* these young people have on the initiative:

- **Did young people develop the idea for initiative?**
  No, this idea was developed by the staff of the participating organisations.

- **Did young people organise and plan the initiative?**
  No, as well as the idea, the main activities, results and outputs were organised by senior staff of the participating organisations.

- **Did young people prepare the initiative?**
  No, it was developed and prepared by the staff members of the participating organisations.

- **Did young people execute the initiative?**
  Yes, young people participate in the development of workshops and activities related to the project, and are active participants in the social and youth entities involved.

- **Did young people evaluate the initiative?**
  The project has not been finished yet.

Frequency of the good practice (is it a sporadic initiative or a continuous one?)
Sporadic (2 years project).

To which extents does the initiative involve other stakeholders? How so?
At least 40 rural development stakeholders are foreseen to be involved in this project, with the aim to cocreate a practical guide to work on the implementation of youth assemblies.

Degree of influence, based on the previous questions:
Initiatives, that involves young people active participants: young people were cooperating in less than three points of participation (exm: they prepared and executed initiative, but were not involved in whole process)

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