

HOW CAN WE HELP THE YOUNG PEOPLE BECOME ACTIVE MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY?



Methodological ISSUE

2025



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History

In the spring of 2024 city of Fót won the opportunity to organize a twinning thematic cooperation and a town twinning meeting by the CERV-2023-CITIZENS-TOWN-TT programme.

Title of the application: Different cities - same values, development of cooperation between twin cities, sharing of good practices in helping young people become active EU citizens

Coordinator:

- Fóti Közszolgáltató Nonprofit Kft. – City of Fót

Partners:

- Bátyu (Ukraine)
- San Benedetto dei Marsi (Italy)
- Balavásár (Romania)
- Székelyhíd (Romania)



Project duration: 8 months (July 2024 – February 2025)

Project summary:

The project aims to share European values and good practices, highlight and focus on the democratic principles of the EU, especially among young people. Our goal is to introduce the values of the European Union to the youth of the settlements, to expand the knowledge of local governments for the implementation of democratic principles and the establishment of youth governments, and to develop urban democratic communities (youth civil society organizations).

The partner municipalities participating in the project organized 2 online and one face-to-face meeting during the project. The face-to-face meeting took place in the fall of 2024 in Fót in the form of a professional conference and a twinning meeting. As a result of the project, the following methodology was created, which helps young people and organizations dealing with them to become active EU citizens in the future.

Venue and date of the town twinning meeting:

Fót, Hungary, September 13-17, 2024.

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Young people and the European Union

Nowadays, the relationship with the European Union and the role of EU values are increasingly prominent in our lives, which is why it is very important for young people to know the basic principles of the EU. After all....



... they are the future of the union.

Young people will be the ones who will carry forward the EU values or even shape them in the future. If they understand and know how the EU works at a young age, they can become more responsible and aware citizens.

... knowledge leads to informed decision-making

Being part of the EU directly affects young people's lives (e.g. learning, employment opportunities, travel, legal protection). If they understand the functioning and principles of the EU institutions, they can vote or participate in public life in a more informed way.

... knowledge promotes democratic thinking

The EU's core values – human rights, the rule of law, freedom, equality, solidarity – contribute to strengthening democratic attitudes. Knowing them helps young people think critically and recognise the value of democracy.

... through it they understand international relations

We live in an increasingly global world where the fate of countries is intertwined. Knowing how the EU works helps young people better navigate foreign policy, economic and environmental issues.

... they can take advantage of the opportunities

Many young people are not even aware of how many programs, scholarships, and mobility opportunities are open to them (e.g. Erasmus+, DiscoverEU, EU youth projects). Basic EU knowledge is essential to understand these.

... will be more protected against misinformation

Misleading or manipulative information about the EU is often spread. Those who are aware of the EU's principles and functioning are more likely to resist false narratives and to think critically.

Why is it important that young people participate in the life of our community?

The professional organizations participating in the project agree that the active social role of young people is of paramount importance in many respects - not only for them, but also for the future of society.



1. The next generation shapes society

Young people will be the decision-makers, workers, and leaders of the future – so it is important that they learn early on how to influence their community, how democracy works, and what their responsibilities are.

2. Fresh thinking, new ideas

Young people are often more open to new technologies, innovations and social changes. Their participation can give impetus to causes that the more conservative adult society may not necessarily support at first.

3. Development of empathy and a sense of community

If young people participate in voluntary work, local initiatives or civil society organizations, it helps them to better understand the situation of others and strengthens their sense of solidarity and the importance of cooperation.

4. Development of self-confidence and skills

Through social engagement, they develop skills such as communication, problem-solving and leadership skills - these are also an advantage in their future job.

5. Strengthening democratic values

When young people experience that their opinions matter and that they can actively shape the world around them, they will show a stronger commitment to democratic institutions and values.

6. Promoting positive change

Many social movements (e.g. environmental protection, equal opportunities, human rights) are initiated by young people. Their enthusiasm and passion often play a key role in making real changes happen.

What does it take for young people to be willing to join the settlement?

Based on the statements of the young people present and youth professionals, we can state that young people in small rural towns are more willing to participate in community tasks if:



- they have a personal connection to the matter,
- they feel that what they are doing is important, and
- the activity is fun, community-building, or developmental for them.

The young people of the five settlements mentioned the following common and popular tasks most often, in which they would be happy to take part:

1. Environmental beautification programs - planting trees, flowers, tidying up public spaces, garbage collection campaigns, creating a community garden, because it is simple, spectacular, teamwork - and the results are immediately visible.

2. Organizing cultural events – village/town day, youth day, local concert, film club, craft fair, even student drama club or slam poetry evening, because it gives an opportunity for creative self-expression and shared experience - and they can often contribute their own ideas.

3. Helping, volunteering activities - helping the elderly, those in need (shopping, gardening, talking), helping at animal shelters or civil organizations, organizing fundraising campaigns. All this develops empathy and connects them with important, "real" issues.

4. Content creation, communication - managing social media pages, making posters, taking photos/videos at events, creating a local newspaper, podcast or blog for young people. Technological knowledge + creativity = a very attractive combination for young people.

5. Participation in educational or development programs - organizing peer support groups, study circles, career workshops, discussion evenings, youth forums. These are especially interesting for high school and university students.

6. Organizing leisure, sports or game programs - sports championships, tours, ping-pong competitions, night soccer, board game evenings, thematic clubs. These are both relaxed and community-building - and they also easily involve the more passive.



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How can a small town encourage young people to be active in their communities?

Community cohesion and active participation are particularly important in a small town, as they must do it with a smaller number of people, but this can also provide more personal, direct opportunities. The following ideas emerged from the workshops and presentations sharing good practices at the twinning meeting on how a small town can encourage young people to be active in their communities:

1. Establishing a youth government or youth council

This gives young people the opportunity to form opinions, make suggestions and even participate in minor decisions. This provides direct experience of democracy and responsibility.



2. Supporting cultural and creative programs

Concerts, art exhibitions, talent shows, community graffiti projects – these are not only fun, but also give young people the opportunity to participate in the events as creators or organizers.

3. Scholarships, internships and community service

If a small town offers internship opportunities at the municipality or local businesses, it not only provides work experience, but also a connection to public life. Community service can also be an experience, not just a mandatory task.

4. Regular youth forums, camps, workshops

These are occasions where young people can be together, brainstorm and even start new projects. If they feel that they are being listened to, they will be more motivated.

5. Involving environmental and social projects

For example, community gardens, waste collection, green days, fundraising, awareness programs - all of these provide opportunities for young people to have a concrete impact on their environment.

6. Using online platforms, social media

The town can use TikTok, Instagram or YouTube to reach young people. Through these channels, they can ask them questions, involve them, or even launch challenges and polls.

7. Recognition and publicity

You can even give a “Young Community Hero” award or something similar once a year – it’s motivating and sets an example for others.



So how can we get young people, who are often accused of passivity, to become interested and actively participate in the everyday life of the city and aspire to be its shapers?

Young people are often portrayed as passive, but many are not indifferent, they just don't feel like they have a say or that their participation matters. The key is to speak to them in their own language, through their own means, and offer them real, authentic opportunities.

Here are some ways to engage and encourage them to become active citizens:

1. Involving relevant topics and real issues



Young people can be addressed when it comes to issues that affect them: e.g. community spaces, public transport, environmental protection, youth programs, sports and entertainment opportunities.

Tip: Ask them! Through a questionnaire, online poll or youth forum.

2. Real input – don't just call them for decoration



Don't just "listen" to them, but involve them in the decisions. If they feel that what they say really has weight, that in itself is motivating.

Example: Have a young member of the local government committee or have a Youth Council whose suggestions are considered.

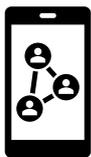
3. A community experience, not a solitary task



Many people don't want to be "lone activists," but they enjoy participating in things as part of a team. Especially if they can do it with friends.

Tip: Create themed clubs, projects, or challenges where you can create or make a difference together.

4. Communicate where they are – online, visually, honestly



Let's use TikTok, Instagram, Discord, YouTube, and involve young "ambassadors" who can authentically address others.

5. Inspiring role models and stories



Let's introduce young people who have already actively contributed to the city - whether it's organizing, volunteering or even implementing a community idea.

Tip: Maybe a "Youth of the Month" column or a short video series about them.

6. Tangible opportunities to express yourself



E.g. creating a community space based on their own ideas, urban development project for young people, street art program, music/film workshop.

The more something comes from their own idea, the more they feel it belongs to them.

7. Recognition, confirmation



In addition to the joy of participation, it is also important whether young people are noticed. Recognition, thanks, even a small gift or a public award can mean a lot.

Youth policy proposal – “Youth for the city!”

The 5 twinning towns participating in the project “*Different cities - same values, development of cooperation between twin cities, sharing of good practices in helping young people become active EU citizens*” have formulated a Youth Policy Proposal Package for local governments to encourage more active social participation of young people. This document can be easily customized depending on the size of the town.

Goal: Strengthening the participation of young people in community life, supporting their social responsibility, and encouraging their active role at the local level.

Strategic objectives:

- Strengthening social participation
 - The voice of young people should be heard and have an impact.
- Providing community experiences
 - Developing strong community ties.
- Expanding knowledge and developing skills
 - Educating aware, prepared citizens.
- Motivation and recognition
 - Participation should have visible results and recognition.



Featured proposals and programs

1. Establish a Youth Council

Objective: Involve young people in decision-making and express their own opinions on city affairs.

Details:

- A council consisting of young people aged 16–25
- They can make suggestions to the city council
- They are invited to committee meetings

2. “Your City” – Youth Idea Competition

Objective: A program to support young people’s own project ideas (e.g. community space, event, community building campaign).

Support: Material support (e.g. 250–1.000 €/project), mentoring.



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3. “Young Hands” – Volunteer and Community Program

Objective: To provide regular opportunities for community work.

Possible activities:

- Cleaning up green areas
- Helping the elderly, families with young children
- Supporting animal shelters

Reward: Community service certificate, public recognition, young volunteer award

4. “You have a voice!” – Communication platform for young people

Goal: To create an online platform (e.g. Instagram, TikTok, city blog) where young people can:

- report on programs,
- share opinions,
- launch self-organizing initiatives.

5. “Active Citizen” – Educational and sensitization program

Objective: Introduction to the EU, democracy, human rights and the basics of social engagement.

Forms:

- Debate clubs, lectures, workshops
- Student government, youth forums

6. “Our city, our decision!” – Participatory budget for young people

Objective: Young people can decide how to use a smaller budget from the city (e.g. 2.500€).

Steps:

- Submit project ideas
- Public vote among young people
- Implementation with the support of the local government

7. “Young Community Hero” Award

Purpose: To recognize young people who have actively contributed to the community.

Form: Annual awards ceremony, poster, short film or social media presentation.

Schedule – suggested steps:

- Quarter 1: Youth forum to introduce the program
- Quarter 2: First call for ideas, launch of volunteer programs
- Quarter 3: Launch of educational programs, participation budget
- Quarter 4: First “Community Hero” awards ceremony

Partners and collaboration opportunities

- Local schools, teachers
- Civil organizations, youth associations
- Churches, sports clubs
- Local entrepreneurs (e.g. sponsorship)



Final thought

One of the important conclusions of the project is that young people should not be “involved” but rather given space. If they are given space, they will become creative, enthusiastic and active EU citizens. The aim of the proposal package is to give them a community experience, real opportunities and recognition in their own city, thereby strengthening their identity and European citizenship.





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