



YOUTH-LED SPACES FOR TRANSFORMATION

Practical Guidebook for Establishing and
Managing Youth Spaces in Rural Areas



ERC Project | 2025 - 2027
Romania • Bulgaria • Poland



CONTENTS



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"Empowering Rural Communities: Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation"



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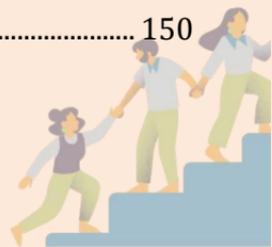
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This Practical Guidebook was developed within the ERC project (Empowering Rural Communities: Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation), funded by the European Union under Erasmus+ (KA210-YOU). The first version was produced during the project's guidebook development phase (01/04/2025–30/09/2025) and subsequently refined based on local piloting and youth feedback collected by partners in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria during implementation.

1.1 Purpose of the Guidebook

This Practical Guidebook was developed within the ERC project (Empowering Rural Communities: Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation), funded by the European Union under Erasmus+ (KA210-YOU). The first version was produced during the project's guidebook development phase (01/04/2025–30/09/2025) and subsequently refined based on local piloting and youth feedback collected by partners in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria during implementation.

At its heart, this guidebook is founded on a humanistic approach that recognizes the inherent dignity, potential, and agency of every young person. It is built on the fundamental belief that rural youth are not passive recipients of services, but active agents of change with unique talents, aspirations, and contributions to make to their communities. This humanistic perspective emphasizes genuine relationships, empathy, respect for individual differences,

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and the creation of safe spaces where young people can explore their identity, develop their capacities, and realize their full potential.



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The guidebook's primary purpose is to disseminate practical knowledge on evidence-based methods of working with rural youth, emphasizing the specificities of local environments and the complex challenges facing non-urban communities in an era of increasing urbanization and digitalization. The publication offers both a solid theoretical foundation grounded in contemporary research in social pedagogy and rural sociology, and tested methodological tools validated through practice by project partners across diverse cultural and institutional contexts in

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Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. These methods are presented through a person-centered lens that prioritizes holistic development, recognizing each young person's unique journey and supporting pathways toward self-actualization and meaningful community engagement.



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The guidebook addresses the urgent need to systematize and disseminate good practices in rural youth activation—practices that have often remained marginal in development programs primarily targeting urban areas. The publication's value lies in its innovative, interdisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from social pedagogy, andragogy, social work, rural sociology, and theories of local and regional development into a coherent



methodological framework. Central to this approach is the recognition of human dignity—ensuring that every young person, regardless of background, circumstances, or location, has access to opportunities that honor their intrinsic worth and enable meaningful societal contribution.

The guidebook's particular value lies in its empirical foundation in real-life experiences of working with rural youth, documented throughout the ERC project's implementation period. Each methodological recommendation emerged from action research processes involving cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, ensuring practical utility and adaptability across diverse local contexts. The guidebook also provides critical analysis of systemic and institutional barriers to effective rural youth work, alongside concrete proposals for addressing these challenges. These recommendations are grounded in authentic relationships between youth workers and young people—relationships characterized by mutual respect, trust, empathy, and genuine commitment to each person's well-being and growth.

The publication also reflects the priorities of the Erasmus+ Program: inclusion and diversity, common values, civic engagement and participation. This means the guidance intentionally supports equitable access to youth spaces and activities, promotes non-discrimination, and encourages active citizenship—especially for young people with fewer opportunities in rural contexts. In practical terms, these values are operationalized through the procedures and tools presented in the



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chapters and annexes (e.g., participation and consent processes, safeguarding approaches, and inclusive program design). Finally, the publication contributes to European youth policies and rural development strategies, offering practical insights for



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implementing the objectives of European cooperation in the youth field and strengthening rural human capital. Policy makers at local, regional, and national levels can use this guidebook as a reference resource, drawing on its evidence-based recommendations for designing and implementing more effective programs supporting rural youth.

1.2 Target Groups

The guidebook addresses diverse audiences whose professional, social, or research activities relate directly or indirectly to rural youth work and rural development. Identifying precise target



groups was central to the publication design process, enabling content and presentation style adaptation to meet specific reader needs and expectations. While many audiences can benefit, the guidebook is written to remain practical, actionable, and adaptable across different institutional realities.

1.2.1 Primary Target Group: Youth Workers and Informal Educators

The primary target group comprises professional youth workers and informal educators who implement programs, projects, and initiatives in rural environments across various organizational structures. This category encompasses both experienced practitioners seeking new inspiration and methodological tools, and emerging specialists requiring solid theoretical foundations and practical guidelines. For this group, the guidebook serves as a comprehensive resource covering contemporary methodologies in youth work, innovative pedagogical approaches, and proven techniques for engaging young people in development activities. The guidebook emphasizes the importance of humanistic values in youth work—values such as unconditional positive regard, authentic presence, active listening, and creating environments where young people feel seen, heard, and valued for who they are, not merely for their achievements. In rural settings—where visibility, privacy, transport constraints, and limited services can shape participation—this relational foundation is often the decisive factor in whether youth spaces become trusted and sustainable.

1.2.2 Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations

An important target group comprises representatives of non-governmental organizations and social action entities operating in



rural areas or implementing programs for rural youth. This category includes local NGO leaders, social project coordinators, local development specialists, and volunteers working with rural communities. The guidebook provides this group with proven strategies for building long-term, trust-based relationships with young rural residents, methods for enhancing motivation to participate actively in local community life, and practical guidance for designing and implementing programs that respond to the actual needs of rural youth.

Because rural organizations often function with limited staffing and resources, the guidebook also supports realistic planning: it encourages phased development of youth spaces, partnership-building with local stakeholders, and step-by-step implementation that can be adjusted to seasonality, distance, and the availability of venues and transport.

1.2.3 Local Government Representatives

Another important group of recipients consists of representatives of local government structures at all levels—from municipal and district officials, through councillors and board members, to commune heads, mayors and starosts responsible for shaping and implementing local youth policy and rural development strategies. For this group, the guidebook is a valuable source of knowledge on the specific needs, aspirations and problems of rural youth, while presenting evidence-based models of effective public interventions that can be adapted and implemented within local and regional socio-economic development strategies.



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The guidebook is designed to help local authorities understand what makes youth spaces work in practice: governance models, safeguarding and accountability, realistic budgeting, and community engagement mechanisms that strengthen legitimacy and long-term sustainability—without turning youth spaces into overly formal, inaccessible institutions.



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1.2.4 Researchers and Academics

The guidebook also addresses researchers, theoreticians, and academics working in rural development, non-formal education, social work, and youth sociology. For this group, the publication offers empirical data and practical insights that can inform further scientific research, theoretical development, and methodological innovation in rural youth work. The documented experiences and conclusions can be integrated into higher education curricula,



contributing to better preparation of future specialists for rural environments.

In addition, the guidebook highlights how practice-oriented knowledge can be generated responsibly and rigorously through participatory and action-research approaches—especially when young people are involved not only as respondents, but also as partners contributing to interpretation and recommendation-building.

1.2.5 Young People from Rural Areas

Young people themselves—rural residents aged 15–25—can use the guidebook as a source of inspiration for their own social engagement and to better understand available personal and professional development opportunities in local contexts. This publication can enhance awareness of their own potential and the significant role they can play in sustainable development processes within their communities, while providing knowledge about mechanisms of social participation and available forms of institutional support.

Although the guidebook is written primarily for practitioners, it is intentionally accessible in style and encourages youth-led and co-managed approaches. Young readers can use it to: understand how youth spaces are created and governed, articulate what “a safe and inclusive space” should mean in practice, and engage in dialogue with local decision-makers from a more informed position.

1.2.6 Educational Institutions

Finally, the guidebook may be useful for representatives of educational institutions at various levels—from high school principals to university rectors—seeking effective methods for collaborating with local communities and engaging young people in educational and development projects that strengthen connections between educational institutions and their surrounding communities.

Educational institutions can also treat youth spaces as complementary learning environments: places where non-formal education supports motivation, civic competence, soft skills, and community-based learning—especially for young people who do not thrive in strictly formal, classroom-based settings.

1.3: Methodology and Sources

In this chapter you will understand why a participatory, practice-oriented methodology was chosen and how it was implemented across Bulgaria, Romania and Poland in rural settings.

What data were collected, when, and from whom (sample sizes, timeframes, stakeholder groups), and how the project ensured ethical conduct, safeguarding, and data protection.

How quality was ensured through triangulation, validation steps, and partner consistency checks.

How field insights were translated into implementable guidance, including procedures, SOPs, checklists and KPIs used throughout this Guidebook.





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Which instruments and templates you can reuse immediately, including interview/focus group guides, consent forms, feedback forms and coding sheets (see Annexes A–D).

This chapter sets out the methodological foundations of the Guidebook. Rather than simply enumerating project activities, it explains why specific approaches were selected, how they were implemented across partner regions, and what value they add for teams establishing or managing youth spaces in rural contexts. It also documents youth involvement, data collection and validation procedures, ensuring the guidance is grounded in lived experience and professional practice. Finally, it outlines simple, practical mechanisms for long-term follow-up so that results can be observed beyond initial implementation cycles and adapted as contexts evolve.

The methodology combines participatory action research with non-formal education (NFE) principles. This pairing reflects three priorities that shaped both process and product:

Local relevance. Content was iteratively tested in rural settings in Bulgaria, Romania and Poland, and adjusted for transport constraints, seasonality, limited infrastructure, and mixed-age groups that often participate together in small communities.

Inclusivity. Young people from diverse ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds participated in shaping material so that the Guidebook reflects a plural experience of rural life, including different levels of access to services, mobility, and informal learning opportunities.

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Practical orientation. Theory informed framing, but the endpoint was implementable guidance—procedures, examples and tools that small teams can adopt without heavy resources, large professional staff, or complex administrative capacity.

In addition, the consortium worked with a “practice-to-product” logic: data were not collected for research alone, but to generate usable decisions (what to do, who does it, how often, with what safety safeguards, and how to measure progress).



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1.3.1 Literature review and desk research

We mapped European and national knowledge on rural youth work, youth participation and placemaking, with a focus on materials that can be translated into everyday practice. Sources included Council of Europe and European Commission materials, SALTO resources, Youth Wiki, European Youth Work Agenda documents, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) program guides, and peer-reviewed scholarship (e.g., *Youth & Society*, *Journal of Youth Studies*).

This phase served four practical functions:

Clarifying concepts used consistently in this Guidebook (e.g., inclusion, participation, youth-led space, safeguarding, rural accessibility).

Surfacing operational gaps—particularly around continuity of programming, outreach to “hard-to-reach” micro-settlements, and mobile / hybrid delivery.

Identifying transferable practices (what works across different administrative systems) versus context-specific solutions (what depends on national legislation or local government structure).

Building a shared reference base for partners so that later field insights could be compared using a common vocabulary.

Where relevant and feasible, partners also cross-checked this mapping against locally available strategies and municipal documents to ensure the Guidebook’s recommendations can “plug into” real planning cycles (annual budgets, school calendars, seasonal employment patterns, etc.).

1.3.2 Participatory fieldwork (sample sizes & timeframe)

March—August 2025: trained facilitators conducted semi-structured focus groups and interviews with more than 80 young people (approximately 15–25 years) and 25 youth workers in rural areas across the three partner countries. A common guide was adapted to local language and culture, with careful attention to culturally appropriate wording and locally sensitive topics.

Local piloting phase: During the guidebook development phase (April–September 2025), each partner organization engaged 10 young people aged 15–25 from rural areas in focus groups and standardized workshops to test draft content and activities. Participants provided feedback through structured questionnaires and open discussions, which directly informed revisions to the guidebook chapters and the development of training modules (see Annex D). This piloting process ensured that the final guidebook reflects the actual needs, preferences, and constraints experienced by rural youth in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.

To strengthen triangulation and reduce “single-perspective bias”, the team also included short interviews and informal consultations with parents/guardians (where relevant), municipal officers, teachers, and community leaders. These conversations were not used to “override” youth perspectives, but to better understand constraints (e.g., transport, safety norms, access to premises) and feasibility (e.g., permissions, opening hours, insurance, local tensions).



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Core themes included:

- Access barriers (transport, cost, time, family obligations, internet coverage).
- Perceived safety and belonging in public and semi-public places.
- Learning value and motivation (what counts as meaningful for youth and families).
- Scheduling practicalities in low-density regions (including mountainous areas and weather-related disruptions).
- Inclusion dynamics: who comes, who does not, and why (with attention to stigma and informal gatekeeping).
- Sampling logic.

The project used purposive sampling aimed at capturing diverse rural realities (small villages, peripheral towns, mountainous communities), rather than statistical representativeness. This matches the Guidebook's purpose: practical guidance that reflects real constraints and workable solutions.

1.3.3 Co-creation with youth (from consultation to shared ownership)

Young leaders participated beyond consultation. They commented on chapter drafts, proposed activity formats, piloted tools, and suggested revisions for clarity and feasibility. Youth contributions were treated as actionable design inputs, not “nice-to-have feedback”.



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Small but decisive adjustments now embedded in procedures include:



- Shorter winter session blocks (more frequent, shorter meetings to match weather, daylight, and transport constraints).
- Visible “You said / We did” notices to increase transparency and trust, and to show that feedback influences real decisions.
- Staggered age-group segments during outreach (e.g., shorter, more structured entry points for younger teens; more autonomous project slots for older youth).
- Practical language edits to ensure instructions are comprehensible for new youth workers, not only for experienced facilitators.



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Co-creation was also used to test whether recommended tools feel respectful and realistic for youth—especially around consent processes, safeguarding language, and the balance between “fun” and “learning”.

1.3.4 Case study documentation (transferable sequences, not “success stories”)

Each partner curated one national case tracing the establishment and operation of a youth space from initial scoping to steady-state delivery. These were designed as “process cases” rather than promotional narratives: they show the real order of steps, typical obstacles, and how teams adapted.

Drafts were read with local stakeholders to verify factual accuracy and transferability. The cases provide concrete sequences (premises, safety, program cadence, partner rhythm) and short accounts of challenges and solutions, including:

Negotiating access to buildings (schools, municipal rooms, NGO premises).

Designing minimum safety standards (entry/exit rules, supervision ratios, incident logging).

Sustaining attendance when young people migrate seasonally for work or schooling.

Coordinating with local authorities without losing youth-led character.

1.3.5 Ethics, safeguarding and data protection (how we kept participation safe)



Because the Guidebook is meant to be reused with young people—including minors—ethics and safeguarding are treated as core practice, not a formal checkbox.

Informed consent and assent: participants received clear explanations of purpose, voluntary participation, and how feedback would be used.

For minors, guardian consent and youth assent were applied in line with national practices and the project’s safeguarding approach.

Participants could withdraw at any time without consequences, and could skip any question.

Confidentiality and anonymity: Notes and summaries were anonymised (no identifying details in reportable outputs).

When case studies included contextual details, partners applied “minimum necessary detail” so locations/individuals could not be easily identified in small communities.

Safeguarding-first facilitation: Sessions were facilitated with clear group rules (respect, no pressure to disclose personal trauma, referral pathways if a safeguarding concern arises).

Facilitators used a “do no harm” principle: if a topic generated distress, activities were adapted immediately and participants were offered support routes.



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Data protection and storage. Data were stored in restricted-access shared folders with partner-defined responsibilities (who can access, who can export, and how long the data are retained). Where digital tools were used, partners prioritised GDPR-aligned practices (e.g., limiting personal data collected to what was strictly needed for the activity).

Reusable templates and examples are provided in Annex C: Participation & Consent Pack (consent forms, participation registers, data protection statements).



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1.3.6 Quality assurance and validation (how we ensured reliability)

To ensure that recommendations are robust and not driven by one-off impressions, the project used multiple quality mechanisms:



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Triangulation - Youth perspectives were compared with youth worker experience and community-level constraints (e.g., transport, available premises). This supported balanced guidance: youth priorities remain central, but feasibility is addressed honestly.

Cross-country consistency checks - Partners used a shared structure and shared guiding questions so that findings from Bulgaria, Romania and Poland could be compared meaningfully, while still allowing local adaptation.

Peer review within the consortium - Draft chapters and toolkits were reviewed by partner teams, and revision logs were maintained (what changed, why, and what feedback informed it). Pilot testing of tools. Selected templates (feedback forms, schedules, basic SOP elements) were tested in local sessions and adjusted for clarity, length, and cultural fit.

Limitations (transparent boundaries) - The methodology is qualitative and practice-oriented; it does not claim statistical representativeness.

Rural communities vary greatly; therefore, the Guidebook emphasizes adaptable principles and “minimum viable standards” rather than fixed models.

Some solutions that work in one legal environment may require translation in another (addressed in Chapter 3 with country-specific legal/institutional notes).

1.3.7 From insights to procedures, SOPs and KPIs (how this Guidebook was built)

A key methodological step was turning field insights into operational guidance. This was done through a structured conversion process:

Identify recurring needs and constraints (e.g., transport unreliability, multi-age participation, stigma around “youth centers”).

Translate needs into operational decisions (e.g., session length, outreach rhythm, supervision rules, inclusion practices).

Convert decisions into tools:

- SOPs (standard operating procedures) for recurring processes (opening/closing, incident response, consent handling).
- Checklists for quick implementation (pre-opening audit, safety pack).
- Templates for planning and documentation (weekly schedule, partner meeting notes, feedback loops).
- Attach measurable indicators (KPIs) where measurement supports learning and accountability (e.g., attendance stability, repeat participation, diversity of participants, number of youth-led initiatives, satisfaction and perceived safety).



This structure is reflected throughout the Guidebook:

- Annex A focuses on safety and readiness (minimum standards, safeguarding, audits).
- Annex B supports program planning (schedules, roadmaps, operational templates).
- Annex C supports participation and consent (registration, consent, data protection).

1.3.8 Reusable instruments and templates (what you can copy-paste)

To support direct implementation, the consortium prepared a set of reusable tools aligned with the methodology:

- Data collection and reflection tools
- Semi-structured interview guide (youth / youth worker versions)
- Focus group guide with inclusive facilitation prompts
- Observation notes template (what to notice in a youth space)
- Reflection log template for youth workers (what happened / what changed / what we'll do next)
- Participation, consent and safeguarding
- Participation register (minimal data fields)
- Consent and assent templates (including parental/guardian consent where needed)
- Basic data protection notice for youth activities
- Incident log template and escalation notes (for safeguarding-first practice)
- Feedback and improvement



- Quick session feedback form (short, youth-friendly)
- “You said / We did” board template
- Quarterly improvement review sheet (what to keep / stop / start)
- Coding and synthesis
- Simple coding sheet for thematic analysis (barriers, enablers, inclusion risks, practical solutions)
- Action prioritisation matrix (impact vs feasibility), used to decide what becomes a procedure or a recommendation

All templates are referenced in the chapter and provided in Annexes A–D so teams can apply them immediately and adapt them to local contexts.

Closing note: how to apply this methodology in your own setting

If you are building or improving a youth space, you can replicate the approach on a smaller scale:

1. Run a short desk scan (local services, youth transport routes, school calendar, existing community spaces).
2. Conduct 2–3 youth focus groups and 5–10 short interviews with youth workers/partners.
3. Co-create one pilot month of programming, then review it using simple feedback tools.
4. Convert what you learn into 3–5 basic SOPs and a small KPI set that helps you improve—without turning youth work into bureaucracy.

This methodology is designed to be lightweight, ethical, and action-oriented—so that rural teams with limited capacity can still build high-quality, youth-led spaces.



1.4 Structure of the Guidebook

This Practical Guidebook is organized into nine main chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of establishing and managing youth spaces in rural areas:

Chapter 1: Introduction (this chapter)

- Purpose and objectives of the guidebook
- Target groups
- Overview of methodology and sources
- Structure of the guidebook

Chapter 2: Understanding Work with Rural Youth

- Challenges and opportunities in rural areas
- Digital exclusion and inclusion
- Principles of non-formal education
- Youth participation and empowerment

Chapter 3: Establishing a Youth Space

- Legal and institutional frameworks (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria)
- Cooperation with local authorities
- Implementation roadmap
- Funding and sustainability





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Chapter 4: Managing a Youth Space

- Team roles and responsibilities
- Planning and scheduling activities
- Budgeting and resource management
- Inclusion and diversity in practice

Chapter 5: Youth Work Introduction

- Non-Formal Activities
- Icebreakers and energizers
- Workshops on soft skills and civic engagement
- Simulations and role plays
- Thematic activities and creative methods

Chapter 6: Best Practices

- Best practices from Bulgaria
- Best practices from Romania
- Best practices from Poland

Chapter 7: Feedback from Rural Youth

- Expectations and needs of young people
- Pathways to employment and entrepreneurship
- Place, identity and culture
- Recommendations from youth



Chapter 8: Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact

- Evaluation frameworks
- Key performance indicators
- Long-term impact measurement
- Continuous improvement

Chapter 9: Conclusions and Future Outlook

- Key learnings and recommendations
- Transferability of approaches
- Future perspectives for rural youth work

Annexes A—D

- Annex A: Pre-Opening & Safety Pack (checklists, audits, safeguarding protocols)
- Annex B: Program Planning Pack (schedules, roadmaps, templates)
- Annex C: Participation & Consent Pack (registers, consent forms, data protection)
- Annex D: Training Modules (ERC) — structured training modules for youth workers and young people

1.5 How to Use This Guidebook

This guidebook is designed to be a practical resource that can be used in multiple ways:





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For practitioners establishing new youth spaces: Start with Chapter 3 (Establishing a Youth Space) for step-by-step guidance, then refer to Chapter 4 (Managing a Youth Space) for operational strategies. Use the annexes as ready-to-use tools.

For existing youth space managers: Focus on Chapter 4 (Managing a Youth Space) and Chapter 5 (Youth Work Introduction) to enhance your current practices. Review Chapter 6 (Best Practices) for innovative approaches from other contexts.

For policy makers and local authorities: Read Chapter 2 (Understanding Work with Rural Youth) and Chapter 3 (Establishing a Youth Space) to understand the rationale and practical requirements. Chapter 8 (Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact) provides frameworks for assessing effectiveness.

For educators and trainers: Chapter 5 (Youth Work Introduction) offers detailed activity descriptions and methodologies. Chapter 7 (Feedback from Rural Youth) provides insights into young people's perspectives and needs.

For researchers: Chapter 1.3 (Methodology and Sources) details the research approach. Chapters throughout provide empirical evidence and case studies that can inform further research.

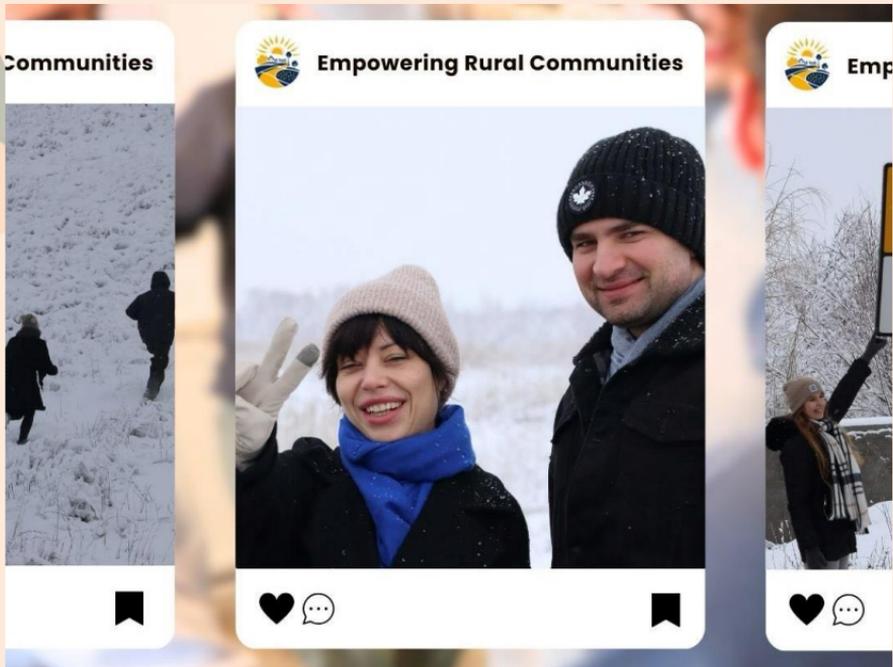
All tools, templates and checklists referenced in the chapters are provided in the Annexes section (Annexes A–D) for immediate use and adaptation to local contexts.



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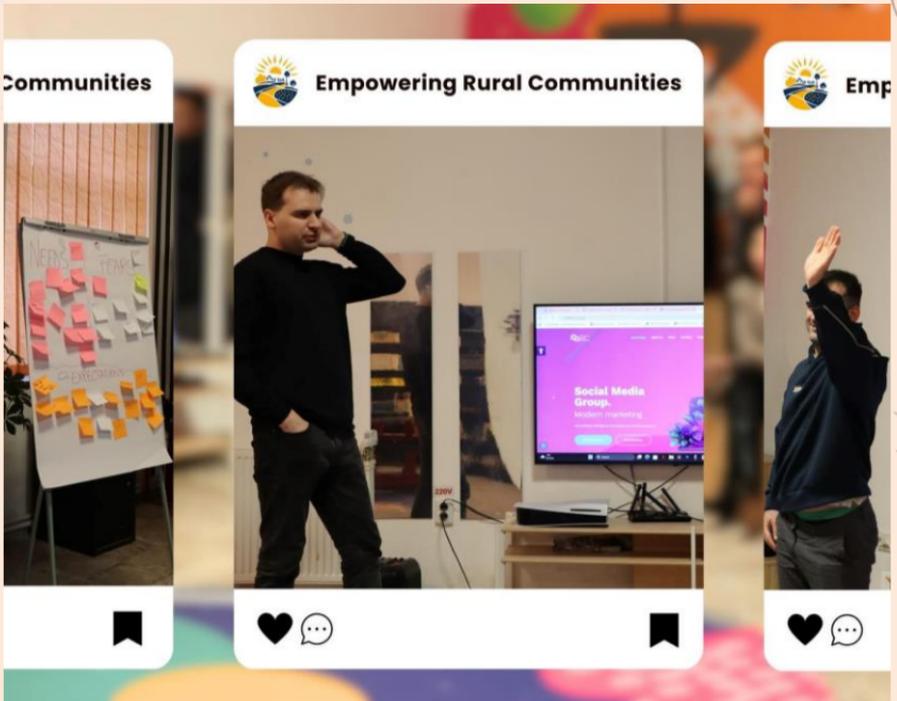
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CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING WORK WITH RURAL YOUTH



2.1 Purpose and Scope

Working with rural youth requires a nuanced understanding of the unique social, economic, cultural, and infrastructural conditions that shape young people's lives outside urban centers.

This chapter provides a conceptual and practical foundation for youth workers, community organisers, and young leaders who want to create, manage, and animate youth spaces in rural areas in line with the ERC project's objectives: strengthening youth empowerment, social inclusion, active citizenship, community development, and youth entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship).

The ERC project addresses rural youth and rural youth workers, with particular attention to those with fewer opportunities or challenging backgrounds, and explicitly aims to increase participation of young people from diverse backgrounds in youth spaces. This requires a grounded approach: understanding barriers, recognising local strengths, and using non-formal education (NFE) and participatory methods as the backbone of youth work practice.



This chapter therefore focuses on three interconnected areas:

- Structural challenges and opportunities that influence young people’s development in rural contexts;
- Digital exclusion and digital participation, understood not only as access to infrastructure but also skills, safety, and meaningful use;
- Methodological foundations—non-formal education and youth participation/empowerment—used throughout the Guidebook and piloted in ERC activities.

This chapter also links directly to the program priorities selected in the ERC application: inclusion and diversity; promoting active citizenship and youth entrepreneurship; and common values, civic engagement and participation—while strengthening alternative forms of participation and community development.



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2.2 Challenges and Opportunities in Rural Areas

Rural areas are not “one uniform reality.” They differ significantly by region, history, local economy, demographic trends, availability of institutions, and the relationships between local authorities and civil society. For youth workers, this means: never assume that an approach that worked in one rural community will automatically work in another. Instead, start from diagnosis, dialogue, and co-creation with young people.

When we speak about inclusion in rural youth work, it is crucial to understand social inclusion as a multidimensional process: shaped by socio-economic conditions, educational pathways, identity factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation), and the presence or absence of bridging social capital (links between groups and institutions). This perspective is essential for designing youth spaces that do not unintentionally reproduce exclusion.



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2.2.1 Structural Challenges Facing Rural Youth

Limited Access to Education and Development Opportunities

One of the most persistent structural barriers is limited access to quality education and development opportunities, especially beyond compulsory schooling. Rural schools may face constraints in teaching resources, extracurricular programs, language learning, and career guidance. Young people often have fewer opportunities for internships, volunteering pathways, civic learning, or contact with diverse role models and professional networks.

At the European level, differences in educational outcomes can be observed along the “degree of urbanisation.” For example, Eurostat reporting on tertiary educational attainment among young adults shows higher shares in cities than in rural areas, highlighting a structural pattern in access and opportunity.

For youth spaces, this means that non-formal education is not a “nice extra.” It functions as a practical equaliser—creating routes to skills, confidence, and agency when formal systems and local labour markets do not provide enough stepping stones.

Socio-Economic Constraints and Limited Labour Market Diversity

Rural youth frequently experience constrained labour markets dominated by a small number of sectors (often agriculture, seasonal work, or limited local services). This can create a sense of “no future here,” and it increases economic dependency on family networks. Young people may also lack practical exposure to entrepreneurship, social innovation, or modern forms of work (digital, creative, remote, project-based).



Youth spaces can respond by developing transversal competences (communication, teamwork, initiative, project management) and by building pathways into entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship—exactly in line with ERC priorities and planned capacity-building activities.

Limited Transport and Mobility

Mobility constraints are a classic rural barrier that affects nearly everything: access to education, employment, culture, healthcare, and youth participation. Even when opportunities exist “nearby,” they may remain effectively inaccessible due to cost, travel time, poor schedules, or lack of safe transport options—especially for younger teenagers and young women.

A youth space can partly compensate by becoming a local “hub” for learning, culture, connection, and public life—reducing the need for constant travel and increasing the visibility of youth-led initiatives locally.

Social Isolation, Stigma, and “Everyone Knows Everyone”

Rural life can provide closeness and support, but it can also generate intense social control, stigma, and fear of being judged—particularly for young people who are “different,” experimenting with identity, or experiencing family hardship. In small communities, confidentiality can be difficult, and young people may avoid participation because it risks exposure.





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From an inclusion perspective, this is where youth workers must actively build psychological safety, clear safeguarding boundaries, and a culture of dignity and non-discrimination—aligned with EU values and the project’s inclusion focus.

Migration Pressures and “Brain Drain”

Young people often move to cities for education and work, leading to a reduced youth presence in rural communities and further weakening local youth ecosystems. This migration is not simply “a choice”; it is often a rational response to structural barriers. The result can be a cycle where fewer young people remain, fewer youth-oriented services exist, and the community’s innovation capacity weakens.

Youth spaces can disrupt this cycle by creating local reasons to stay connected: meaningful projects, recognition, leadership pathways, and a sense that youth can shape local development rather than only exit it.

Reduced Cultural and Civic Infrastructure

Many rural areas have limited cultural infrastructure (youth centers, libraries with strong youth programming, arts spaces, civic labs), and youth participation channels may be weak or symbolic. When youth do not experience real influence, participation becomes “tokenistic,” and disengagement grows.



CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING WORK WITH RURAL YOUTH

A core principle of ERC is to create youth spaces that are not only social venues but platforms for alternative forms of participation: project-based engagement, peer support, community actions, volunteer initiatives, youth-led events, and practical collaboration with local stakeholders.



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2.3 Digital Exclusion and Rural Youth

Digital exclusion in rural areas is often misunderstood as only a problem of “internet access.” In reality, it is a layered issue involving infrastructure, affordability, device access, skills, confidence, safety, and opportunities for meaningful use. It also intersects with other inequalities: socio-economic status, disability, language access, education level, and local institutional capacity.





Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

At EU level, differences between cities and rural areas remain visible in household internet access, with rural areas still slightly behind cities. (European Commission)

2.3.1 Key Barriers to Digital Inclusion in Rural Communities

Infrastructure and Connectivity Gaps

While connectivity has improved across Europe, rural areas often experience slower speeds, unstable connections, or limited high-capacity networks. This matters not only for entertainment but for learning platforms, job applications, online civic participation, digital entrepreneurship, and access to services.

Affordability and Equipment

Even where internet access exists, the cost of stable connectivity, appropriate devices, and software can be a barrier—especially for families facing financial hardship. Young people may rely on shared devices, outdated phones, or limited data plans, restricting participation in digital learning or content creation.

Digital Competence and Confidence

Digital skills are not automatic. Research comparing digital competences of urban and rural youth can show meaningful differences in specific skill areas—particularly those linked to problem-solving, content creation, and digital safety. (cogitatiopress.com)

Digital Safety, Privacy, and Fear of Visibility



Rural “visibility dynamics” can be mirrored online: fear of being judged, harassed, or exposed. Young people may avoid expressing opinions publicly, participating in civic debate, or creating content because it can have real offline consequences. Youth spaces can offer supported environments to build digital confidence and safe participation practices.

Limited Local Digital Opportunities

Even skilled young people may have limited opportunities to apply digital skills meaningfully—through projects, mentoring, internships, entrepreneurship pathways, or civic tech activities. Youth spaces can actively create these opportunities through youth-led media, community storytelling, micro-campaigns, local information platforms, and project-based learning aligned with ERC dissemination and visibility activities.

2.3.2 Practical Responses for Youth Spaces

A rural youth space can become a “digital inclusion anchor” by:
Providing safe access to devices, internet, and learning environments;

Building digital competences through creative, project-based non-formal education (e.g., Canva/Photo editing/video making, project communication, online civic campaigns);



Supporting young people to participate online in ways that are safe, ethical, and empowering—linking digital skills with common values, civic engagement, and alternative participation forms.

2.4 Unique Development Opportunities of Rural Youth

Despite structural constraints, rural contexts also offer distinct strengths that can be leveraged as resources for youth development and community transformation. Effective rural youth work does not treat rurality only as “lack.” It recognises assets, cultural richness, relational density, and place-based identity as potential sources of resilience and innovation.

2.4.1 Strong Emotional Attachment to Place

Rural youth often develop a strong sense of belonging to their local environment—connected to family, land, community stories, and cultural memory. When youth work validates this attachment rather than framing success as “leaving,” it supports identity, dignity, and long-term engagement.

In practice, this means designing youth space activities that build on local identity while also expanding horizons through intercultural exchange and European cooperation (consistent with ERC’s transnational learning logic).

2.4.2 Continuity of Local Tradition and Culture

Rural communities frequently maintain rich traditions—crafts, festivals, food culture, storytelling, local history, and

intergenerational knowledge. These can become learning resources and foundations for modern forms of youth entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship: creative tourism, local product branding, cultural events, or community social enterprises.

The key is not romanticising tradition, but helping young people reinterpret it with agency: choosing what they value, transforming what they want to change, and using culture as a platform for inclusion rather than exclusion.

2.4.3 Environmental Stewardship and Ecological Awareness

Rural youth are often close to natural environments and can develop strong ecological awareness rooted in lived experience. This can become a pathway into youth-led community development projects: clean-up actions, biodiversity initiatives, local climate adaptation ideas, renewable energy debates, and sustainable community practices—integrating civic participation with practical action.



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Such initiatives align naturally with ERC's focus on community development and youth empowerment through real local projects.

2.4.4 Digitalization Potential

Digitalisation can significantly reduce the disadvantages of geographical distance by opening access to remote learning, online services, and new forms of work. While rural connectivity gaps still exist, progress in digital access is ongoing, and even partial connectivity can enable meaningful opportunities when paired with skills and mentoring. (European Commission)

For youth spaces, digitalisation potential is not only about jobs; it is also about alternative participation (youth-led media, online civic dialogue, digital campaigns), creative expression, and intercultural connection.

2.5 Principles of Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education constitutes a fundamental element of effective and sustainable work with rural youth, offering flexible and adaptive methodological approaches precisely tailored to specific needs, socio-cultural conditions, and infrastructural constraints characteristic of local non-urban communities. In rural contexts, where traditional formal education systems often fail to meet young people's real needs and local labor market specificities, non-formal education plays a particularly important role as a tool for equalizing educational opportunities and strengthening competencies necessary in knowledge-based economies.



2.5.1 Principle 1: Voluntary Participation

The basic principle of non-formal education directed toward rural youth is voluntary participation, which ensures authentic involvement of participants and their internal motivation for learning. In contrast to obligatory forms of formal education, participation in non-formal education programs should result from the real needs and interests of young people, which significantly increases the effectiveness of educational processes and the durability of the competences developed. This principle requires from educators special attention to identification and articulation of educational needs of youth, as well as flexibility in adapting programs to the changing expectations of participants.

This principle honors the autonomy and agency of each young person, recognizing their right to choose and their capacity to know what is best for their own development. It is grounded in respect for human dignity and the belief that authentic learning emerges from genuine interest and intrinsic motivation, not external coercion.

In an ERC youth space, voluntary participation also supports inclusion: young people who have experienced exclusion often need time, trust, and low-pressure entry points. Voluntary design enables “soft participation” pathways—an important alternative participation form for those not ready for formal roles.

2.5.2 Principle 2: Participatory Learning Processes

Participatory learning processes are another key principle, according to which young people should be actively involved in all stages of planning, implementing, and evaluating educational



activities. The participatory approach is not limited only to consultation of opinions of young people, but includes their actual participation in making decisions regarding educational goals, working methods, forms of activity, and criteria for assessing success. In a rural context, where youth often experience marginalization in decision-making processes, the application of participatory principles has special meaning for development of civic competences and strengthening the sense of agency. This principle embodies the humanistic value of partnership, where youth and adults work together as equals, each bringing their unique perspectives and contributions. It creates spaces where young people's voices are not just heard, but genuinely valued and acted upon, fostering a sense of belonging and significance.

This principle directly supports ERC's priority on civic engagement and participation by turning everyday youth space programming into a training ground for democracy.

2.5.3 Principle 3: Learning from Experience

Using life experiences of participants as a basis for development of new competences is the third fundamental principle of non-formal education. Rural youth have rich experiences related to living in a specific socio-cultural environment, which can be effectively used as a starting point for learning processes. Educators should be able to identify and valorize these experiences, creating bridges between practical knowledge and theoretical and methodological competences necessary in the modern economy.

Inclusion-wise, this also means recognising the strengths embedded in survival, care responsibilities, work, migration histories, or other lived realities—without pathologising them.



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2.5.4 Principle 4: Respect for Local Culture with Openness to Innovation

The key methodological principle is respect for local culture, tradition, and system values by simultaneously opening to innovations, global trends, and modern forms of youth activity. Non-formal education in rural environments should skillfully combine respect for the cultural heritage of the community with preparing young people to function in a globalized, multicultural world. This means the necessity of developing a delicate balance between maintaining local identity and developing intercultural and global competences.

The practical implementation of this principle requires the systematic use of local cultural, historical, and natural resources



as a context and medium for learning processes, simultaneously equipping young people with universal competences necessary in a knowledge-based economy, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, intercultural communication, and digital skills. Educators should act as cultural mediators, helping young people interpret and integrate diverse cultural influences.

2.5.5 Principle 5: Intergenerational Integration

Another important methodological aspect is the systematic integration of different age and social groups in educational processes, which reflects the specificity of small rural communities, traditionally characterized by strong intergenerational ties and high levels of social capital. Non-formal education programs should leverage the natural social support networks and relational structures characteristic of rural environments, creating opportunities for the transfer of knowledge, experiences, and skills between different generations of residents.

An intergenerational approach to non-formal education benefits both young people, who can benefit from the wisdom and experience of older members of the community, and older people, who gain access to modern competences and perspectives represented by the younger generation. This approach strengthens social cohesion of the local community and counteracts processes of social fragmentation characteristic of contemporary demographic changes in rural areas.

This principle also reflects European youth policy emphasis on intergenerational dialogue and solidarity as part of inclusion strategies.

2.5.6 Principle 6: Contextuality

The principle of contextuality means that non-formal education programs should be closely tailored to specific local conditions, including labour market needs, available resources, cultural traditions, and development challenges specific to a given community. This means the need to systematically diagnose local needs and opportunities, as well as flexibly adapt programs to changing socio-economic conditions.

In practice, contextuality also means adapting to seasonal rhythms, transport realities, school calendars, and the “micro-politics” of small communities.



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2.5.7 Principle 7: Lifelong Learning

Finally, the principle of lifelong learning emphasizes that non-formal education should not be seen as a one-off intervention, but as a continuum of developmental processes supporting youth in various phases of their personal and professional life. Programs should be designed to enable progression and deepening of competences, as well as creating long-term educational relationships that support the maturation process and career development of rural youth.

2.6 Youth Participation and Empowerment

Youth participation in decision-making processes regarding local community development constitutes both a fundamental element of effective and sustainable youth work in rural areas and a key mechanism for democratizing social life and strengthening social capital in small non-urban communities. In contexts of contemporary demographic challenges, characterized by progressive rural population aging and youth migration to urban centers, active youth participation in local life becomes particularly important as a factor ensuring development continuity and community innovation.

2.6.1 The Multidimensional Nature of Youth Empowerment

Empowering young people in rural areas is a multidimensional process requiring systematic and strategic competence building in critical analysis of social problems, formulating innovative solutions, effectively influencing local decision-making processes, and mobilizing social and economic resources to achieve common



development goals. This process encompasses both technical and methodological skill development and strengthening of agency, self-confidence, and initiative-taking abilities in complex socio-political environments. At its heart, empowerment is a deeply humanistic process recognizing each young person's inherent capacity for growth, self-determination, and meaningful contribution. It involves creating conditions where young people can discover their own strengths, develop unique talents, and realize potential in ways authentic to who they are. This requires genuine relationships built on trust, empathy, and unconditional positive regard—relationships where young people feel safe to explore, take risks, and grow.

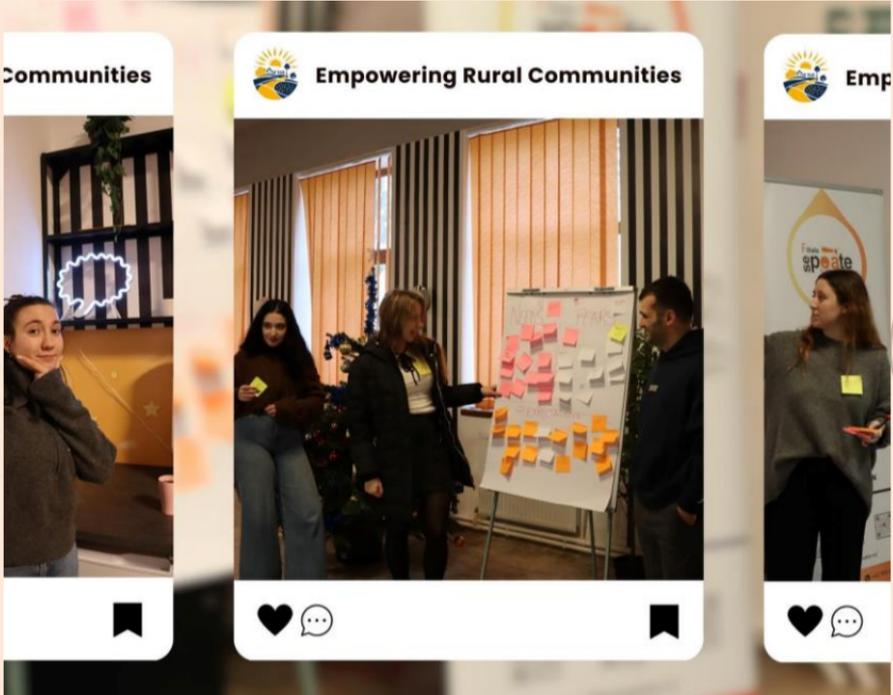
2.6.2 Navigating Traditional Power Structures

Effective strategies for rural youth participation must account for complex and often multi-layered traditional power structures and specific functioning patterns of small local communities, characterized by high levels of mutual knowledge, informal influence networks, and long-term interpersonal relationships. In rural environments, decision-making processes often rely on consensus and respect for older community members' authority, which can function both as barriers and resources for youth participation development.

The implementation of modern participatory mechanisms in the rural context often requires delicate mediation and negotiation between contemporary forms of participatory democracy, based on the principles of equality, transparency, and inclusiveness, and the established social patterns characteristic of traditional rural environments, where decisions are made based on the hierarchy

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of age, experience, and social position. This cultural mediation requires youth workers to have a deep understanding of local cultural codes and the ability to build bridges between different generations and social groups.



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2.6.3 Developing Civic Competences

The key element of strategies for strengthening the position of rural youth is systematic development of their civic competences, including knowledge of the mechanisms of democratic participation, ability to analyse public policy, advocacy techniques, and the ability to build social coalitions. These competences should be developed in a practical context, through direct



involvement of young people in the actual processes of planning and implementing local initiatives, which allows for combining theory with practice and building authentic civic experience.

2.6.4 Developing Leadership Competences

Equally important is developing leadership competences among youth, understood not as the capacity for domination or control, but as the skill of inspiring others, building a vision for the future, coordinating group activities, and resolving conflicts in a constructive manner. In a rural context, youth leadership must be especially culturally sensitive, combining respect for local tradition with openness to innovation and social change. This humanistic understanding of leadership emphasizes service, collaboration, and the empowerment of others. It recognizes that true leadership emerges from a deep sense of empathy, the ability to understand and respond to others' needs, and a commitment to creating spaces where everyone can flourish. Youth leaders are supported to develop not just skills, but also character—qualities such as integrity, humility, compassion, and a genuine care for the well-being of their communities.

2.6.5 Developing Entrepreneurial Competences

Development of entrepreneurial competences constitutes the next key element in strengthening the position of rural youth, especially in the context of limited employment opportunities in traditional sectors of the local economy. Entrepreneurial competences include not only business skills in the narrow sense, but also creativity, innovation, capacity for identifying



developmental possibilities, and the ability to mobilize resources for the implementation of social and economic projects.

It is particularly important to support youth initiatives that innovatively combine respect for local tradition, culture, and natural resources with modern approaches to solving social and economic problems typical of rural areas. Such initiatives may include projects in the areas of cultural tourism, the creative economy, agricultural technologies, renewable energy sources, or the circular economy, which use local assets in a sustainable and innovative way.

2.6.6 Creating Systemic Opportunities for Participation

The practical implementation of youth empowerment strategies requires the creation of systemic opportunities for the regular participation of young people in decision-making structures at the local level, including municipal councils, advisory committees, working groups, and other consultative bodies. It is equally important to provide adequate financial and organizational resources for the implementation of youth initiatives, as well as mentoring and advisory support enabling the development of competences and self-confidence of young leaders.





2.6.7 Changing Attitudes and Stereotypes

Finally, effective empowerment of rural youth requires systematic work on changing attitudes and stereotypes regarding the role of young people in local communities, both among the youth themselves and among older members of the community. This work should include educational campaigns, events showcasing youth achievements, and systematically creating positive examples of effective youth leadership that can inspire other young people and change the perception of youth among older generations.

Cross-References

**For detailed information on establishing youth spaces in rural areas, see Chapter 3: Establishing a Youth Space.*

**For practical methods and activities for working with rural youth, see Chapter 5: Youth Work Introduction — Non-Formal Activities.*

**For case studies and best practices, see Chapter 6: Best Practices.*

**For youth perspectives and feedback, see Chapter 7: Feedback from Rural Youth.*



CHAPTER 3: ESTABLISHING A YOUTH SPACE

3.1 Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter provides a practical, step-by-step framework for establishing a youth space in rural communities, with a strong emphasis on inclusion, safety, participation, and sustainability. Rural contexts often involve limited infrastructure, fewer services, and reduced access to non-formal learning opportunities—yet they also offer strong social ties and high potential for community-based solutions.

A youth space is not only a “room with activities.” It is a social ecosystem: a place where young people can safely gather, build relationships, explore identity, and develop competencies that strengthen their agency and participation in community life. Research and practice show that “hanging out” itself can be



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meaningful—young people use spaces to negotiate belonging, inclusion/exclusion, and their “place” in society. This matters in rural settings too, where youth visibility is often high and youth autonomy may be constrained by norms, distance, and limited mobility.

In the ERC project context, establishing youth spaces (and improving how they operate) supports the program priorities of inclusion and diversity, active citizenship and participation, and common values and civic engagement. It also links directly to the guidebook’s aim: equipping youth workers and communities with concrete tools to create and manage youth spaces that are youth-led, welcoming, and impactful.



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3.2 Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Youth spaces function within legal, administrative, and institutional systems. These systems differ between countries and sometimes even between municipalities. Still, the core principles remain consistent:

- operate legally (registration, governance, accountability);
- protect young people's rights and safety (safeguarding, privacy, data protection);
- meet standards for premises and activities (sanitary, fire, accessibility, occupational safety);
- document decisions and procedures (policies, rules, partnership agreements).

3.2.1 Legal Regulations (with practical guidance)

In many contexts (including Poland), *youth spaces are most often created and operated by:*

- non-governmental organizations (associations, foundations),
- local government institutions (municipal cultural centers, libraries, schools),
- partnerships between NGOs and local authorities (shared responsibility model),
- sometimes informal groups operating under an umbrella organization.

Poland – key legal areas (illustrative, not exhaustive): When an NGO runs a youth space, typical regulatory areas include the Act on



Associations, the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work, and public finance rules when public funding is involved. In practice, this means the youth space must comply with:

- formal organizational requirements (statutes, representation, registration, accounting),
- rules for implementing public tasks (if funded by local government),
- transparent and auditable financial management.

Data protection and privacy (GDPR/RODO): Youth spaces often collect personal data (sign-up lists, consent forms, participation records, photos/videos for dissemination, evaluation surveys). This creates obligations such as:

- defining legal bases for processing data,
- collecting only necessary data,
- ensuring secure storage and limited access,
- obtaining consent where required (especially for images and minors),
- respecting rights of data subjects (access, correction, deletion).

Facility standards (safety and compliance): A youth space must meet basic building and safety standards. These often involve:

- fire safety rules and evacuation procedures,
- sanitary conditions and hygiene requirements,
- minimum space and ventilation standards,





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- safe equipment and maintenance,
- accessibility standards (where applicable),
- risk assessments for activities (especially for events outside the venue).

Safeguarding and child protection (critical in youth spaces): Even if national rules differ, a youth space should always have a safeguarding approach, including:

- a written safeguarding policy (what is unacceptable, how to report concerns, how to respond),
- staff/volunteer codes of conduct,
- procedures for dealing with harm, violence, harassment, discrimination, and neglect,
- safe recruitment practices for staff and volunteers (background checks where legally required/available),
- clear rules about supervision, boundaries, online communication, and transportation of young participants.

This is not “optional bureaucracy.” It is a core condition of a safe, inclusive youth space and aligns with Erasmus+ expectations regarding protection and safety of participants.

Practical compliance checklist (recommended minimum):

- Consult local legal support (municipality legal department, NGO support center, or external lawyer).
- Confirm the legal operating model (NGO-run, municipal unit, partnership).

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- Ensure the venue meets safety, sanitary, and fire regulations; document inspections and improvements.
- Prepare internal policies: safeguarding, privacy/data protection, participation rules, complaint mechanism.
- Create basic templates: consent forms, incident forms, volunteer agreements, MoU with partners.
- Train staff/volunteers before opening and repeat training regularly.

Country note (Romania/Bulgaria and other contexts): Exact legal acts differ, but the same domains apply: legal status of the operator, child protection/safeguarding duties, data protection, occupational safety, fire/sanitary standards, and rules for public funding. Treat this section as a framework and always verify local legal requirements before opening.



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3.2.2 Local and Strategic Documents

At the local level, strategic documents regarding social policy and local development, in particular municipal ones, are of fundamental importance for the strategic positioning of a youth space in the institutional ecosystem of the commune. These include:

- Social development strategies
- Programs of cooperation with non-governmental organizations (often adopted annually)
- Municipal strategies for solving social problems
- Programs on family issues

Detailed knowledge of these documents enables the identification of priority thematic areas for local authorities, which allows for strategic adjustment of the mission and activities of the youth space to diagnosed social needs and local development priorities—significantly increasing the chances of obtaining systematic financial and organizational support from the local government.

Practical tip: When presenting your youth space concept, explicitly reference the municipality's priorities (e.g., youth wellbeing, prevention, education, employment, culture, integration). This turns your youth space into a solution for known challenges rather than a “nice extra.”

3.2.3 European Union Funding

Important meaning may also have regulations regarding the acquisition and use of financial resources from the European



Union structural funds, in particular from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) under the financial perspective 2021–2027, which constitutes one of the key sources of financing projects in the scope of social inclusion, education, and youth activation in rural areas.

Knowledge of application procedures, requirements regarding eligibility of costs, project settlement rules, and reporting requirements is essential for the effective acquisition and proper use of external funds. In practical terms, this means:

- maintaining clear documentation and evidence of activities,
- keeping participant records consistent with privacy rules,
- being prepared for audits and controls,
- planning cash flow and co-financing where required.

3.2.4 Municipal Regulations

Finally, the functioning of youth spaces may be regulated by internal legal acts of the municipality, such as resolutions of the municipal council specifying the principles of cooperation with non-governmental organizations, the amount and principles of granting subsidies for the implementation of public tasks, as well as possible prevention programs or strategies for solving specific social problems identified at the local level.

Systematic analysis and monitoring of these local regulations is essential for strategic positioning of the youth space in the local institutional ecosystem and ensuring its long-term operational stability.

3.3 Cooperation with Local Authorities

Effective and strategic cooperation with local government constitutes a crucial, often decisive success factor in creating and sustaining youth spaces in rural areas, where limited financial and institutional resources require particularly intensive coordination among various local entities and effective utilization of available social infrastructure.



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In small rural municipalities, where personal relationships and informal cooperation networks often play greater roles than formal institutional procedures, building lasting relationships with key local decision-makers based on mutual trust and respect assumes particular strategic importance.



3.3.1 Initiating the Partnership Process

Partnership building with local government should begin much earlier than actual youth space activation activities, optimally at the project conceptualization stage when strategic goals are being formulated.

Organizing a series of consultation meetings with municipal executive authority representatives—particularly commune heads or mayors, as well as substantive employees responsible for social policy, education, culture, and sport—is crucial, as these individuals will serve as key stakeholders and operational partners in youth space activity implementation.

Equally important is establishing relationships with municipal authority representatives (councillors), who, through budget adoption and strategic planning document processes, have decisive influence on financial resource allocation and prioritization of various local policy areas.

3.3.2 Presenting the Concept

The initial youth space concept presentation to local authorities should be carefully prepared and professionally executed, utilizing compelling empirical data, thorough social needs analyses, and specific, realistic action plans addressing diagnosed local community development challenges.

Particularly important is clearly demonstrating alignment between the planned initiative and applicable municipal strategic documents, such as:



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- the development strategy,
- the program of cooperation with non-governmental organizations,
- the strategy for solving social problems,
- local sectoral programs concerning youth, education, or culture.

The presentation should also include a realistic analysis of costs and sources of financing, showing that the initiative is economically sustainable and will not constitute an excessive burden on the municipal budget.

Inclusion-focused addition (recommended):

Make inclusion visible in your concept note: explain how the space will welcome young people with fewer opportunities (geographic isolation, economic hardship, disability, discrimination, limited transport, etc.) and how you will measure improvement (e.g., growth in diversity of participants; targeted outreach; removing barriers).



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3.3.3 Partnership Model

The fundamental principle of effective cooperation with local government involves developing a partnership model based on complementarity, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, where both parties contribute specific resources, competences, and opportunities while simultaneously drawing tangible benefits from cooperation and sharing responsibility for achieving common developmental goals.

Forms of Support from Local Government

Local government can offer various forms of support for youth spaces, starting from:

- providing appropriate infrastructure on preferential terms in parts of public utility buildings,
- systematic financial support in the form of targeted subsidies for the implementation of public tasks,
- assistance in promotion of activities of the space by use of official channels of communication of communes, such as:
 - internet websites,
 - profiles in social media,
 - news bulletins,
 - local media.



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Recommended practice: formalize the partnership with a short Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or agreement that clarifies:

- who provides the venue and under what conditions,
- who is responsible for utilities, maintenance, insurance,
- minimum opening hours and staffing,
- safeguarding responsibilities and reporting lines,
- evaluation and reporting schedule,
- crisis procedures (incidents, safety risks, reputational issues).



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3.3.4 Integration with Local Ecosystem

A particularly valuable form of support from local government is the integration of youth spaces with the broader ecosystem of institutions and public initiatives operating within the commune, including:

- schools,
- libraries,
- community centers,
- social welfare centers,
- organizational units responsible for sports and recreation.
- Such integration enables:
 - effective synergy of activities of various entities,
 - prevention of duplication of initiatives,
 - more efficient use of limited local resources,
 - opportunities for the development of comprehensive, multidimensional programs that respond to the complex needs of rural youth in a holistic manner.

Practical tool: create a “local ecosystem map” (one-page) that lists institutions, contact persons, what they can offer (rooms, transport, promotion, expertise), and what the youth space can offer them (youth consultation, volunteering, co-hosting events).



3.3.5 Transparency and Accountability

In return for support from local government, youth space organizers should ensure:

- a high level of transparency and responsibility in implementing their mission,
- systematic reporting on activities and achieved results,
- openness to suggestions, comments, and recommendations from local government representatives.

It is particularly important to implement professional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating activities, which enable an objective assessment of the effectiveness and social impact of implemented programs, providing local authorities with reliable empirical data on the return on public investment in youth space activities.

Recommended minimum reporting package (quarterly or semi-annual):

- participant numbers + basic demographics (in line with privacy rules),
- brief description of activities and learning outcomes,
- examples of youth-led initiatives,
- inclusion actions taken and barriers removed,
- feedback summary (youth voices),
- financial summary aligned with funding agreements.



3.4 Launching a Youth Space: Implementation Roadmap

Establishing a youth space is most successful when approached as a phased start-up pathway rather than a single event. Rural youth spaces often evolve: they start small, test activities, refine participation models, and gradually build trust.

The roadmap below supports:

- strong community legitimacy (youth and stakeholders see the value),
- reduced risk (pilot before scaling),
- better inclusion (barriers identified early),
- sustainability (realistic operations and diversified funding).

3.4.1 Stage I: Diagnosis and Concept Development

The diagnostic and concept stage should answer: *Who* is the space for, what do they need, and what will make them actually come?

An important element of this stage is a thorough needs assessment, *combining quantitative and qualitative methods*:

- anonymous youth surveys (online + paper),
- focus groups (diverse youth profiles, including those “not active”),
- informal interviews with parents, teachers, social workers,





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- stakeholder consultations (municipality, school directors, libraries),
- mapping barriers (transport, stigma, disability access, cost, safety concerns).

Inclusion and participation are designed here, not added later.

Use this stage to define:

- how young people will co-decide (youth council, weekly planning circles, “open agenda wall”),
- what “safe” means locally (confidentiality, anti-harassment, respectful language),
- what accessibility requires (physical access, sensory-friendly options, low-cost/no-cost entry),
- how to reach youth with fewer opportunities (outreach points, peer ambassadors, flexible hours).

Deliverables of Stage I (recommended):

- a 1–2 page concept note (mission, target group, activities, values),
 - draft house rules (co-created with youth),
 - stakeholder map and partnership plan,
 - initial annual calendar draft (3-month pilot + 9-month plan),
 - preliminary budget and staffing plan.
- 



3.4.2 Stage II: Infrastructure and Equipment Preparation

This stage focuses on ensuring the venue is safe, functional, welcoming, and adaptable. The space should reflect youth identity while meeting standards.

Core tasks include:

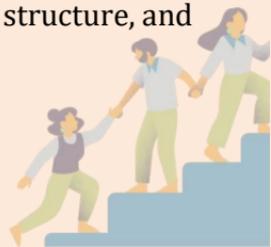
- confirming legal access to the venue (agreement, lease, municipal decision),
- safety and compliance checks (fire safety, sanitation, electrical safety),
- accessibility review (entrance, toilets, signage, lighting, seating),
- procurement of essential equipment (tables, chairs, storage, first aid kit),
- creation of flexible zones (quiet corner, group work area, social area),
- digital readiness (internet access, basic devices if possible).

Youth co-design matters. Involve young people in decisions about:

- layout, colors, decoration, and signage,
- naming the space and designing a logo,
- creating a “community wall” for ideas and announcements,
- defining what makes the space feel welcoming.

3.4.3 Stage III: Staff Recruitment and Training

A youth space needs people who can combine care, structure, and youth-led facilitation.



Staffing models vary:

- paid youth worker(s) + volunteers,
- rotating team from partner institutions,
- hybrid models with peer leaders.

Key recruitment priorities:

- motivation to work with rural youth and build trust over time,
- competencies in non-formal education and facilitation,
- strong ethical standards and safeguarding mindset,
- ability to collaborate with municipality and institutions.

Training should be planned before the opening and refreshed regularly. Minimum training topics:

- non-formal education methods and group dynamics,
- inclusion and diversity competence (anti-discrimination, barrier awareness),
- safeguarding and responding to disclosures,
- conflict resolution and de-escalation,
- data protection and responsible documentation,
- basic project and financial management (especially when grants are involved).

CHAPTER 3: ESTABLISHING A YOUTH SPACE



Quality tip: Keep a short staff handbook (10–15 pages) with:

- house rules and values,
- safeguarding procedures,
- incident reporting,
- communication principles,
- opening/closing routines,
- referral pathways (psychological support, social services).



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3.4.4 Stage IV: Pilot Activation (Soft Opening)

Pilot activation is a controlled “test phase.” The aim is to learn:

- which activities attract different youth groups,
- what hours work best,
- what barriers appear in real life,
- how the team functions operationally,
- what safeguarding and conflict risks emerge.

Recommended pilot format:

- 4–8 weeks with a limited but consistent schedule,
- a mix of low-threshold activities (“drop-in”, board games, movie night),
- at least one skill-building format (workshop, project lab),
- a youth-led element every week (youth chooses or runs part of the program).

Feedback systems should be simple and youth-friendly:

- anonymous “two stars and a wish” cards,
- QR-code micro surveys,
- weekly reflection circle,
- suggestion box (physical and online).

3.4.5 Stage V: Full Operation and Continuous Development

After the pilot, the space transitions *into full operation with:*



- stable opening hours,
- regular activity cycles (weekly, monthly),
- clear roles (staff, volunteers, youth leaders),
- improved policies and routines,
- stronger partnerships and reporting.

A mature youth space:

- balances “hanging out” with learning opportunities,
- supports youth-led initiatives (mini-projects, volunteering),
- connects youth to opportunities (mobility, training, community dialogue),
- actively reduces barriers (transport support, outreach, inclusion actions),
- uses monitoring to improve rather than to control.

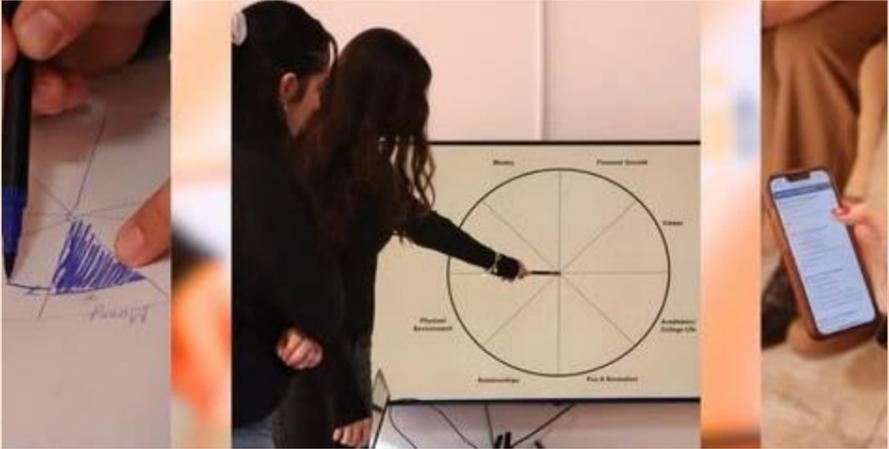
Continuous development practices:

- quarterly program reviews with youth,
- annual stakeholder meeting with municipality and partners,
- updated inclusion plan (who is missing and why),
- staff supervision and peer learning.



3.5 Funding and Sustainability

Youth spaces in rural areas need financial stability, but also flexibility. The strongest model is diversified funding, where no single source determines survival.



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3.5.1 Public Funding: Local Government Financing

Public funding often provides the backbone of rural youth spaces.

Common forms include:

- annual subsidies for public tasks (youth activation, prevention, culture),
- co-financing of events and programs,
- providing infrastructure at low/no cost (venue, utilities),
- in-kind support (promotion, transport, equipment).



To succeed with public funding:

- align activities with municipal priorities,
- maintain transparency and reporting quality,
- demonstrate outcomes (especially inclusion and youth participation),
- build relationships beyond election cycles.

3.5.2 Public-Private Partnerships

Local businesses can support youth spaces through:

- sponsorships (materials, events, equipment),
- internships or career days,
- mentoring and guest workshops,
- supporting transport or refreshments.

A good partnership is value-based:

- youth benefit is clear,
- business promotion is ethical and limited,
- no pressure on young people to “consume” or represent a brand,
- safeguarding and boundaries are respected.



3.5.3 Grant Fundraising: Possibilities and Challenges

Grants can significantly expand what a youth space can do, especially for:

- inclusion projects,
- youth participation and civic engagement,
- employability and skills,
- digital inclusion,
- community development.

Potential sources:

- national youth funds and ministries,
- foundations (local, national, international),
- EU programs and structural funds,
- Erasmus+ (youth mobilities, partnerships, local dissemination).

Challenges to plan for:

- administrative burden and reporting,
- co-financing requirements,
- cash-flow timing (reimbursement delays),
- staff capacity and burnout risks,
- “project logic” dominating daily youth work.

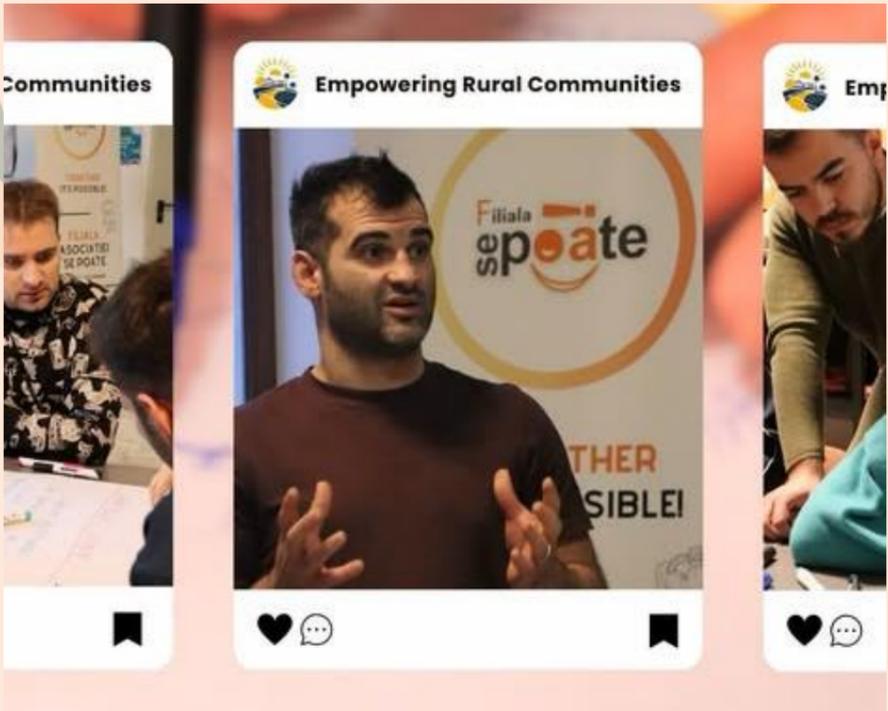
Practical safeguard: Keep a “grant capacity rule”—do not apply for grants that exceed the team’s realistic management ability. Better one well-managed grant than three that collapse operations.



3.5.4 Community-Based Funding and Fundraising

Community-based funding strengthens legitimacy and local ownership. *Examples:*

- local fundraising events (community dinner, charity tournament),
- donation boxes and online campaigns,
- local “friends of the youth space” network,
- in-kind donations (paint, furniture, printing, snacks),
- micro-sponsorships (e.g., a local shop supports one monthly activity).



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This works best when:

- youth co-organize fundraising (skills + ownership),
- transparency is high (what funds are used for),
- participation is voluntary and non-stigmatizing.

3.5.5 Earned Income and Social Enterprise Models

Some youth spaces develop earned income streams to *support core operations*:

- small café corner during events (where legal),
- paid workshops for adults (run by staff or invited experts),
- renting the venue for compatible community use,
- creating youth-led products (art, crafts) as learning projects.

These models must be handled carefully:

- youth space identity remains youth-centered,
- income activities do not exclude low-income youth,
- legal and tax rules are respected,
- safeguarding and staff workload are managed.



3.5.6 Budgeting and Financial Management

Financial health depends on clear budgeting and discipline. Recommended practices:

- separate operational costs from program costs,
- plan monthly cash flow (especially with grants),
- keep an emergency reserve where possible,
- document in-kind contributions (useful for reporting),
- ensure dual control for payments (reduces risk).

Minimum budget categories:

- staff and training,
- utilities and maintenance,
- equipment replacement,
- program materials,
- safeguarding and safety (first aid, security improvements),
- dissemination and communication,
- inclusion supports (transport, accessibility adjustments).

3.5.7 Sustainability Planning and Risk Management

Sustainability is not only “money.” *It is also:*

- stable partnerships,
- strong youth ownership,
- staff wellbeing and continuity,
- public legitimacy and community trust.





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Key sustainability elements:

- a 12–24 month strategy (goals, funding mix, growth plan),
- a stakeholder engagement plan,
- a youth participation structure (council, co-management),
- monitoring and evaluation routines linked to improvement,
- a risk register (updated quarterly).

Contingency plans should identify:

- what happens if public funding decreases,
- how to maintain minimum opening hours with fewer resources,
- alternative venues or shared spaces,
- volunteer mobilization plans (with safeguarding),
- communication steps for crises (incidents, reputational risks),
- staff replacement and knowledge transfer steps.

3.6 Best Practices (for establishing a rural youth space)

Start with youth reality, not adult assumptions: include youth who are usually “absent.”

1. *Design for inclusion:* remove practical barriers (transport, cost, stigma, accessibility).
2. *Create a low-threshold entry:* drop-in hours and informal activities build trust.



3. *Formalize safety:* safeguarding policy, clear rules, trained staff, incident procedures.
4. *Build a partnership ecosystem:* schools, libraries, social services, sports, culture.
5. *Pilot before scaling:* test, learn, adapt; make youth feedback visible.
6. *Use simple monitoring:* track participation trends and inclusion progress without over-surveillance.
7. *Protect staff sustainability:* supervision, peer learning, realistic workloads.
8. *Diversify funding:* avoid dependence on one source; document impact to build support.
9. *Keep the space youth-led:* co-decisions, youth projects, visible youth ownership.

Cross-References

**Chapter 1: defines youth spaces, their function, and inclusive principles.*

**Chapter 2: introduces youth workers' roles and competencies needed to implement this chapter.*

Later chapters: expand on program planning, non-formal methods, youth participation, and evaluation practices.



CHAPTER 4: MANAGING A YOUTH SPACE (REVISED)

4.1 Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter provides comprehensive guidance on managing youth spaces in rural areas, covering both daily operational aspects and strategic management for long-term sustainability. Drawing on experiences from ERC project partners across Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria, it addresses staff management, volunteer coordination, program development, monitoring and evaluation,



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CHAPTER 4: MANAGING A YOUTH SPACE (REVISED)

and building organizational cultures that support both youth empowerment and operational effectiveness.



Effective management in a humanistic framework goes beyond efficiency and productivity—it creates environments where every person, whether staff, volunteer, or participant, feels valued, respected, and supported in their growth. This chapter approaches management through a lens of human dignity, recognizing that organizational structures and processes should serve people, not the other way around. It emphasizes the importance of building genuine relationships, fostering a culture of care and empathy, and creating spaces where everyone can thrive and contribute their unique gifts.

This approach also directly reflects Erasmus+ expectations and project commitments around: inclusion and diversity, common values, civic engagement and participation, and promoting youth initiative and entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship).



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4.2 Staff Recruitment and Development

Effective management of a youth space begins with recruiting and developing the right team. In rural contexts, where resources are limited and the social context is unique, staff selection and development take on particular importance.

4.2.1 Key Competences for Youth Space Staff

Core competences required: Pedagogical and educational competences: Understanding of non-formal education methodologies, developmental psychology of young people, and participatory learning approaches.

Community engagement skills: Ability to build relationships with local stakeholders, navigate local power structures, and integrate the space into the community ecosystem.

Program development and facilitation: Skills in designing, implementing, and facilitating various forms of youth activities.

Organizational and administrative competences: Ability to manage budgets, handle administrative tasks, and ensure compliance with legal requirements.

Digital competences: Proficiency in using digital tools for communication, documentation, and program delivery.

Intercultural sensitivity: Understanding of local cultural context combined with openness to diversity and global perspectives.



Beyond these technical competences, humanistic values are fundamental: the ability to demonstrate genuine empathy, to listen deeply and without judgment, to show unconditional positive regard for each young person, and to create spaces where vulnerability is safe and authenticity is celebrated. These human qualities are not optional extras—they are the foundation upon which all effective youth work is built. Staff should be selected and developed not just for their skills, but for their capacity to form meaningful, caring relationships with young people.

Inclusion competence as a management priority (ERC alignment), because the project aims to increase participation of young people from diverse backgrounds, staff must be able to:

- notice who is missing and why (barrier analysis),
- adapt programs to lower thresholds,
- communicate inclusively and respectfully,
- understand discrimination risks and respond safely.

4.2.2 Recruitment Strategy

Local vs. External Recruitment

In rural areas, there is often a tension *between*:

- recruiting locally (advantage: local knowledge, community trust, lower costs),
- recruiting externally (advantage: fresh perspectives, specialized skills, broader networks).

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The optimal approach often combines both: a local coordinator with strong community connections, supplemented by external specialists for specific programs or training.

Recruitment process:

Job description development: Clearly articulate required competences, responsibilities, and working conditions.

Multi-channel advertising: Use local networks, social media, professional associations, and educational institutions.

Competency-based interviews: Focus on practical scenarios and real-world challenges.

Reference checks: Especially important in rural communities where reputation matters significantly.

Trial period: Allow time for mutual assessment in the actual working context.



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Recruitment scenarios to test in interviews (recommended additions):

- A new participant is being mocked by peers—what do you do in the moment and after the session?
- A young person discloses a safety concern—what are your safeguarding steps?
- Attendance drops for three weeks—how do you diagnose and respond without blaming youth?
- A municipality asks for “a list of names”—how do you handle data protection and accountability? (Link to data protection obligations.)

4.2.3 Staff Development and Training

Initial training program

All staff should undergo *comprehensive initial training covering*:

- Non-formal education methodologies: understanding different approaches, tools, and techniques.
- Youth participation principles: how to authentically engage young people in decision-making.
- Safety and safeguarding: child protection, health and safety regulations, emergency procedures.

Local context: understanding the specific characteristics, challenges, and opportunities of the rural community.

Administrative procedures: budgeting, reporting, documentation, GDPR compliance.





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Conflict resolution and mediation: skills for managing group dynamics and resolving conflicts.

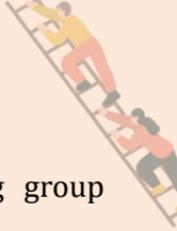
Continuous professional development

Regular training and professional development opportunities *should include:*

- methodological workshops: introduction to new tools and approaches,
- peer learning: exchanges with other youth workers and organizations,
- specialized training: digital skills, fundraising, project management, etc.,
- supervision and mentoring: regular reflection sessions and support from experienced practitioners.

Quality culture link to ERC project management

The ERC project foresees structured monitoring, evaluation, and risk management practices (including checkpoints and improvement loops). A youth space team can mirror this with lightweight but regular reflection cycles—so learning becomes routine, not a crisis response.





4.3 Volunteer Management

Volunteers are often the backbone of rural youth spaces, providing essential support while building community ownership. Effective volunteer management is crucial for sustainability and quality.

4.3.1 Volunteer Recruitment

Target groups for volunteering:

- Young people (peer leaders and facilitators)
- Parents and community members
- Professionals offering specialized skills (e.g., artists, technicians, entrepreneurs)
- Retired persons with time and expertise to share
- University students from urban areas seeking practical experience

Recruitment strategies:

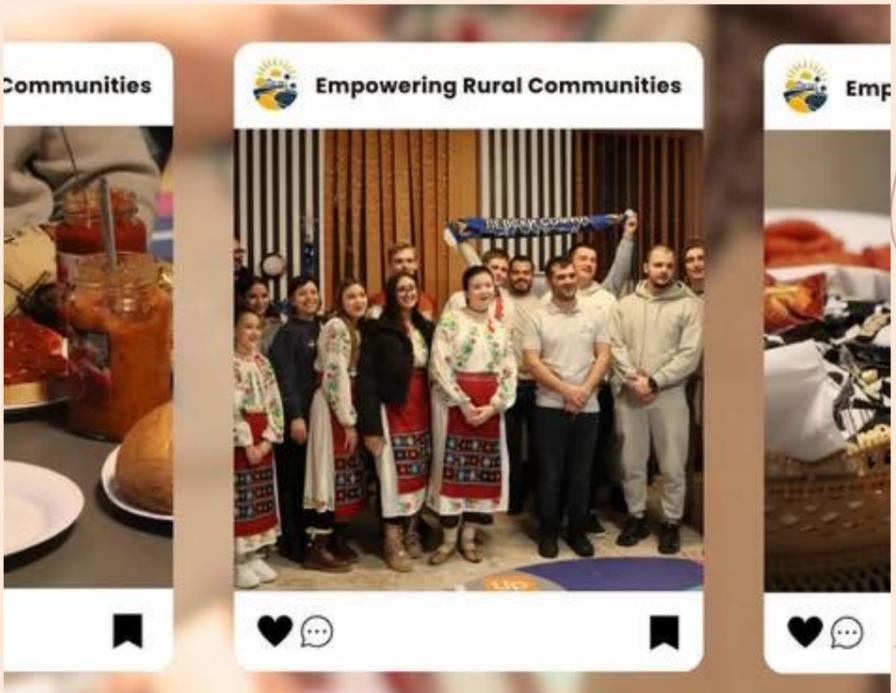
- Word of mouth: leveraging existing networks and community connections
- Targeted invitations: approaching specific individuals with relevant skills or interests
- Open events: volunteer fairs, information meetings, open days
- Social media campaigns: reaching younger volunteers through digital channels
- Partnerships: working with schools, universities, and other organizations



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Inclusion note:

Volunteer recruitment must avoid reproducing exclusion (e.g., only “confident” youth become volunteers). Create entry roles for youth with fewer opportunities: small, supported tasks; buddy systems; flexible hours; and recognition that does not require public visibility.



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4.3.2 Volunteer Engagement and Retention

Clear role definition

Volunteers need:

- clear job descriptions with specific responsibilities,
- realistic time commitments,
- meaningful tasks that match their interests and skills,
- recognition and appreciation for their contributions.



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Training and support:

- Orientation sessions: introduction to the organization, mission, and working methods
- Role-specific training: skills needed for specific volunteer tasks
- Ongoing support: regular check-ins, problem-solving assistance, and feedback
- Skill development: opportunities to learn new competences through volunteering

Recognition and motivation:

- Formal recognition: certificates, letters of recommendation, recognition events
- Informal appreciation: regular thank-yous, featuring volunteers in communications, involving them in decision-making
- Social connection: creating a sense of community among volunteers
- Meaningful impact: ensuring volunteers can see the difference they make



4.3.3 Challenges in Volunteer Management

Common challenges:

- Reliability: ensuring consistent volunteer attendance and commitment
- Quality: maintaining professional standards with volunteers
- Boundaries: managing the line between volunteering and employment
- Burnout: preventing volunteer exhaustion and turnover

Mitigation strategies:

- Clear expectations and agreements from the start
- Regular communication and feedback loops
- Flexible scheduling and diverse engagement opportunities
- Creating a supportive volunteer community
- Ensuring volunteers have meaningful, appropriately-scoped tasks

Recommended addition (safeguarding and ethics):

Volunteers who work directly with minors or vulnerable youth must be included in safeguarding orientation, codes of conduct, and clear reporting lines. This also aligns with contractual expectations around protection and safety of participants and data protection responsibilities.



4.4 Program Planning and Development

Effective program planning is essential for ensuring that youth space activities respond to real needs and achieve intended outcomes.

4.4.1 Needs-Based Program Planning

Needs assessment

Regular assessment of youth needs *through*:

- surveys and questionnaires,
- focus groups and discussions,
- individual consultations,
- observation of participation patterns,
- feedback from previous activities.

Participatory planning:

- Youth involvement: young people actively participate in planning and design
- Co-creation: programs developed collaboratively between staff and youth
- Flexibility: ability to adapt programs based on feedback and changing needs

ERC link (target groups and skills):

The project explicitly targets rural youth (15–25) and youth workers (18–30), including those facing geographical, economic, and educational disadvantages, and expects competence development in areas like self-awareness, emotional intelligence, assertive communication, leadership, public speaking, and digital skills. This should influence the program mix (well-being + civic + skills + digital + entrepreneurship).

4.4.2 Program Categories

Core program areas:

- Educational and skill development: workshops, courses, training sessions
- Recreational and social: games, social events, informal gatherings
- Cultural and artistic: art workshops, cultural events, creative projects
- Civic engagement: community projects, advocacy initiatives, volunteering
- Health and well-being: sports activities, mental health support, healthy lifestyle programs
- Digital and technological: digital skills training, coding clubs, media production





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Program design principles:

- Youth-centered: programs respond to real youth interests and needs
- Accessible: removing barriers to participation (financial, transport, timing)
- Inclusive: welcoming diverse groups of young people
- Progressive: building skills and complexity over time
- Engaging: using participatory and experiential methods
- Relevant: connecting to real-world contexts and opportunities



Given ERC priorities, incorporate at least a light pathway for *youth initiative and entrepreneurship*:

- “Idea-to-action” labs (problem → idea → prototype → small local test),
- community micro-projects (with basic budgeting and stakeholder mapping),
- inviting local professionals for mentoring (including ethical boundaries),
- showcasing youth-led solutions during dissemination moments.

4.4.3 Activity Scheduling and Coordination

Balancing different needs:

- Regular vs. occasional: mix of weekly recurring activities and special events
- Age groups: activities appropriate for different age groups
- Interests: diverse range of topics and approaches
- Resources: realistic scheduling based on available staff, volunteers, and space



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Calendar planning:

- Annual planning: long-term strategic program framework
- Quarterly reviews: adjusting plans based on feedback and results
- Weekly schedules: practical day-to-day activity planning
- Flexibility: ability to adapt to unexpected opportunities or challenges

Rural reality additions (to protect attendance):

- plan transport-sensitive start/end times,
- account for seasonality (harvest, exams, winter),
- use predictable routines (youth know “what happens when”),
- keep drop-in hours stable even if workshops rotate.



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4.5 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Impact Assessment

Systematic monitoring and evaluation are essential for understanding effectiveness, demonstrating impact, and improving programs.

4.5.1 Monitoring Systems

Daily monitoring:

- Attendance tracking: participant numbers, demographics (as appropriate and GDPR-compliant), attendance patterns
- Activity logs: documentation of activities, methods used, participant engagement
- Informal feedback: conversations, observations, quick check-ins
- Incident reports: documentation of safety issues, conflicts, or challenges

Regular monitoring:

- Weekly reviews: staff reflection on activities and participant engagement
- Monthly/bi-monthly reviews: participation trends, inclusion signals (who is not coming), volunteer stability
- Quarterly reviews: program performance against goals and learning priorities
- Annual review: impact narrative + key indicators + partnership assessment





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Tools (project-aligned example): The ERC application describes using a project management platform (e.g., Trello) to monitor progress, task completion, quality, satisfaction, budget allocation, timeframes, and risk management. Youth spaces can adopt a simplified version: one board for program planning, one for operational tasks, and one for risks/issues (with clear owners and deadlines).

4.5.2 Evaluation Methods

Evaluation should combine quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Quantitative methods:

- attendance and retention (repeat participation),
- program delivery counts (sessions delivered vs planned),
- volunteer engagement rates,
- reach of communication (where relevant and ethical).

Qualitative methods:

- short satisfaction surveys,
- focus groups or interviews (youth and youth workers),
- reflective journals or learning diaries,
- observation notes,
- stories of change (with consent and anonymity).



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The ERC plan mentions delivering interim and final evaluation reports using both quantitative and qualitative criteria. A youth space can replicate this rhythm at local level with lighter “interim” and “annual” reports.

4.5.3 Impact Indicators and KPIs (including inclusion target)

To align evaluation with ERC objectives, define a small KPI set that is meaningful and not overly bureaucratic. The ERC project includes a specific target: increase participation of young people from diverse backgrounds in youth spaces by 20% within the first ten months of operation.

Recommended KPI menu (select and adapt locally)

Inclusion KPI: % increase in participation of underrepresented groups (define locally what “diverse backgrounds” means and how you measure it ethically).



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Retention KPI: share of participants who return at least 2–3 times per month.

Youth leadership KPI: number of youth-led initiatives or youth co-facilitated sessions per quarter.

Civic participation KPI: number of community actions / dialogues with decision-makers / volunteering initiatives.

Skills KPI: self-reported growth in selected transversal skills (e.g., confidence, teamwork, communication).

Safety KPI: number and type of incidents + response time + learning actions taken (focus on prevention, not blame).

Volunteer stability KPI: active volunteer count + turnover + average hours/month (with burnout monitoring).

Project-level dissemination indicators (ERC example): The project describes tracking website/module access statistics and downloads of the Guidebook as part of impact follow-up. Youth spaces that disseminate outputs can also monitor ethical reach indicators without collecting unnecessary personal data.





4.5.4 Closing the Loop: Learning and Improvement

Monitoring is only useful if it leads to improvement.

Recommended improvement loop:

1. Collect feedback (quick + regular).
2. Discuss it with youth (co-decision).
3. Decide changes (what will change, who does what, by when).
4. Communicate visibly (“You said / We did”).
5. Review after 4–6 weeks and adjust again.

This approach supports transparency, youth ownership, and continuous quality improvement—consistent with the project’s quality plan and evaluation logic.

4.6 Building Sustainable Organisational Culture

A youth space is shaped not only by activities, but by everyday culture: how people speak, decide, handle conflicts, and respond to vulnerability. Culture is “what happens when nobody is watching,” and in rural contexts—where trust and reputation are crucial—culture is one of the most important sustainability factors.



4.6.1 Values and Principles

Key culture principles include:

- Youth-Centered Focus
- Programs respond to authentic youth needs and interests
- Each young person is recognized as a unique individual with inherent dignity, worth, and potential that deserves to be honored and nurtured
- Inclusivity and Diversity
- Welcoming all young people regardless of background, ability, or circumstances
- Creating safe spaces where everyone can be themselves
- Actively addressing barriers to participation
- Embracing diversity as a source of strength and richness, recognizing that every person brings unique perspectives and contributions that enrich the community
- Learning and Growth
- Continuous improvement and innovation
- Learning from mistakes and challenges
- Supporting development of both youth and staff
- Creating a culture of psychological safety where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth, not failures to be punished
- Community Connection
- Integration with local community
- Building bridges across generations and groups
- Contributing to community development
- Fostering genuine relationships based on mutual respect, empathy, and care for the well-being of all community members

These principles are fully compatible with the EU values referenced in the project (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, human rights, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity).

4.6.2 Communication Practices

Internal communication:

- Regular team meetings: ensuring all staff are informed and involved
- Open communication channels: easy ways for staff to share ideas and concerns
- Transparent decision-making: clear processes and information sharing
- Appreciation and recognition: regular acknowledgment of contributions



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Youth communication:

- Multiple channels: social media, newsletters, notice boards, face-to-face
- Two-way communication: opportunities for youth to communicate with staff
- Clear information: easy access to schedules, opportunities, and information
- Inclusive communication: ensuring all youth can access information
- Community communication:
- Visibility: regular communication about activities and achievements
- Stakeholder engagement: keeping partners and supporters informed
- Public relations: building positive public image and awareness

Contractual alignment:

Communication, dissemination/visibility and data protection are explicit obligations in Erasmus+ grant conditions; youth spaces must communicate responsibly and protect personal data.





4.6.3 Managing Change and Challenges

Adaptability:

- Ability to respond to changing circumstances
- Flexibility in programs and approaches
- Learning from challenges and failures

Conflict resolution:

- Clear procedures for addressing conflicts
- Mediation and restorative approaches
- Learning opportunities from conflicts

Crisis management:

- Preparedness for various crisis scenarios
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Communication plans for crises
- Support systems for staff and youth

Recommended crisis mini-plan (practical add-on):

- safety incident steps (who leads, who documents, who contacts guardians/authorities),
- media/social media rule during crises (one spokesperson),
- staff debrief after incidents (learning + wellbeing),
- re-opening plan if a temporary closure is needed.



4.7 Sustainability Planning

Long-term sustainability requires strategic planning beyond day-to-day management.

4.7.1 Financial Sustainability

Diversified funding:

- Multiple funding sources to reduce risk
- Mix of public, private, and earned income
- Strategic fundraising planning

Resource management:

- Efficient use of resources
- Building financial reserves
- Long-term financial planning

This aligns with broader ERC management logic around budgeting, monitoring expenditures, and reallocating when needed.



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4.7.2 Organisational Sustainability

Succession planning:

- Developing future leaders (both youth and staff)
- Knowledge transfer and documentation
- Building capacity for organizational continuity

Strategic partnerships:

- Maintaining and developing partnerships
- Collaborative projects and resource sharing
- Integration into broader networks

Innovation and adaptation:

- Staying relevant to changing youth needs
- Adopting new methods and technologies
- Continuous improvement and renewal



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4.8 Best Practices from ERC Project

Drawing on experiences from the ERC project partners

From Poland:

- Participatory management model with youth advisory council having real decision-making power
- Intergenerational volunteer engagement combining youth and adult volunteers
- Regular evaluation cycles with quick feedback loops enabling rapid program adjustments

From Romania:

- Structured mentoring programs connecting youth with community professionals
- Integration of traditional skills with modern entrepreneurship training
- Clear progression pathways for youth from participants to leaders

From Bulgaria:

- Effective volunteer management through clear roles, training, and recognition systems
- Digital tools for program management and communication
- Mobile outreach strategies extending reach to remote villages



CHAPTER 4: MANAGING A YOUTH SPACE (REVISED)



Cross-References

**For establishing a youth space, see Chapter 3: Establishing a Youth Space.*

**For program activities and methods, see Chapter 5: Youth Work Introduction — Non-Formal Activities.*

**For best practices and case studies, see Chapter 6: Best Practices.*



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CHAPTER 5: YOUTH WORK INTRODUCTION

What you'll learn | Practical methods and activities for working with rural youth. Non-formal education approaches, workshop designs, facilitation techniques, and activity examples across different domains. Tools and resources for implementing engaging youth programs.

5.1 Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter introduces practical approaches to non-formal education and youth work activities that can be implemented in rural youth spaces. It provides concrete examples, methodological guidance, and tools for designing and facilitating engaging activities that respond to rural young people's needs and interests. Drawing on ERC project experiences across partner countries, it covers various activity types and domains relevant to rural contexts, offering adaptable frameworks for diverse local situations.

Every activity described in this chapter is grounded in humanistic principles that honor the whole person—their cognitive, emotional, social, creative, and spiritual dimensions. These activities are not just tools for skill development, but opportunities for young people to explore their identity, express their authentic selves, build meaningful relationships, and discover their unique gifts and passions. The facilitation approaches emphasize creating

safe, welcoming environments where young people feel free to be themselves, take risks, make mistakes, and grow at their own pace.



Alignment with ERC project objectives

The ERC project *focuses strongly on:*

- inclusion and diversity;
- common values, civic engagement, and participation;
- promoting young people's sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- strengthening transversal skills (communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking) through at-scale local activities;
- delivering practical, "ready-to-run" formats (e.g., workshops, consultations with decision-makers, film screenings, board game evenings, and digital content creation).

This chapter supports those priorities by offering activity formats that can be used both in youth worker training and in regular youth space programming for young people aged 15–25, and for youth workers/potential youth workers (often 18–30) working in rural contexts.



5.2 Principles of Non-Formal Education Activities

Non-formal education activities in youth spaces should be guided by core principles that ensure effectiveness, engagement, and meaningful learning outcomes—especially in rural settings where access to opportunities may be limited and participation barriers can be high.

5.2.1 Key Principles

Participatory Approach:

- Young people actively engage in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities.
- Activities respond to youth interests and needs, not only adult agendas.
- Multiple opportunities for choice and decision-making.
- Honors the autonomy and agency of each young person, recognizing their right to shape their own learning journey.

Experiential Learning:

- Learning through doing, experiencing, and reflecting.
- Activities connect to real-world contexts and applications.
- Reflection is built into activity design.
- Values the whole person, integrating cognitive, emotional, physical, and social dimensions of learning.



Inclusivity:

- Activities are accessible to diverse groups of young people, including those with fewer opportunities (economic, geographic, educational, social).
- Different learning styles and abilities are accommodated.
- Safe and welcoming environment for all participants.
- Creates spaces where every person feels seen, heard, and valued for who they are, not just for what they can do.

Relevance to Rural Context:

- Activities connect to local community, culture, and resources.
- Address real challenges and opportunities in rural areas (mobility, limited services, fewer leisure options, fewer role models, limited networks).
- Build on local knowledge and assets, including traditions, crafts, nature, local enterprises, and intergenerational strengths.

Progressive Development:

- Activities build skills and complexity over time.
- Clear progression pathways for youth development.
- Multiple entry points for different levels of experience.
- Youth can move from participant → co-organizer → facilitator → youth leader.



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Safe Practice and Safeguarding (recommended as a standing principle):

- Clear rules and boundaries; transparent expectations.
- Respectful communication norms and confidentiality agreements.
- Stronger attention to consent (especially in photography/video/social media outputs).
- Awareness of power dynamics, gender equality, and protection of minors.



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5.3 Activity Categories and Examples

This section offers a broad menu of activity categories commonly used in rural youth spaces. In the ERC project, partners committed to delivering multiple local activities reaching large numbers of rural young people; therefore, the formats below are designed to be repeatable, adaptable, and scalable.

5.3.1 Educational and Skill Development Activities

Digital Skills Workshops

Purpose: Develop digital competences essential for modern economy, civic participation, and communication.

Examples:

- Basic computer literacy (office software, internet navigation, email)
- Social media literacy and digital citizenship
- Digital content creation (photography, video, podcasting)
- Online safety and privacy
- Basic coding and programming
- Digital marketing and e-commerce

Facilitation Tips:

- Start with participants' existing knowledge and interests.
- Use practical projects relevant to their lives (e.g., “create a poster for a local event,” “record a short video story about the village,” “design a youth space logo”).





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- Pair technical skills with creative expression.
- Address digital divide barriers explicitly (access to devices, connectivity, fear of technology, lack of quiet space at home).
- Include low-tech alternatives where needed (offline editing, paper prototyping, shared devices, rotating roles).

Entrepreneurship and Business Skills

Purpose: Develop entrepreneurial competences and business skills relevant to rural contexts (including social entrepreneurship).

Examples:

- Business idea development workshops
- Market research and customer discovery
- Business plan creation
- Financial literacy and budgeting
- Marketing and promotion strategies
- E-commerce and online selling
- Presentation and pitching skills

Facilitation Tips:

- Connect to local resources and opportunities (tourism, crafts, agriculture, local services).
- Use real examples from local entrepreneurs and invite them as guests.

- Include practical exercises and simulations (pricing game, customer persona, budget challenge).
 - Highlight ethical entrepreneurship, community benefit, and inclusion (“business that strengthens the village”).
 - Encourage team-based ideas to reduce fear of failure and build cooperation.
- 

Language Learning

Purpose: Improve language skills for education, employment, and international opportunities.

Examples:

- Conversation clubs in different languages
- Language exchange programs
- Cultural immersion activities
- Language through games and activities
- Preparation for language certifications

Facilitation Tips:

- Make it fun and interactive, not school-like.
- Use multimedia and technology.
- Connect to intercultural exchange and mobility opportunities.
- Create a safe environment for making mistakes (normalize errors as learning).

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Academic Support

Purpose: Support school success and educational attainment—especially where rural youth have limited access to tutoring.

Examples:

- Homework help sessions
- Study skills workshops
- Exam preparation (e.g., Matura, university entrance)
- Subject-specific tutoring
- Time management and organization skills



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Facilitation Tips:

- Balance support with youth autonomy.
- Use peer tutoring where possible.
- Make it collaborative, not competitive.
- Connect academic success to life goals and personal meaning (future options, confidence, independence).

Soft Skills & Civic Competences Workshops



Purpose: Strengthen transversal skills such as communication, public speaking, teamwork, leadership, project writing, and active participation in democratic life.

Examples:

- Assertive communication and boundaries
- Emotional intelligence and conflict de-escalation
- Public speaking labs (short talks, storytelling, “my place matters”)
- Project planning and writing (problem tree, objectives, activities, budget basics)
- Team management basics (roles, feedback, meeting facilitation)

Facilitation Tips:

- Build in repeated practice, not only theory.
- Use real-life rural scenarios (organizing a youth event with limited resources; speaking to a mayor; dealing with rumors).
- Include reflection and feedback cycles (self-reflection + peer feedback + facilitator coaching).

5.3.2 Recreational and Social Activities

Recreational activities are often the “entry door” to a youth space. In many rural contexts, young people first come “to chill,” to be with friends, and to feel safe and welcomed. When facilitated





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intentionally, recreation becomes a powerful inclusion tool—reducing isolation, building belonging, and creating a foundation for deeper learning.

Board Games and Tabletop Activities

Purpose: Social connection, strategic thinking, fun, and community building.

Examples:

- Strategy games (Chess, Settlers of Catan, Ticket to Ride)
- Cooperative games (Pandemic, Forbidden Island)
- Educational games (Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit)
- Local traditional games
- Card games and tournaments

Facilitation Tips:

- Rotate games to maintain interest.
- Teach games in accessible ways (demo round, visual aids, buddy system).
- Organize tournaments and competitions with inclusive rules.
- Use games as icebreakers for other activities (team formation, communication practice, conflict resolution).



Sports and Physical Activities

Purpose: Physical health, teamwork, stress relief, and social engagement.

Examples:

- Team sports (football, volleyball, basketball)
- Individual sports (table tennis, fitness, yoga)
- Outdoor activities (hiking, cycling, nature walks)
- Traditional sports and games
- Sports tournaments and competitions

Facilitation Tips:

- Adapt to available facilities and equipment.
- Include both competitive and non-competitive options.
- Focus on participation and enjoyment, not just winning.
- Use sports for team-building and leadership development (captain roles, fair play reflection, inclusion rules).



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Social Events and Gatherings

Purpose: Community building, belonging, and informal relationship development.

Examples:

- Open mic nights and talent shows
- Movie nights and film discussions
- Themed parties and celebrations
- Picnics and outdoor gatherings
- Game nights and tournaments
- Cultural celebrations

Facilitation Tips:

- Let youth plan and organize events (real ownership).
- Create a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers (buddy host, welcome corner).
- Balance structured and unstructured time.
- Use events to showcase youth talents and achievements.
- Add light “meaning moments” (short reflection, gratitude circle, “what made you smile today?”).



5.3.3 Cultural and Artistic Activities

Cultural and artistic activities can be particularly powerful in rural areas because they connect identity, place, tradition, and creativity—and can also lead to income-generation opportunities (crafts, media skills, local tourism storytelling).

Arts and Crafts Workshops

Purpose: Creative expression, traditional skills, entrepreneurship potential.

Examples:

- Traditional crafts (pottery, weaving, woodworking, embroidery)
- Contemporary arts (painting, drawing, digital art)
- Upcycling and sustainable making
- Product design and creation
- Art exhibitions and showcases

Facilitation Tips:

- Connect to local cultural traditions.
- Combine traditional and modern techniques.
- Showcase products and creations (community exhibition, online gallery).
- Explore entrepreneurship opportunities (pricing, storytelling, selling at local fairs).
- Ensure inclusive materials and processes (low-cost tools, accessible steps).



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Music and Performance

Purpose: Creative expression, confidence building, cultural preservation.

Examples:

- Music workshops and jam sessions
- Choir or band formation
- Performance opportunities
- Recording and production
- Cultural music traditions

Facilitation Tips:

- Provide instruments and equipment access (even improvised instruments).
- Support various skill levels.
- Create performance opportunities with psychological safety (opt-in stages).
- Connect to cultural traditions and modern expressions.



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Photography and Media

Purpose: Visual storytelling, digital skills, community documentation.

Examples:

- Photography workshops
- Video production
- Podcast creation
- Documentary projects
- Social media content creation
- Community memory projects

Facilitation Tips:

- Use smartphones and accessible equipment.
- Focus on storytelling and meaning, not only “pretty visuals.”
- Document local community and culture respectfully.
- Create platforms for sharing work (youth space page, exhibition night).
- Establish clear consent rules for filming and publishing (especially for minors).



5.3.4 Civic Engagement and Community Activities

Civic engagement activities translate youth energy into tangible community impact. In the ERC project, special attention is placed on active participation in democratic life, consultations with decision-makers, and building young people's confidence to speak up respectfully and effectively.

Community Projects

Purpose: Civic engagement, community contribution, leadership development.

Examples:

- Community improvement projects (clean-up, beautification)
- Intergenerational initiatives
- Local history documentation
- Community mapping
- Volunteer coordination
- Fundraising for local causes

Facilitation Tips:

- Start with youth-identified community needs (not adult assumptions).
- Connect projects to local priorities and real stakeholders.
- Build partnerships with community organizations.
- Celebrate achievements and impact publicly (visibility increases youth motivation and community trust).



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Advocacy and Awareness



Purpose: Understanding issues, developing voice, influencing change.

Examples:

- Discussion groups on local and global issues
- Awareness campaigns
- Advocacy skill-building
- Meeting with local decision-makers
- Youth-led research projects

Facilitation Tips:

- Create a safe space for diverse opinions.
- Build skills gradually (discussion → research → action).
- Connect to real opportunities for influence (youth council, municipal meetings, school boards).
- Support youth-led initiatives with adult allies, not adult control.



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Consultations with Local Decision-Makers

Purpose: Build democratic participation, confidence, and practical dialogue skills; reduce “distance” between youth and institutions.

Examples:

- Youth roundtable with mayor/municipality representatives
- “What would make young people stay?” consultation
- Youth space co-management meeting with local authorities
- Participatory budgeting simulation and proposal

Facilitation Tips:

- Prepare youth with a short public speaking and meeting etiquette workshop.
- Use question cards and small-group preparation to lower stress.
- Set clear rules for respectful communication on both sides.
- End with concrete next steps and accountability (“what happens after this meeting?”).

Environmental Activities

Purpose: Environmental awareness, action, connection to nature, and green economy opportunities.

Examples:

- Environmental education workshops
- Nature conservation projects
- Gardening and sustainable practices
- Climate action initiatives
- Connection to rural natural environment

Facilitation Tips:

- Use the local natural environment as a resource.
- Connect to practical actions and solutions.
- Balance education and action.
- Explore green economy opportunities (eco-tourism, sustainable crafts, local food systems).



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5.4 Facilitation Methods and Techniques

5.4.1 Group Dynamics and Participation

Icebreakers and Energizers

Purpose: Build group cohesion, energy, and comfort.

Examples:

- Name games and introductions
- Quick movement activities
- Team-building exercises
- Discussion starters

Facilitation notes:

- Use low-risk activities first (no forced disclosure).
- Offer opt-out options and respect personal boundaries.
- Keep energizers short and purposeful; always link back to the session flow.

Group Discussion Techniques

Purpose: Encourage participation, diverse perspectives, and deep thinking.



Methods:

- Round-table discussions
- Small group breakouts
- World Café method
- Fishbowl discussions
- Structured debates

Facilitation notes:

- Use mixed formats to include quieter participants.
- Provide “thinking time” before speaking (write first, then share).
- Establish ground rules: respect, no interruption, confidentiality where needed

Participatory Decision-Making

Purpose: Build ownership and democratic skills.

Methods:

- Consensus-building exercises
- Dot voting and prioritization
- Open space technology
- Youth advisory councils
- Regular feedback sessions



Facilitation notes:

- Make decision rules clear (what is decided by youth, what is negotiable, what is fixed by safety/legal constraints).
- Document decisions visibly and revisit them (“we said we would...”).
- Ensure inclusion (not only the most confident voices).

5.4.2 Learning Design

Workshop Structure

1. Opening: Welcome, introductions, setting the stage
2. Warm-up: Engaging activity to activate interest
3. Main content: Core learning through experiential activities
4. Reflection: Processing and connecting learning
5. Action planning: Applying learning to real contexts
6. Closing: Summary, next steps, appreciation

Activity Sequencing

1. Start with accessible, low-risk activities
2. Build complexity gradually
3. Alternate between active and reflective moments
4. Provide breaks and movement opportunities
5. End on a positive, forward-looking note



Differentiation

- Offer choices in activities and methods
- Adapt for different skill levels
- Provide additional support where needed
- Allow for different participation styles
- Create space for individual exploration

Reflection practices

- “What? So what? Now what?” reflection triangle
- One-minute paper: “one thing I learned / one question I have”
- Pair-share: “what I want to try next week”
- Visual reflection: draw your learning journey



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5.5 Adapting Activities for Rural Contexts

5.5.1 Working with Limited Resources

Maximize Available Resources

- Use local natural environment
- Tap into community expertise
- Share resources with partners
- Create multi-purpose spaces and equipment
- Develop resource-sharing networks

Low-Cost Activity Options

- Games and activities requiring minimal materials
- Outdoor activities using natural resources
- Digital activities using existing technology
- Community-based activities leveraging local assets

Volunteer-led activities

Practical rural hack: design activities that work in three modes (ideal / minimal materials / outdoor version). This reduces cancellations and supports continuity when resources change





5.5.2 Addressing Barriers

Transportation Barriers

- Schedule activities at accessible times
- Coordinate with public transport
- Organize group transport when possible
- Consider mobile outreach to remote areas
- Use online activities for accessibility

Financial Barriers

- Keep activities free or low-cost
- Provide materials and equipment
- Support participation costs where needed
- Connect to scholarships or support programs

Social Barriers

- Create a welcoming environment for newcomers
- Build diverse groups gradually
- Address conflicts and exclusion proactively
- Ensure a safe space for all participants

Sensitive practices

- Use “bring a friend” invitations to reduce anxiety.
- Offer gentle roles for new participants (helper, photographer, timekeeper).
- Make participation visible but non-pressured (recognition without forcing performance).



5.6 Activity Planning Template

Use this checklist to design or improve any activity. It works equally well for a short game night and for a multi-session training module.

Activity Planning Checklist:

- Objective: What learning or outcome is intended?
- Target group: Who is this activity for? (age, interests, experience level)
- Duration and timing: How long? When? (time of day, day of week)
- Materials needed: What resources are required?
- Facilitation: Who will facilitate? What support is needed?
- Preparation: What needs to be done beforehand?
- Structure: What are the main steps and flow?
- Adaptations: How can this be adjusted for different groups?
- Evaluation: How will you assess effectiveness?
- Follow-up: What happens after the activity?



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Add-ons recommended for ERC implementation quality:



- Inclusion check: Who might be unintentionally excluded? What adjustments can we make?
- Safeguarding check: Any risks? Any special considerations for minors?
- Consent & visibility check: If photos/video are involved, do we have consent and a clear publishing plan?
- Community link: Is there a local stakeholder or community asset that could strengthen this activity (library, craftspeople, municipality, local entrepreneurs)?

5.7 Examples from ERC Project

From Poland:

- Intergenerational craft workshops combining traditional skills with modern applications
- Photography projects documenting rural life and disappearing traditions
- Youth-led community festivals showcasing local culture
- From Romania:
 - Traditional craft workshops with entrepreneurship focus
 - Cultural heritage documentation projects
 - Youth cooperatives combining traditional skills with modern business



From Bulgaria:

- Digital skills workshops using accessible technology
- Mobile outreach activities to remote villages
- Hybrid programs combining in-person and online elements
- How to reuse these examples effectively:
- Keep the purpose constant (e.g., inclusion, skills, participation) but adapt the format to local realities.
- Use the same activity model as a series (e.g., 5 sessions) so youth can progress from beginners to co-facilitators.
- Build a public moment (exhibition, showcase, meeting) to strengthen community recognition of youth work.

5.8 Resources and Further Reading

Council of Europe Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People

SALTO-Youth Toolbox: Non-formal education methods database

Erasmus+ Training Kits: Practical resources for youth work

Local community resources: Libraries, museums, cultural centers, craftspeople



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Cross-References

**For understanding the context of rural youth work, see Chapter 2: Understanding Work with Rural Youth*

**For establishing a youth space, see Chapter 3: Establishing a Youth Space*

**For managing programs, see Chapter 4: Managing a Youth Space*

**For best practices and case studies, see Chapter 6: Best Practices*



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CHAPTER 6: BEST PRACTICES

How to apply a structured set of transferable best practices for rural youth spaces, and how to adapt them to different local conditions (transport limits, low budgets, seasonality, mixed-age groups). This chapter delivers practice cards you can implement with minimal preparation and scale over time.

6.1 Purpose of the Chapter

Youth spaces in rural areas succeed when they combine: (1) relevance (activities anchored in real youth needs), (2) trust and safety (clear safeguarding and predictable routines), and (3) community legitimacy (relationships with families, schools, municipal actors, and local groups).

In the ERC project, the Practical Guidebook was designed to include at least 10 best practices from each partner country (Bulgaria, Romania, Poland) for managing youth spaces and running non-formal activities effectively. This chapter operationalises that commitment by presenting a standardised, easy-to-reuse format.



6.2 How to Use the Practice Cards

Each best practice is presented as a “card” so that youth workers can:

- implement it immediately (even with a small team),
- adapt it for different age groups (15–25 youth; 18–30 youth workers),
- monitor results with lightweight indicators,
- replicate and scale it after a 30–90 day cycle.

Practice Card Format

1. Goal: the outcome you want.
2. Why it works: the mechanism (participation, routine, peer learning, visibility, etc.).
3. Steps: a clear sequence (often “Start small → test → expand”).
4. Resources: minimum viable materials, space, roles.
5. Risks & Safeguards: what can go wrong and how to protect young people and staff.
6. Adaptations for rural constraints: transport, weather, budgets, low connectivity.
7. Simple indicators: “good enough” measures for small teams.

6.3 Best Practices From Bulgaria

Context note (for adaptation): In the project application, the Bulgarian partner (YIYD) operates in the Smolyan region and has experience running a rural youth space and youth-work activities, which informs the practical orientation of these practices.

Practice 1 — “Open Studio” Drop-in Hours (Low-threshold participation)

Goal: Increase regular attendance and rebuild trust among youth who are hesitant to join structured programs.

Why it works: Drop-in formats reduce anxiety and commitment barriers. Young people can “test” the space without pressure, which is especially important where rural youth feel monitored or judged.

Steps

1. Choose 2 fixed weekly time slots (same days/times for 8–12 weeks).
2. Prepare 3 micro-zones: chill corner, creative corner, “help desk” corner (youth worker available).
3. Use a soft invitation: posters + word of mouth + one trusted connector (teacher, peer, volunteer).
4. Add a weekly micro-theme (music sharing, collage, photo walk planning, local story collecting).
5. Close with a 2-minute feedback pulse (emoji voting or one-question sticky note board).



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Resources (minimum): 1–2 facilitators/volunteers, tea/water, simple art supplies, speaker, sign-in sheet.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: cliques dominate.

Mitigation: rotate mini-activities, greet newcomers, set inclusive norms.

Risk: conflict during unstructured time.

Mitigation: visible house rules + calm de-escalation script.

Adaptations

If transport is difficult: align times with school bus schedules.

If space is small: run “quiet hours” and limit capacity with a simple token system.

Simple indicators: unique youth/month; % returning within 2 weeks; # newcomer check-ins.

Practice 2 — Mobile Youth Space (Outreach to remote villages)

Goal: Reach youth who cannot access the main youth space due to distance or cost.

Why it works: Mobile outreach reduces structural exclusion and signals that youth work is “for you too,” not only for those living close to the center.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Steps

1. Map 2–4 satellite villages and identify safe host points (library, school room, community hall).
2. Run a monthly route (same week each month).
3. Deliver a repeatable “activity pack”: energiser + group game + short workshop + reflection circle.
4. Use local youth co-facilitators (1–2 per location) trained in basic facilitation.
5. Collect needs and convert them into the next month’s theme.



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Resources: Transport plan, portable kit (flipchart, markers, cards, small sports items), consent/safeguarding forms.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: weak legitimacy in new communities.

Mitigation: co-host with a trusted local institution.

Risk: inconsistent attendance.

Mitigation: predictable schedule + local youth ambassadors.

Adaptations

In winter: shift to indoor micro-workshops and small group formats.

Low internet: use offline tools (printed cards, paper surveys).

Indicators: villages reached/quarter; # youth engaged; # return participants; # local co-facilitators retained.

Practice 3 — Peer Volunteer Ladder (Participant → Helper → Co-leader)

Goal: Build sustainable local capacity and reduce staff overload.

Why it works: Rural spaces thrive when youth ownership is real, not symbolic. Clear pathways increase motivation and retention.





Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Steps

1. Define 3 roles: Helper (2–4 hrs/month), Co-facilitator (1 session/month), Youth Lead (monthly plan + delivery).
2. Create a micro-training (90 minutes): safety, inclusion, activity flow, conflict basics.
3. Assign a “buddy” youth worker to each new helper.
4. Recognise progression publicly (certificate, social media spotlight, reference letter).

Resources: Role descriptions, short training slides/handout, simple supervision notes.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: “favourites” perception.

Mitigation: transparent criteria and open calls.

Risk: burnout of youth leaders.

Mitigation: rotate responsibilities and cap hours.

Adaptations

If youth are busy with school/work: micro-roles + flexible scheduling.

Indicators: volunteers by level; volunteer retention rate; # sessions co-led by youth.



Practice 4 — Intergenerational Micro-Projects (Youth + Adults)

Goal: Improve community acceptance of the youth space and reduce stigma toward young people.

Why it works: Intergenerational cooperation builds legitimacy and can reduce conflict around “youth hanging out,” replacing suspicion with shared achievement.

Steps

1. Identify a community micro-need (bench repair, mural, garden corner, photo archive).
2. Pair youth with local adults (craftsperson, librarian, cultural worker, retired teacher).
3. Run a 3-session arc: plan → build → showcase.
4. End with a public mini-event (30–60 minutes): “What we made + why it matters.”

Resources: Small materials budget, simple risk assessment, photo consent.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: adult domination.

Mitigation: youth co-chair the planning meeting.

Risk: political conflict.

Mitigation: keep projects non-partisan and community-focused.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Adaptations

If adults are reluctant: start with “story exchange” events before hands-on work.

Indicators: joint sessions; community attendance at showcase; partner satisfaction pulse.



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Practice 5 — Low-Tech Digital Skills Club (Inclusion-first)

Goal: Reduce digital exclusion while keeping entry barriers low.

Why it works: Rural youth may have limited access to equipment, stable internet, or mentorship. Low-tech design ensures fairness.

Steps

1. Choose a simple 6-week curriculum: CV basics, email etiquette, online safety, photo editing basics, community storytelling.
2. Use shared devices (2–4 laptops/phones) and rotate stations.
3. Pair youth in “buddy teams” to avoid isolation and increase peer learning.
4. Create a “show your work” ritual: 5-minute demos at the end.

Resources: Devices (even limited), printed worksheets, offline apps where possible.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: privacy exposure.

Mitigation: anonymised practice accounts; no forced sharing.

Risk: shame about skill gaps.

Mitigation: normalise “starting from zero.”



Adaptations

If internet is unreliable: offline tasks + pre-downloaded resources.

Indicators: % participants completing 4+ sessions; self-reported confidence change; # practical outputs (CVs, posters).

Practice 6 — Youth Space “House Rules” Co-Design

Goal: Create a safe, predictable environment with shared responsibility.

Why it works: Co-designed rules are followed more consistently and reduce conflict because young people perceive them as “ours.”

Steps

1. Host a 60-minute workshop: “What helps people feel safe here?”
2. Draft 8–12 rules (short, positive language).
3. Agree consequences using a restorative approach (repair, reflection, re-entry plan).
4. Display rules visibly and revisit every 3 months.

Resources: Flipchart, markers, printed poster, short restorative script.



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Risks & Safeguards

Risk: rules become symbolic.

Mitigation: monthly “rule check” at drop-in hours.

Risk: exclusion as punishment.

Mitigation: focus on repair and re-entry, not bans.

Adaptations

For mixed ages: create “core rules” + age-specific add-ons.

Indicators: incidents/month; % resolved restoratively; youth safety perception pulse.



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Practice 7 — Monthly “Community Connector” Roundtable

Goal: Build stable relationships with local institutions and reduce operational friction.

Why it works: Many rural youth spaces fail due to weak coordination (access to rooms, utilities, permissions, referrals). Lightweight roundtables keep collaboration alive.

Steps

1. Invite 5–8 connectors: school rep, municipal rep, librarian, youth leader, NGO contact, local business ally.
2. Use a fixed agenda (45 minutes): updates, needs, upcoming calendar, support requests.
3. Capture actions in a one-page note: owner + deadline.

Resources: Meeting space, simple template, consistent facilitator.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: meetings become talk-only.

Mitigation: always end with 3 concrete actions.

Risk: youth voice missing.

Mitigation: include 1–2 youth reps with preparation support.



Adaptations

If formal meetings are hard: run “connector coffee” sessions quarterly.

Indicators: active partners; # resources secured (rooms, materials, referrals); issue resolution speed.

Practice 8 — Seasonal Programming (Winter-proof planning)

Goal: Maintain engagement through weather and seasonal constraints.

Why it works: Rural participation often drops due to cold, darkness, transport disruptions. Seasonality planning prevents “program collapse” in winter.

Steps

1. Create a winter-safe calendar: fewer events, higher reliability.
2. Shift to indoor anchor formats: board games, film club, micro-workshops.
3. Add “micro-commitment” projects: 2-week challenges rather than long courses.
4. Increase warm hospitality: tea, snacks, welcoming lighting, calm space.

Resources: Indoor plan, backup facilitator list, simple emergency contacts.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: exclusion of remote youth.

Mitigation: hybrid/phone check-ins or mobile outreach mini-visits.

Indicators: winter attendance retention; # cancelled sessions; participant satisfaction.



Own photo | Bulgaria, Smolyan | Jun 2025

Practice 9 — “Youth-led Visibility” Package (Legitimacy + recruitment)



Goal: Make the youth space visible and socially accepted, while recruiting new participants.

Why it works: Visibility increases trust among parents and stakeholders, and helps youth feel proud and recognised.

Steps

1. Train youth to produce low-effort content: 1 photo + 1 sentence “what we did/why it matters.”
2. Post weekly on 1–2 channels (social media + physical notice board).
3. Run a quarterly “open house” with short demos.

Resources: Simple content guidelines, consent protocol, one coordinator.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: privacy issues.

Mitigation: consent, no sensitive stories, opt-out always available.

Risk: online harassment.

Mitigation: moderation plan and reporting steps.

Indicators: inquiries/newcomers; event attendance; stakeholder feedback.



Practice 10 — Micro-Grants for Youth Initiatives (Small budgets, big ownership)

Goal: Enable youth to launch their own mini-projects with minimal bureaucracy.

Why it works: Small funds unlock agency. Youth learn planning, budgeting, and accountability through real action.

Steps

1. Define micro-grant rules: 20–100 EUR equivalent, 2-week turnaround.
2. Simple application: 5 questions (goal, steps, budget, safety, who benefits).
3. Provide a “budget buddy” youth worker for review.
4. End with a short showcase and a one-page reflection.

Resources: Small fund pool, template, receipts log, safeguarding checklist.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: conflict over selection.

Mitigation: transparent criteria + youth panel scoring.

Risk: misuse of funds.

Mitigation: simple receipts + check-in before purchases.

Indicators: initiatives funded; completion rate; leadership skills self-report; community benefit snapshots.

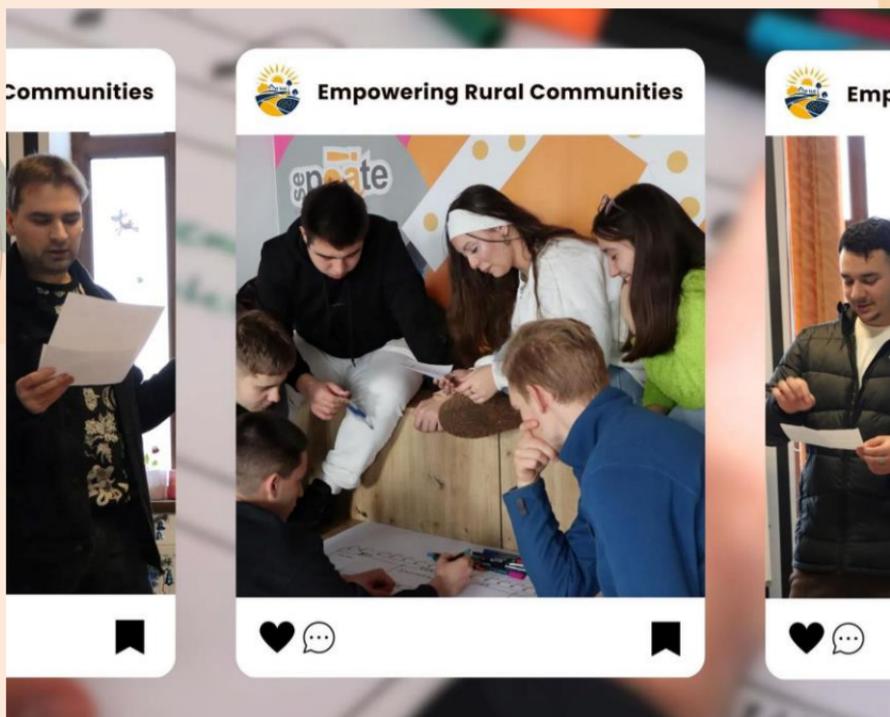


Cross-References

**For setting up and legitimising a youth space: see Chapter 3: Establishing a Youth Space.*

**For operational routines and team management: see Chapter 4: Managing a Youth Space.*

**For activity design and facilitation: see Chapter 5: Youth Work Introduction — Non-Formal Activities.*



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026



6.4 Best Practices From Romania

Context note (for adaptation): These practices reflect typical rural constraints and strengths (strong informal networks, tradition/heritage assets, limited local labour market diversity) and the ERC emphasis on initiative, participation, entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship) and inclusion.

Practice 1 — Mentoring Circles (Youth + Local Professionals)

Goal: Increase youth confidence, career orientation, and social capital in low-opportunity areas.

Why it works: Rural youth often lack exposure to diverse professional pathways. Circles reduce hierarchy and build “weak ties” that later become opportunities.

Steps

1. Identify 6–10 mentors (local entrepreneurs, teachers, health workers, artisans, municipal staff).
2. Form circles of 6–8 youth with 1–2 mentors; meet monthly.
3. Run a fixed agenda: check-in → topic micro-lesson → Q&A → “next step” commitments.
4. Add “shadowing day” once per quarter (short, safe, pre-agreed).
5. Close each cycle with a youth showcase (what I learned / what I want next).



Resources: Mentor code of conduct, safeguarding/consent protocols, simple meeting template.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: mentors dominate.

Mitigation: youth-led questions, facilitator timekeeping.

Risk: privacy concerns in small communities.

Mitigation: confidentiality rules + opt-out.



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026

Adaptations

If transport is hard: hold circles in rotating villages or pair with school schedule.





Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Indicators: youth returning; # “next step” actions completed; self-reported confidence change.

Practice 2 — Heritage-to-Enterprise Lab (Tradition + Modern Market)

Goal: Build entrepreneurial skills by transforming local heritage into ethical, modern products/services.

Why it works: It uses local identity as an asset, not a limitation; it’s highly motivating and community-legitimising.

Steps

1. Map 5–10 local heritage skills (crafts, food, music, tourism stories).
2. Run a 5-session lab: story → product concept → prototype → pricing → pitch.
3. Invite one local artisan and one marketing helper for session 4.
4. Test products at a local fair or youth space “mini-market”.
5. Debrief ethically: cultural respect, fair pricing, community benefit.

Resources: Basic craft materials, smartphone camera, simple budget worksheet.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: romanticising tradition / excluding minorities.

Mitigation: multiple narratives, inclusive selection.



Risk: exploitation.

Mitigation: clear credit and fair collaboration rules.

Adaptations

Low budget: prototype with paper mockups and borrowed materials.

Indicators: prototypes; # youth pitches; # community contacts; repeat participation.

Practice 3 — “Youth Cooperative” Simulation (Teamwork + Budget + Governance)

Goal: Teach governance, accountability, and cooperative decision-making.

Why it works: Rural projects often require teamwork and shared resources; cooperative models fit community realities.

Steps

1. Form “coops” of 5–7 youth; assign roles (finance, operations, comms, inclusion lead).
2. Give each coop a scenario: local service gap (e.g., transport info, youth events, tutoring).
3. Use a 3-week sprint: plan → test → present results.
4. Introduce a simple budget and a rule: every decision must consider inclusion and safety.
5. End with a community panel feedback session.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Resources: Scenario cards, budget sheets, role cards, reflection prompts.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: conflict.

Mitigation: facilitation + restorative check-ins.

Risk: unequal voice.

Mitigation: structured rounds + rotating roles.

Adaptations

Mixed ages: keep coops smaller and increase structure. *Indicators:* completed coop plans; group cohesion pulse; leadership rotation evidence.



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026

Practice 4 — “Village Challenge Weeks” (Short, High-Energy Cycles)

Goal: Keep momentum in communities where attendance is seasonal and irregular.

Why it works: Short challenges create clear beginnings and endings; they’re easier to join.

Steps

1. Pick a weekly theme: “Improve one place”, “Story of our village”, “Healthy week”.
2. Run daily mini-activities (30–60 minutes) + one culminating event.
3. Track participation with simple stamps/cards (gamified but not competitive).
4. Invite families/community to the final day (visibility + legitimacy).
5. Collect one lesson learned per youth.

Resources: Sticker cards, simple daily plans, photo consent rules.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: pressure / exclusion.

Mitigation: opt-in tasks, multiple roles, no public ranking.

Adaptations

Remote villages: run the week as mobile sessions in multiple points.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Indicators: youth reached; # new participants; # returning after the week.

Practice 5 — “Youth Service Map” (Navigation to opportunities)

Goal: Reduce hidden exclusion by making local opportunities visible and accessible.

Why it works: Many youth don't know what exists (training, grants, health, support). Mapping empowers and improves referrals.

Steps

1. Co-map services: education, wellbeing, social services, sports, volunteering, jobs.
2. Create a simple printed + digital map (one page).
3. Add “how to access” steps (contact, documents, cost, opening times).
4. Run a “service navigation workshop” with role plays (how to call, how to ask).
5. Update quarterly with youth feedback.

Resources: Template map, permission to list contacts, poster printing.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: outdated info.

Mitigation: quarterly update owner.

CHAPTER 6: BEST PRACTICES



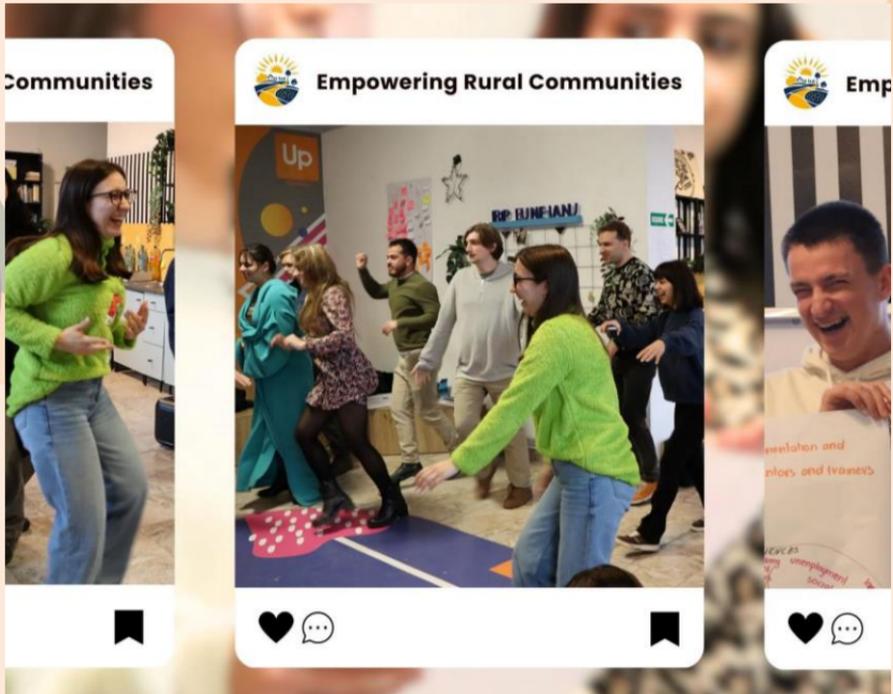
Risk: sensitive topics.

Mitigation: separate “public” info from confidential referral guidance.

Adaptations

Low internet: printed wall map in youth space + take-home sheet.

Indicators: map uses; # referrals supported; youth self-report “I know where to go”.



Own photo / Romania, Troianul / Jan 2026



Practice 6 — Community Storytelling Documentary (Identity + Media + Inclusion)

Goal: Build voice, digital skills, and belonging through respectful storytelling.

Why it works: Media projects validate youth perspective and strengthen local pride without forcing “formal participation”.

Steps

1. Train basics: consent, interviewing, ethics, framing.
2. Choose 3–5 story themes (migration, traditions, youth hopes, local heroes).
3. Produce short formats (1–3 minutes each).
4. Host a community screening night with dialogue.
5. Archive outputs in youth space (with consent).

Resources: Smartphones, simple editing app, consent forms, screening setup.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: privacy exposure.

Mitigation: consent, anonymise, avoid sensitive details.

Risk: community conflict.

Mitigation: non-partisan, respectful tone.



Adaptations

No editing tools: photo-story + captions instead of video.

Indicators: youth producers; # stories completed; community attendance; youth pride pulse.

Practice 7 — Micro-Internships with Local Businesses (Short + Safe)

Goal: Create real exposure to work and entrepreneurship without heavy bureaucracy.

Why it works: “One-day” or “two half-days” formats fit rural capacity and reduce fear.

Steps

1. Identify 5–10 safe host businesses/organisations.
2. Create a micro-internship agreement (hours, tasks, safety, supervision).
3. Prepare youth (work etiquette, rights, boundaries).
4. Run placement; collect youth reflection and host feedback.
5. Convert reflections into CV lines and next steps.

Resources: Simple agreement template, safeguarding checklist, reflection sheet.





Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: exploitation.

Mitigation: clear scope, max hours, supervision, no hazardous tasks.

Risk: transport.

Mitigation: cluster placements geographically.

Adaptations

If businesses are scarce: do “job shadow interviews” instead.

Indicators: placements; youth readiness self-report; # follow-up opportunities.

Practice 8 — Youth-Led Community Dialogue (Respectful civic participation)

Goal: Strengthen youth civic confidence and improve youth–authority relationships.

Why it works: Structured dialogue prevents tokenism and gives youth a “real seat at the table”.





Steps

1. Youth prepare 3–5 priority issues (with evidence: photos, mini-survey).
2. Facilitate a 60–90 min meeting with municipality/school leaders.
3. Use clear rules: equal speaking time; no humiliation; action commitments.
4. Publish a one-page summary: “agreed steps + deadlines”.
5. Follow up at 6 weeks: “what changed / what’s next”.

Resources: Prep workshop, meeting script, summary template.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: adults dismiss youth.

Mitigation: pre-brief adults + independent facilitator.

Risk: youth fear visibility.

Mitigation: allow anonymous questions and small-group speaking.

Adaptations

If direct meeting is hard: start with written Q&A + later meeting.

Indicators: commitments made; # commitments completed; youth sense of influence.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Practice 9 — Inclusion Ambassadors (Peer outreach)

Goal: Increase participation of underrepresented youth (fewer opportunities) through peer invitation.

Why it works: Rural youth often trust peers more than institutions. Ambassadors reduce stigma.

Steps

1. Recruit 4–6 ambassadors (diverse backgrounds); train them in inclusion + boundaries.
2. Provide “invitation scripts” and safe outreach methods.
3. Create “first visit” support: welcome host, buddy system, no pressure activities.
4. Track barriers and adjust program (transport, timing, cost, stigma).
5. Recognize ambassadors (certificates, small roles, leadership pathway).



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026



Resources: Training mini-pack, badge/role card, feedback template.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: ambassadors feel responsible for others.

Mitigation: clear limits + staff support.

Risk: gossip.

Mitigation: privacy rules, no naming.

Adaptations

Micro-villages: use “small group invitations” rather than mass promotion.

Indicators: diversity participation trend; newcomer retention; reported barrier reductions.



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026



Practice 10 — Wellbeing + Skills Blend Sessions (emotional literacy + tools)

Goal: Support mental wellbeing while building practical competences.

Why it works: Stress, isolation and identity pressure are common; combining wellbeing with skills feels safe and useful.

Steps

1. Run weekly 60–90 min sessions: check-in → skill module → reflection.
2. Modules: assertive communication, conflict de-escalation, self-awareness, time management.
3. Include optional anonymous “question box”.
4. Provide referral pathways for serious issues (clear boundaries).
5. Close with “one small action this week”.

Resources: Facilitation guide, safe check-in prompts, referral list.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: therapy confusion.

Mitigation: clarify youth work boundaries; referrals when needed.

Risk: disclosure handling.

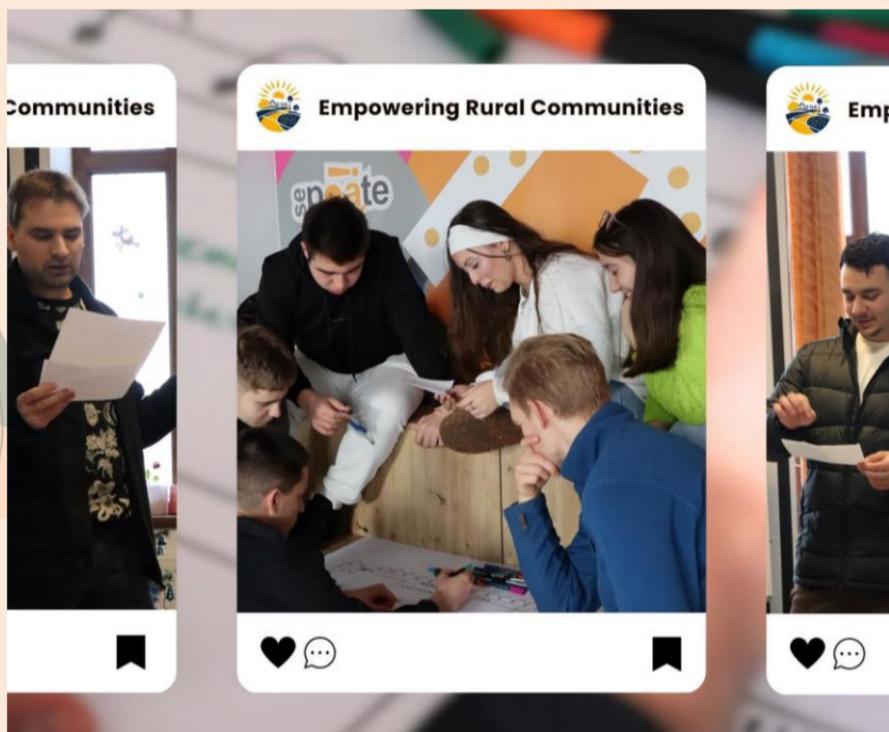
Mitigation: safeguarding steps and staff training.

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Adaptations

If group is mixed ages: create smaller circles or parallel tasks.

Indicators: attendance stability; wellbeing self-report; observed conflict reduction.



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026

6.5 Best Practices From Poland

Context note (for adaptation): These practices emphasise structured participation, local partnership-building, visibility and communication, and operational discipline (safeguarding, documentation), which are often decisive in Polish rural municipalities.

Practice 1 — Youth Co-Management Board (Real, not symbolic)

Goal: Turn youth participation into real governance.

Why it works: Youth are more engaged when they co-decide. It also reduces adult “programming from above.”

Steps

1. Create a board of 5–9 youth (diverse ages/backgrounds).
2. Define decision scope (program calendar, events, small budget, house rules).
3. Meet monthly with staff facilitator; publish decisions visibly.
4. Rotate youth chair and note-taker roles.
5. Review board diversity every quarter (who is missing and why).

Resources: Simple charter, decision log template, inclusion checklist.



Risks & Safeguards

Risk: elite capture.

Mitigation: rotation + open recruitment cycles.

Risk: pressure.

Mitigation: voluntary participation and “light roles”.

Adaptations

Small villages: combine board with “open planning circles”.

Indicators: decisions youth-led; attendance board stability; youth satisfaction.

Practice 2 — “Safety Pack First” Opening Protocol (Minimum viable standards)

Goal: Ensure safe operation from day 1 (especially with minors).

Why it works: Rural spaces can be informal; written minimum standards prevent confusion and protect everyone.

Steps

1. Establish safeguarding policy + code of conduct.
2. Create incident log and response flow (who, what, when, escalation).
3. Implement consent processes for participation and media.
4. Train staff/volunteers before opening + refresh quarterly.
5. Run a “safety audit” walk-through every 3 months.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Resources: Templates from Annexes A-D, printed rules, staff handbook.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: paperwork overwhelms.

Mitigation: keep pack short; one-page quick guides.

Adaptations

No permanent venue: mobile safety pack (portable first aid, contact list, rules poster).

Indicators: incident response readiness; training completion; youth safety perception pulse.



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026



Practice 3 — School Partnership Gateway (Reach the “invisible” youth)

Goal: Reach youth who never join NGO or municipal initiatives.

Why it works: Schools are the most stable access point in rural areas.

Steps

1. Agree with school on a monthly “youth space slot” (short workshop + invitation).
2. Train 2–3 teachers as “connectors” who can refer youth.
3. Run a low-pressure first visit plan (buddy host, drop-in).
4. Share a simple calendar and success stories (with consent).
5. Keep boundaries: youth space is not school; it stays voluntary.

Resources: Short school presentation deck, referral script, consent rules.

Risk: school tries to control.

Mitigation: MoU clarifying autonomy and safeguarding.

Adaptations

Very small schools: integrate with library or community center.

Indicators: referrals; conversion to attendance; retention after 2–3 visits.



Practice 4 — Library as Youth Space Ally (Quiet, inclusive entry point)

Goal: Create an alternative “safe entry” for youth who avoid highly social spaces.

Why it works: Libraries carry low stigma and support learning identity.

Steps

1. Co-design 2 monthly formats: study-support hour + media club.
2. Provide a “quiet participation option” (no forced speaking).
3. Use book-to-life links: themes like identity, belonging, local history.
4. Host small exhibitions or readings led by youth.
5. Gradually invite to broader youth space events.

Resources: Room access, simple media tools, print materials.

Risk: boredom.

Mitigation: youth choose themes and formats.

Adaptations

If no library: use school reading room or cultural center.

Indicators: youth with low social confidence attending; repeat participation.



Practice 5 — Rural Media Lab (Visibility + skills + pride)

Goal: Build digital skills and strengthen legitimacy through youth-led communication.

Why it works: Content creation is motivating, and it gives youth voice while showcasing value to community.

Steps

1. Train a small “media team” (photo, video, posters, short stories).
2. Produce weekly: “what we did + why it matters” micro-content.
3. Publish on notice board + 1 social channel; keep consent strict.
4. Run quarterly public showcase (screening/exhibition).
5. Link content to civic themes (values, participation, inclusion).

Resources: Smartphones, simple templates, consent forms, moderation plan.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: privacy breaches.

Mitigation: opt-out always; no sensitive stories; controlled publishing.

Risk: online hate.

Mitigation: moderation rules + reporting steps.

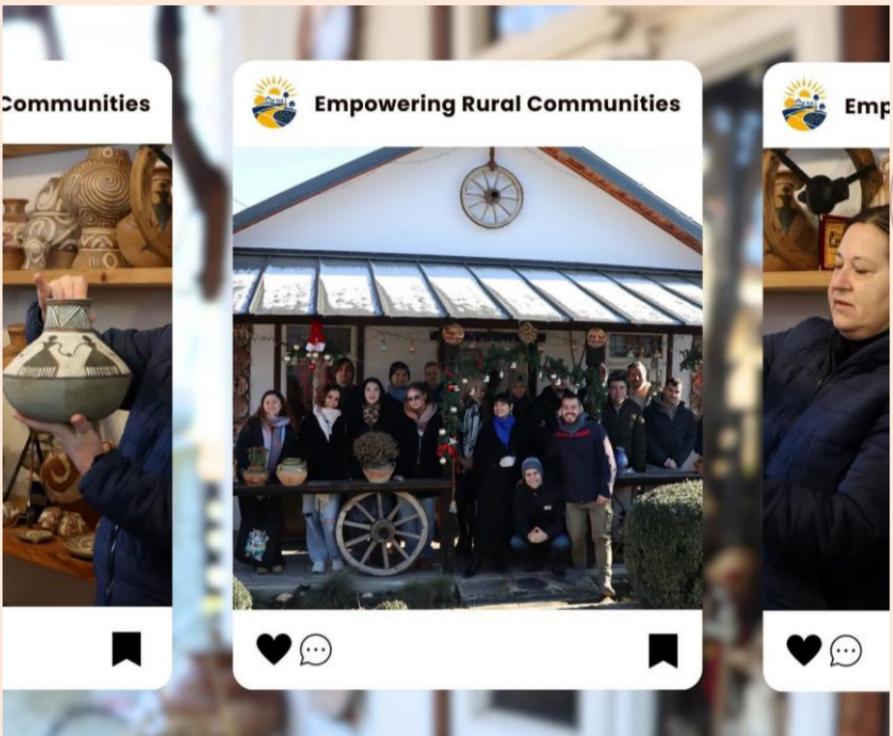


Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Adaptations

Low internet: print-first approach + later upload.

Indicators: newcomers referencing media; skills self-report; stakeholder trust feedback.



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Practice 6 — “You Said / We Did” Transparency Wall

Goal: Build trust and demonstrate that youth voice changes reality.

Why it works: Rural youth often doubt institutions. Visible follow-through increases participation.

Steps

1. Collect feedback weekly (stickies/QR).
2. Post top 3 issues and decisions on wall.
3. Assign actions (owner + date).
4. Update progress visibly.
5. Review monthly with youth board.

Resources: Board, sticky notes, simple action tracker.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: promises not kept.

Mitigation: only post realistic commitments.

Adaptations

Mobile spaces: use a shared notebook + photos.

Indicators: feedback volume; % actions completed; trust pulse.



Practice 7 — Micro-Projects with Small Municipal Support (Quick wins)

Goal: Show tangible community impact within 4–8 weeks.

Why it works: Quick wins build legitimacy and can unlock longer-term municipal funding.

Steps

1. Co-identify one small community improvement goal.
2. Build a minimal plan + budget (even small in-kind support).
3. Implement with youth leadership roles.
4. Present results publicly (short opening event).
5. Capture evidence for reporting (photos, attendance, quotes with consent).

Resources: Small budget, partner support, basic tools.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: politicisation.

Mitigation: non-partisan framing, focus on community wellbeing.

Adaptations

If budget is zero: in-kind donations + volunteer time.

Indicators: project completion; community attendance; municipal feedback.



Practice 8 — Inclusion Outreach in “Three Gates” (Peers + adults + services)

Goal: Increase participation of youth with fewer opportunities systematically (not случайно).

Why it works: One channel rarely reaches excluded youth. Three gates make outreach resilient.

Steps

1. Gate A (peers): ambassadors with buddy invitations.
2. Gate B (trusted adults): teachers, social workers, coaches referring youth.
3. Gate C (services): collaboration with social welfare / family support where ethical.
4. Offer low-threshold first visits (drop-in, games, no forms overload).
5. Track barriers and adapt hours, transport, language, accessibility.

Resources: Referral scripts, inclusion plan, confidentiality guidance.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: stigma.

Mitigation: universal invitations; no “special group” labeling.

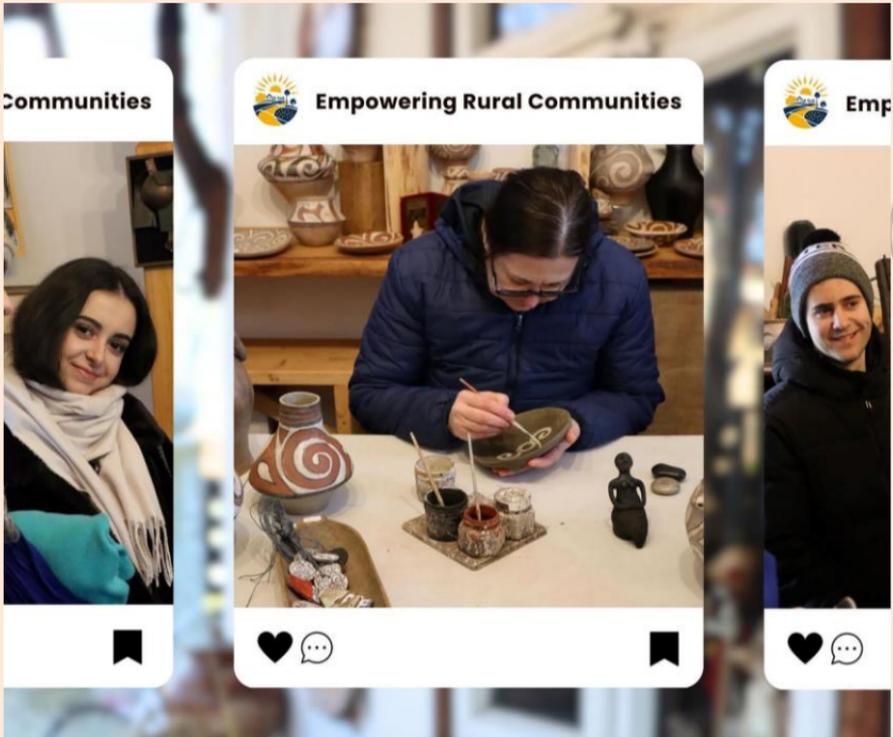


Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Adaptations

If services are sensitive: focus on Gate A + B first.

Indicators: diversity participation trend; newcomer retention; barrier removal actions.



Own photo | Romania, Troianul | Jan 2026

Practice 9 — Seasonal Attendance Stabiliser (Rural rhythm planning)



Goal: Keep continuity through harvest/exams/winter disruptions.

Why it works: Predictability reduces dropout; adapting to rhythm shows respect for youth reality.

Steps

1. Map local seasonal peaks (exam months, agricultural work, holidays).
2. Create “anchor sessions” that never change (same day/time).
3. Use shorter formats in difficult seasons (60 min micro-workshops).
4. Add a winter “comfort plan” (warm drinks, indoor games, calm space).
5. Communicate changes early and clearly.

Resources: Annual calendar, communication templates.

Risks & Safeguards

Risk: overplanning.

Mitigation: keep calendar flexible but stable.





Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Adaptations

Remote areas: cluster activities on days youth are already in town.

Indicators: cancellations; retention rate across seasons.

Practice 10 — Local Entrepreneurship & Social Enterprise Mini-Track

Goal: Turn youth ideas into small, ethical initiatives that serve the community.

Why it works: Rural youth often see limited futures; mini-track creates “I can build here” mindset.

Steps

1. Run a 4-session mini-track: problem → idea → budget → test.
2. Use micro-grants (even symbolic amounts) or in-kind support.
3. Pair youth teams with a mentor (business or NGO).
4. Include a community feedback session.
5. End with a public “youth solutions night”.

Resources: Simple budget sheet, mentor list, micro-grant rules.



Risks & Safeguards

Risk: failure shame.

Mitigation: normalise iteration; celebrate learning.

Risk: exclusion by cost.

Mitigation: ensure free participation and material support.

Adaptations

If no mentors: use online guest sessions or peer mentorship.

Indicators: initiatives launched; # youth leading; skills self-report (confidence, planning).

Chapter 6 Cross-References

**For set-up and legal/partnership groundwork: Chapter 3: Establishing a Youth Space*

**For daily management, roles and routines: Chapter 4: Managing a Youth Space*

**For activities and facilitation designs: Chapter 5: Youth Work Introduction — Non-Formal Activities*

**For youth voice and needs: Chapter 7: Feedback from Rural Youth*



CHAPTER 7: FEEDBACK FROM RURAL YOUTH

What you'll learn | How youth feedback was collected (focus groups, interviews, post-session micro-surveys) and analysed. What rural young people in Smolyan say they need from a youth space and why. Which program changes YIYD made in response (scheduling, outreach format, mental-health signposting). A compact SOP to turn feedback into improvements and show “You said / We did”. Start-up KPIs to track listening and response in the first 90 days.

This chapter synthesises structured qualitative feedback gathered from rural young people in the Smolyan region and explains how their perspectives directly informed the design and delivery of youth spaces operated by Young Improvers for Youth Development (YIYD). It presents the research approach, the principal insights, the adjustments made in response, and a compact monitoring framework for continuous learning. All data are reported in aggregate and without personally identifying information.

This chapter embodies a fundamental humanistic principle: that every young person's voice matters and deserves to be heard. The feedback processes described here are not mere data collection exercises, but acts of genuine listening and respect for the dignity of each individual. They reflect a commitment to creating spaces where young people feel safe to express their authentic thoughts, needs, and aspirations—knowing that their words will be taken

CHAPTER 7: FEEDBACK FROM RURAL YOUTH

seriously and will lead to meaningful change. This approach recognizes that young people are the experts on their own lives and experiences, and that effective youth work must be grounded in their realities, not in adult assumptions about what they need.

Why feedback is a project requirement (not an “extra”). In ERC, local piloting explicitly includes engaging rural youth to test, apply activities, and provide feedback on the Guidebook’s usefulness—through discussions and workshops to understand their needs, preferences, and ideas for youth spaces (with each partner involving local youth in focus groups/standardised workshops).



Own photo | Bulgaria, Rudozem | Jun 2025

7.1 Synthesis of Focus Group and Interview Findings



7.1.1 Data collection: who, when, how

Between March and August 2025, during the field phases of the ERC initiative, trained facilitators conducted semi-structured focus groups and in-depth interviews with more than eighty young people (approximately 15–25 years) from villages and small towns across the Smolyan region. Guides were adapted to local context (see Annexes), and all sessions followed informed-consent procedures. Note-taking was anonymous and focused on four lenses: access; safety and climate; learning and skills; and participation and influence. The aim was not statistical representativeness but practice intelligence—evidence that can guide implementation choices in a rural setting.

To align with the ERC approach to quality and evaluation (continuous monitoring, feedback loops, and structured review), teams used simple coordination tools and short data cycles that can be replicated by other partners and future youth spaces.

7.1.2 What young people consistently asked for

A consistent picture emerged. Young people emphasised the value of safe, welcoming and predictable places where they can meet, learn and create without judgement. They associated continuity—recurring weekly sessions and a stable adult presence—with trust and regular attendance. The youth space was repeatedly described as a social bridge, enabling peers from different schools, ethnicities and beliefs to interact on equal terms. Activities that mixed physical movement, creative expression and practical





problem-solving were rated as most engaging; short mindfulness or quiet blocks helped with regulation without pathologising stress.

This aligns with broader inclusion thinking: social inclusion is not a single “yes/no” status but a continuum from isolation to empowerment, and it is multi-dimensional (social, cultural, political, economic). Feedback work helps identify where on that continuum different young people are—and what support is needed to move toward participation and autonomy.

7.1.3 Gaps and unmet needs (as expressed by youth)

Gaps were also clear. *Participants reported:*

- Limited access to timely information about opportunities (competitions, mobility, volunteering).
- Insufficient career guidance, especially practical steps and local pathways.
- A need for light-touch mental-health support: brief, confidential conversations and clear signposting rather than intensive therapy.

For outlying villages, mobile youth work was viewed as essential rather than optional; a visible visit pattern increased turnout and parent buy-in.



7.1.4 Participant voices (anonymised)

From Smolyan (Bulgaria) – Participant voices (anonymised):

- “This is the only place where no one judges me — we just come together, talk and learn.”
- “Before coming here, I didn’t know I could organise something myself. Now I feel part of something bigger.”
- “In our village nothing happens; when the team came with the van, everyone showed up — it gave us a spark.”

Interpretation note (important for youth workers): statements like “we just want to hang out” often signal a legitimate need for peer belonging, privacy, and identity building—not idleness. Youth-oriented space work benefits when it treats “hanging out” as meaningful and structured (with agreed norms, safety, and gradual pathways into participation).

7.1.5 Analysis and credibility checks

Methodologically, the team used an inductive–deductive hybrid for thematic coding, checked inter-coder consistency on a 10% sample and conducted brief member-checking via “You said / We did” notices to verify that conclusions reflected the intended meaning. These procedures increased reliability while keeping the process youth-friendly.



7.2 Recommendations for Practice (derived from youth feedback and YIYD operations)

The following recommendations translate feedback into operational choices. They are written so they can be reused by partner organisations and by any rural youth space team.

7.2.1 *Make regularity visible*

Weekly or bi-weekly sessions reduce anxiety about cancellations and help families plan. Publish a six-week calendar and freeze the next week every Friday; align with school calendars to avoid clashes.

7.2.2 *Use mobile work for equity*

In dispersed areas, a mobile line with a standard kit and a 120-minute format is a necessity, not a luxury. Pair each visit with a return invitation and schedule a follow-up within four weeks to build momentum.

7.2.3 *Blend activity types (movement + creativity + practical skills)*

Programs that integrate movement (e.g., fitness, mini-football), creativity (e.g., music, podcasting) and practical skills (e.g., digital storytelling, CV basics) keep mixed groups engaged. Insert a short calm block to aid focus.



7.2.4 Integrate light-touch mental-health support

Establish a confidential hour weekly with a trained professional or partner service; adopt clear signposting scripts so facilitators can refer sensitively and quickly.

7.2.5 Co-design with accountability (“You said / We did”)

A monthly youth advisory circle can set session times, shape micro-budgets for materials and select themes. Publish “You said / We did” summaries to close the loop and sustain trust.

7.2.6 Normalise inclusion (not “special treatment”)

In plural settings like Smolyan, intercultural understanding grows through shared projects, visible non-discrimination norms and attention to dietary and calendrical needs. Offer an observer-first option for newcomers who need time to participate actively.

7.2.7 Keep spaces modular

Rooms should switch from workshop to podcast to peer support with minimal reset. Micro-grants for youth-led initiatives widen ownership and create local role models.

7.2.8 Frame international mobility as an amplifier

Erasmus+ and ESC opportunities should extend—not replace—local trajectories, reinforcing the message that rural origin is no barrier to growth.

7.3 Feedback-to-Improvement Loop (Practice Tool — SOP)



A lightweight Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) allows youth spaces to “listen and respond” without heavy bureaucracy.

PRACTICE TOOL — Standard Operating Procedure

1. Prepare — Use a short, youth-friendly guide; confirm consent; assign a neutral note-taker.
2. Collect — Run focus groups or mini-interviews quarterly; add one-minute post-session forms weekly.
3. Analyse — Within 72 hours, summarise Keep / Change / Try items; tag by theme (access, safety, skills, culture).
4. Decide — In the weekly team meeting, adopt 1–3 changes for the next six-week cycle; record the rationale.
5. Close the loop — Post “You said / We did” updates on the board and in the group chat; revisit after two weeks.

PRACTICE TOOL — Implementation checklist (quick reference)

1. Publish a 6-week public calendar; freeze next week every Friday.
2. Standardise the mobile format (120') and pre-book return visits.
3. Weave movement + creativity + practical skills into each block; add a calm minute.
4. Offer a weekly confidential hour (partner psychologist/counsellor); use signposting scripts.



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5. Convene a monthly youth advisory circle and post “You said / We did”.
6. Keep rooms modular; seed micro-grants for youth-led starts.
7. Frame Erasmus+/ESC as an amplifier of local development.



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7.4 Practice Cases (Smolyan)

Case A — Stabilising attendance through predictability

Context: Focus groups linked no-shows to uncertainty about schedules.

Action: The team published a six-week calendar, introduced a Friday “next-week freeze” and aligned with exam dates via a weekly coordination call.

Result: Within one cycle, no-show rates fell and repeat attendance rose, particularly for the open-studio block.

Case B — Outreach format for mixed-age villages

Context: Rural interviews flagged friction between younger and older participants.

Action: The mobile format was redesigned with staggered age blocks and station-based tasks that support different paces, plus a short mid-session reset.

Result: Subsequent visits showed higher participation across both cohorts and fewer conflicts.



7.5 The Case of Troianul, Teleorman County

The youth space created by Filiala Asociației Se Poate in Troianul offers a practical example of rural youth work connected to community development. Troianul is a rural commune facing common structural challenges: youth migration, limited extracurricular infrastructure, economic constraints, and strong informal social dynamics.

The youth space was developed in partnership with the municipality and the safe space of the commune: the local priest, who already had experience in community support and non-formal education. This partnership embedded the initiative within existing local structures instead of positioning it as an external project. From the beginning, the space was presented as a community asset, not only a youth NGO initiative.

Key Elements of the Model

A defining feature of the Troianul model is partnership-based governance. Cooperation with local authorities, educational institutions, volunteers, and other community actors created shared responsibility. This reduced institutional resistance and increased long term stability. When multiple actors are involved, the initiative becomes part of the local system rather than dependent on a single leader.

Another central element is the youth led approach. Young people are involved in designing activities, volunteering, participating in mobility projects, and representing the space in community events. Their role is practical and visible. Youth voice is not only



declared in documents but expressed through action and responsibility.

Innovation in this context is social rather than technological. In rural environments, innovation often means reframing existing resources. It may involve activating unused community spaces, building intergenerational dialogue, or connecting local youth to European opportunities.

In Troianul, change emerged through participation, collaboration, and exposure to new experiences rather than through digital infrastructure or advanced equipment.

A Framework for Community Involvement

The experience in Troianul suggests a practical process that can be adapted elsewhere. First, community mapping is essential. This means identifying institutions, informal leaders, existing tensions, and available assets.

Second, stakeholder engagement must be intentional. Meetings with the municipality, school representatives, parents, and local actors help clarify expectations and build trust.

Third, youth co creation ensures relevance. Young people should help define priorities, rules, and activities. This builds ownership and long-term engagement.

Fourth, visible community action strengthens legitimacy. Implementing initiatives that benefit the wider community, not only youth participants, shifts perception and demonstrates value.





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Finally, sustainability planning must include diversified funding and long-term partnerships to reduce dependency on single sources.

Risks and Impact

Rural youth spaces face risks such as political instrumentalization, volunteer burnout, financial dependency, and community scepticism. These risks can be reduced through transparent governance, clear role distribution, consistent communication, and diversified resources.

Community impact can be measured through increased youth participation, growth in partnerships, youth led initiatives implemented, volunteer retention, and improved perception among local stakeholders.

Transferability

The experience of Troianul demonstrates that rural youth spaces can act as hubs of community innovation when involvement is structured and intentional. Youth leadership, partnership with local institutions, and visible community engagement strengthen long term sustainability.

While each rural context is different, the core lesson remains consistent: youth spaces that integrate into the local ecosystem and activate community assets can contribute not only to youth development, but also to broader local growth.



7.6 Ethics, Consent, and Data Handling (Minimum Standard)

Informed consent: explain purpose, how notes are used, and that participation is voluntary.

No identifying details in notes: do not record names, exact addresses, or personal identifiers.

Safe storage and limited access: keep notes in a restricted folder; define who can view them.

Retention: follow the grant agreement's documentation retention and audit rules (for grants up to 60,000 EUR, retention may be required for up to 3 years after final payment; apply the strictest interpretation used by your coordinator/NA).

Safeguarding escalation: if a disclosure triggers safeguarding duties, follow your incident protocol rather than treating it as "research data."

Cross-References

**For inclusion-first set-up and community legitimacy: Chapter 3: Establishing a Youth Space*

**For operational routines, roles, and safeguarding: Chapter 4: Managing a Youth Space*

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**For activity design formats that youth rated most engaging:
Chapter 5: Youth Work Introduction — Non-Formal Activities*

**For “You said / We did” operational transparency and MEL
approach: see the KPI and dashboard approach in Chapter 6*



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CHAPTER 8: MONITORING, EVALUATION AND IMPACT



What you'll learn | How to set up a lightweight M&E system for a rural youth space that is realistic for small teams and still produces credible evidence. How to track inclusion progress (including “who is missing and why”), youth participation outcomes, youth-led initiatives, and community legitimacy. How to use simple tools (logs, dashboards, reflection loops) without turning youth work into bureaucracy. How to measure impact short-term and long-term, and how to link evaluation to improvement decisions.

8.1 Purpose of the Chapter

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is not about “proving you are perfect.” It is about learning, improving, and demonstrating value to young people, communities, and stakeholders (including funding bodies). In rural contexts, where resources are limited and trust is central, M&E is also a trust-building tool: it shows that the youth space is responsible, transparent, and genuinely youth-centered.



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This chapter provides a practical approach to M&E that fits rural realities:

- small staff teams and volunteers,
- fluctuating attendance due to seasonality and mobility,
- high sensitivity around privacy (“everyone knows everyone”),
- the need to show outcomes without over-collecting data.

M&E in this Guidebook follows a humanistic principle: numbers do not replace people. Data is used to support dignity, inclusion and meaningful participation—not to control youth or turn the space into a surveillance system. Evaluation therefore prioritises: informed consent, proportionality, and youth ownership of feedback loops.



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8.2 A Practical Theory of Change for Rural Youth Spaces



A simple Theory of Change makes evaluation coherent. Use this model as a baseline and adapt locally.

8.2.1 *Inputs* → *Activities* → *Outputs* → *Outcomes* → *Impact*

Inputs (what you invest):

- staff time, volunteer time,
- a venue (or mobile format),
- basic equipment/materials,
- partner relationships (school, municipality, library, social services),
- micro-funding and in-kind contributions.

Activities (what you do):

- drop-in sessions and safe space hosting,
- non-formal education workshops,
- civic dialogue and community projects,
- digital inclusion activities,
- youth leadership pathways,
- outreach and mobile sessions.

Outputs (what you can count easily):

- sessions delivered,
- participants reached (unique and returning),





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- youth-led sessions/projects,
- partner meetings and agreements,
- outreach visits and events.

Short-term outcomes (what changes in 1–6 months):

- increased attendance stability and retention,
- improved sense of safety and belonging,
- increased participation of youth from diverse backgrounds,
- improved self-confidence and basic transversal skills,
- youth start initiating ideas and co-deciding.

Medium-term outcomes (6–18 months):

- more youth-led initiatives with real community relevance,
- improved youth–authority relationships and civic participation,
- increased youth employability/entrepreneurship readiness,
- reduced isolation and stigma for underrepresented youth,
- stronger institutional support and stable partnerships.

Long-term impact (18+ months):

- stronger rural youth ecosystem (youth work becomes “normal” and valued),
- improved community cohesion and intergenerational cooperation,
- increased local innovation capacity,

- more young people seeing viable futures in their community (stay/return/engage).



8.3 What to Monitor (Minimum Viable M&E)

In a rural youth space, the “minimum viable” M&E system should track five domains:

8.3.1 Participation (*reach + retention*)

Track participation trends to understand real engagement—not just “how many showed up once.”

Core metrics

- Unique participants per month (counted once each month)
- Returning participants (attended 2+ times/month)
- Attendance stability (sessions delivered vs planned; cancellation rate)
- Average session size and peak times (helps scheduling)

Why it matters

Participation is the most sensitive early indicator of trust and relevance. Retention is often more meaningful than “big one-off numbers.”



8.3.2 Inclusion and diversity (who is missing and why)

Inclusion monitoring is not about labelling people. It is about removing barriers.

Core metrics

- Participation trend of underrepresented groups (defined locally and ethically)
- Barrier log: transport issues, cost, timing, stigma, accessibility, language, etc.
- Entry pathway tracking (how youth heard about the space: peer, school, outreach, online)

Key principle

- Collect only what you truly need.
- Use anonymous or aggregated indicators whenever possible.

8.3.3 Quality of experience (safety, belonging, youth climate)

Youth spaces succeed when youth feel safe and respected.

Core metrics

- Quick satisfaction pulse (e.g., 1–5 rating or emoji scale)
- Safety climate pulse (e.g., “I feel safe here” yes/no/neutral)
- Conflict/incident log (frequency, type, resolution method)
- “Welcoming indicator”: % newcomers greeted/hosted with buddy system



8.3.4 Learning and development (skills + confidence)

Non-formal learning is often best measured through short, repeated self-reflection.

Core metrics

- Self-reported confidence changes (before/after short cycles)
- Skills micro-rubrics (communication, teamwork, leadership, digital, etc.)
- Evidence of application (youth organising sessions, presenting ideas, creating outputs)

8.3.5 Community legitimacy and ecosystem connection

This domain is crucial for sustainability.

Core metrics

- active partners and partner contributions (space, materials, mentoring, promotion)
- Stakeholder feedback (short pulses twice a year)
- community events/showcases and attendance
- referrals in/out (with privacy safeguards)



8.4 Data Collection Methods (Low-burden, High-value)

8.4.1 Session log (the backbone)

After every session (2–4 minutes to fill):

- session type (drop-in / workshop / mobile / civic meeting),
- participants (new/returning),
- short note: “what worked / what didn’t / what to try next,”
- any safeguarding or conflict note (if needed),
- consent check if media/photos were produced.

8.4.2 One-minute youth feedback tools (weekly)

Pick one:

- emoji scale board,
- QR micro-survey (3–5 questions),
- sticky notes (“two stars and a wish”),
- exit ticket (“one thing I liked / one thing I want next time”).

Tip: keep the feedback format stable for at least 6 weeks so results are comparable.

8.4.3 Focus groups / youth circles (quarterly)

Use short, youth-friendly formats:

- 45–60 min group circle,
- “Keep / Change / Try” board,

- ranking of activity types,
- barrier mapping (what stops people from coming).



8.4.4 Observation and reflective practice (staff)

A youth space team should hold:

- weekly 20–30 min reflection check-in,
- monthly 60 min program review,
- quarterly “deep review” with youth reps and at least one community connector.

8.4.5 Case stories (with consent)

Use short “most significant change” stories:

- what changed, for whom, and what contributed,
- anonymised and consented,
- used carefully (avoid sensitive disclosures).
- This is powerful for stakeholder support and local legitimacy.



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8.5 Evaluation Design (How to Make It Credible)

8.5.1 Baseline → cycle → follow-up

Instead of trying to evaluate “everything at once,” use cycles.

Baseline (Week 1–2)

- initial participation numbers,
- initial safety/belonging pulse,
- initial barrier map.

Cycle evaluation (Week 6–8)

- what changed in attendance/retention,
- youth feedback patterns,
- what new groups appeared (or didn't),
- what youth are starting to initiate.

Follow-up (Month 6 and Month 12)

- youth leadership trajectory,
- community legitimacy indicators,
- sustainability signals (partners, funding, stability).

8.5.2 Triangulation (simple but real)

Always compare:

- youth feedback,
- staff observation,

- participation patterns (attendance + retention),
- partner/stakeholder notes.



If all four point in the same direction, you can be confident in your conclusions.

8.6 Inclusion Measurement (Ethical and Practical)

8.6.1 Define “diverse backgrounds” locally and transparently

Instead of collecting sensitive identity data, many rural spaces can use *proxy and barrier-based indicators*:

- youth from remote villages (distance as barrier),
- youth with low participation in school/community events,
- youth referred by support services (with consent and confidentiality),
- youth reporting financial barriers,
- youth with disability access needs (only if youth choose to disclose),
- youth who are newcomers, migrants, or from minority groups (only if safe).

8.6.2 Use an inclusion action log

Track not “who they are,” but *what you did to remove barriers*:

- changed session time to match transport,
- added mobile visits,
- introduced buddy system,
- created quiet participation options,



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- reduced costs or provided materials,
- improved accessibility or sensory friendliness,
- created non-discrimination norms and response steps.

8.6.3 Protect privacy

- Use aggregated data wherever possible.
- Never publish identifying details about youth participants.
- Keep consent strict, especially for photos/video.
- Make opt-out easy and respected.



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8.7 Suggested KPIs (Small Set, High Signal)



A youth space can track many things, but should focus on 8–12 KPIs max.

8.7.1 Participation KPIs

- Unique participants/month
- Return rate (participants attending 2+ times/month)
- Session delivery rate (% sessions delivered vs planned)
- Cancellation rate and reason patterns (weather, staffing, transport)

8.7.2 Inclusion KPIs

- Participation growth of underrepresented youth (defined ethically)
- Barrier removal count (number of concrete changes made to reduce barriers)
- Newcomer retention (new youth returning within 2 weeks)

8.7.3 Youth leadership KPIs

- Youth-led sessions/month
- Youth-led micro-projects/quarter
- youth in progression roles (helper → co-facilitator → leader)



8.7.4 Quality KPIs

- Safety/belonging pulse (\geq target threshold)
- Satisfaction pulse (\geq target threshold)
- Incidents resolved restoratively (%)

8.7.5 Community legitimacy KPIs

- Active partners count
- Partner contributions (in-kind + time + venues)
- Community event attendance (or engagement through offline channels)

8.7.6 Project-level KPIs (Erasmus+ reporting)

The ERC project includes specific key performance indicators for reporting to the European Union under the Erasmus+ Program. These project-level KPIs complement the operational KPIs described above and are used for project monitoring and final reporting.



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KPI	Definition	Target	Data Source	Frequency	Owner
Stakeholder engagement	Number of stakeholders actively engaged in project activities	Minimum 20 stakeholders	Stakeholder database, participation records, meeting notes	Quarterly	Project coordinator
Guidebook access	Number of unique accesses to the Guidebook (website views, downloads initiated)	Minimum 50 accesses	Website analytics, download tracking	Monthly	Communication officer
Guidebook downloads	Number of completed downloads of the Guidebook	Minimum 70 downloads	Download tracking, file server logs	Monthly	Communication officer
Reports production	Number of detailed reports produced (interim and final evaluation reports)	2 reports (interim + final)	Project documentation	At M9 and project end	Project coordinator
Training modules	Number of training modules developed and incorporated into the Guidebook	Minimum 4–6 modules	Guidebook content, Annex D	At guidebook completion	Guidebook development team
Satisfaction surveys	Collection of satisfaction survey data from participants	Continuous data collection	Survey responses, feedback forms	Ongoing	Evaluation team



Notes:

- These KPIs are tracked at the project level and reported to the National Agency (FRSE) as part of Erasmus+ reporting requirements.
- Data collection methods should respect GDPR and data protection requirements.
- Stakeholders include: local authorities, educational institutions, youth-focused organizations, community members, private sector partners, and experts in youth work.
- Access and download statistics should be tracked ethically, without collecting unnecessary personal data.

8.8 Reporting Templates (Ready-to-Use)

8.8.1 Monthly “One-Page Report”

Month:

Sessions delivered:

Participation: unique / returning

Inclusion notes: barriers observed + actions taken

Top activities: (3 bullets)

Youth voice: (3 short anonymised quotes or key points)

Incidents: (if any; actions taken)

Next month priorities: (3 bullets)

8.8.2 Quarterly Review (2–4 pages)

- participation trends (simple chart or table),
- inclusion insights (“who is missing and why”),
- youth leadership growth,

- partnership ecosystem update,
 - learning summary (“what we changed and what happened”),
 - next quarter plan and risks.
- 

8.8.3 Annual Impact Snapshot (4–8 pages)

- core KPIs and narrative,
- 3–5 case stories (anonymised),
- evidence of community benefit,
- sustainability plan and funding mix,
- priorities for the next year.

8.9 Risk Management as Part of M&E

Monitoring should also detect risk early.

8.9.1 Typical rural youth space risks:

Operational risks

- staff burnout, volunteer turnover,
- venue loss or restricted access,
- inconsistent delivery due to weather and seasonality.

Social risks

- conflict between youth groups,
- stigma toward the youth space,
- misinformation or local political tension.



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Safeguarding and legal risks

- unclear boundaries,
- mishandling disclosures,
- data protection failures,
- misuse of photos/videos.

Simple risk register (monthly update)

- risk description,
- likelihood (low/med/high),
- impact (low/med/high),
- mitigation steps,
- owner,
- review date.

8.10 Closing the Loop (From Data to Decisions)



Data becomes valuable only when it changes practice.

Use a repeating loop:

1. Collect (session logs + youth pulse)
2. Reflect (weekly 20–30 min)
3. Decide (1–3 concrete adjustments)
4. Communicate (“You said / We did”)
5. Review (after 4–6 weeks)

This loop protects the youth-centered nature of the space and builds trust through visible responsiveness.

Cross-References

**For activity designs used in evaluation cycles: Chapter 5*

**For operational routines, staffing and safeguarding: Chapter 4*

**For best practices and implementation cards: Chapter 6*

**For youth feedback collection and improvement SOP: Chapter 7*



CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

What you'll learn | The most transferable lessons from running rural youth spaces (what reliably works across contexts). Actionable policy directions across municipal, school and EU levels. A 90-day consolidation SOP you can apply immediately after launch or after a major program cycle. How to demonstrate sustainability credibly with light evidence. Starter KPIs to make results legible to partners and funders.

This chapter distils core lessons from implementing rural youth spaces, formulates actionable policy directions, and outlines a realistic route to sustainability and follow-up. It is designed for small teams operating in dispersed, mountainous, low-density or otherwise underserved areas—where transport constraints, seasonality, and reputational dynamics (“everyone knows everyone”) shape participation.

The ERC project (Empowering Rural Communities: Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation) runs for 24 months (01/03/2025–28/02/2027), with a lump sum grant of 60,000 EUR, and prioritises inclusion and diversity, active citizenship and youth entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship), and common values, civic engagement and participation. This chapter closes the guidebook by showing how to keep the work alive beyond project cycles: through routine, co-design, partnerships, and proportional monitoring-evaluation-learning (MEL).



9.1 Lessons Learned (Transferable Across Rural Contexts)

9.1.1 Participation is strongest when it is routine

Rural participation grows when the offer becomes predictable and legible to families and young people. Routine reduces uncertainty and the “risk” of showing up.



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Practices that reliably increase retention

- Co-design at intake (needs mapping, naming activities, setting weekly slots).
- Ongoing micro-roles that create belonging (greeting newcomers, leading warm-ups, managing equipment checkout, co-hosting segments).
- A visible 6-week schedule, with a weekly “freeze” point that prevents last-minute changes.



This lesson appears consistently in the project's own practice narrative (e.g., Smolyan: a visible schedule and Friday freeze reduced no-shows).

Why this matters for inclusion: young people facing barriers (distance, stigma, low confidence) are less likely to “take a chance.” Routine lowers the threshold and acts as an inclusion mechanism.

9.1.2 Cooperation needs rhythm, not ad-hoc goodwill

Partnerships do not stay alive on enthusiasm alone. They require predictable coordination, shared calendars, and short loops of follow-up.

What worked best

- A short, recurring coordination window (e.g., monthly or quarterly): municipality + school + library + youth space.
- A shared “exam-aware” calendar to avoid clashes with school peaks and community events.
- Clear agreements on what each partner contributes (premises, promotion, referrals, transport, equipment).

This “cadence approach” is reflected in the guidebook’s operational lessons from partner practice.

9.1.3 Flexibility is a design principle (not an emergency response)

In rural settings, disruption is normal: weather, transport, harvest periods, exam seasons, staffing gaps. Spaces and programs must be built to adapt without collapsing.

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Two types of modularity that reduce burnout

Modular rooms: workshop → podcast/media → peer support with minimal reset.

Modular scheduling: weekly staples + monthly “draw” events + mobile cycles.

When flexibility is planned, the youth space stays stable even as formats change.



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9.1.4 “Hanging out” is meaningful—treat it as a real youth practice

Young people’s everyday presence in a space—meeting peers, listening to music, talking—often carries social and civic meaning. Research on youth public-space use shows how ordinary “hanging out” can be tied to belonging, inclusion/exclusion dynamics, and learning the “grammars” of public life.

Implication for rural youth spaces: informal time is not wasted time.

It becomes developmental when it is:

- safe (clear norms and safeguarding),
- welcoming (newcomer support),
- connected to pathways (micro-roles, opt-in workshops, youth-led initiatives).

9.1.5 Light, consistent monitoring compounds into quality

A minimal MEL system—one-minute feedback, short facilitator “keep/change” notes, attendance logs, a simple dashboard—reviewed weekly, provides enough signal to adjust timing, formats and staffing. Visible “You said / We did” updates close the loop and build trust.

This is also aligned with the project’s emphasis on practical evaluation rhythms and tool-based coordination, rather than heavy paperwork.

9.2 Policy Recommendations (Actionable at 3 Levels)

9.2.1 Municipal level: treat youth spaces as infrastructure for inclusion

Municipalities can stabilise youth spaces through a small set of high-leverage decisions.

Recommended municipal actions:

- Integrate youth spaces into municipal strategies (youth, social inclusion, culture).
- Allocate premises or long-term room use; cover winter utilities where needed (high leverage in mountain regions).
- Establish a small micro-grants line for youth-led initiatives (fast, low-bureaucracy).
- Recognise mobile youth work as an equity measure in low-density areas.
- Support coordination windows (youth office + schools + library), including an exam-aware shared calendar.

Inclusion rationale: youth exclusion is multi-dimensional and shaped by social capital gaps and missing “bridging links” between groups and institutions; youth spaces can become those bridging links when supported structurally.

9.2.2 Schools and cultural institutions: formalise access + co-host recurring formats

Schools and libraries are stable anchors in rural ecosystems. They can strengthen youth spaces with predictable cooperation.

Recommended institutional actions

- Formalise after-hours room access and co-host recurring activities (reading circles, open studios, career days).
- Harmonise basic templates (registers, consent, incident logs) to reduce friction.
- Share a referral approach that protects dignity (no labelling; voluntary participation).
- Provide a “quiet entry” for youth who fear visibility (library-based formats are often low-stigma).

9.2.3 National/EU level: weight quality of inclusion practice over organisational scale

Funding and support frameworks can better serve rural youth spaces by:

- making rural youth spaces explicit in calls tied to digital inclusion, green transition and social innovation;
- weighting selection criteria toward co-design quality, inclusion practice, safeguarding readiness, and basic MEL capacity—not only size or prior scale;
- encouraging proportional reporting and offering model safeguarding/data templates that small teams can implement without specialist staff.



Platform-based follow-up: ERC plans to use Erasmus+ ecosystem platforms (e.g., European Youth Portal, SALTO, Erasmus+ Project Results Platform) for implementation updates, dissemination, and long-term partner search and capitalisation.

9.3 Sustainability and Follow-Up (Beyond the Project Cycle)

9.3.1 Sustainability pillars (what must stay true)

Sustainability is not only about money. A rural youth space becomes durable when four pillars remain strong:

Youth ownership: co-management structures, micro-roles, youth-led initiatives.

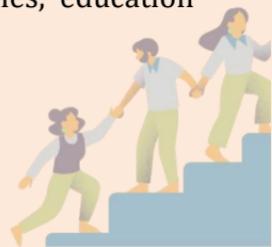
Predictable offer: stable weekly anchor formats + transparent scheduling.

Partnership ecosystem: schools, libraries, municipality, local professionals.

Evidence & learning: minimal MEL + “You said / We did” transparency.

9.3.2 Sustainability through dissemination (turning outputs into use)

ERC dissemination events aim to reach young people, youth workers, and stakeholders (including public bodies, education



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institutions, community members, private sector, experts), with a minimum participation target per partner country.



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Use dissemination not as “presentation only,” *but as:*

- recruitment of new connectors (schools, services, businesses),
- showcasing youth-led work (legitimacy),
- collecting new needs and partnership proposals (pipeline).



9.3.3 Sustainability through outcomes (keep the project promises legible)

The application frames key results such as: reports on best practices, development of training courses, international piloting, skills development for a large cohort of young people, and local dissemination conferences.

A youth space can keep these outcomes alive by embedding them into annual planning:

- repeatable training modules,
- annual community involvement guide refresh,
- ongoing local piloting cycles (test → reflect → adapt),
- a yearly dissemination/open house ritual.

9.4 A 90-Day Consolidation SOP (Post-Launch or Post-Cycle)

This SOP is designed for the first 90 days after opening a youth space (or after a major program reset). It stabilises routines, strengthens inclusion, and prevents burnout.

Phase 1 (Days 1–30): Stabilise the basics

1. Lock 2 weekly anchor slots (drop-in + one workshop).
2. Implement newcomer welcome routine (greeting + buddy option).
3. Start the minimum MEL set: attendance log + one-minute feedback + weekly staff reflection.





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4. Confirm safeguarding and consent routines are used consistently.
5. Run one connector meeting (school/municipality) to align calendars.

Phase 2 (Days 31–60): Build ownership and inclusion pathways

1. Launch youth co-management circle (monthly).
2. Introduce micro-roles (helper, co-facilitator) and rotate visibly.
3. Run at least one outreach/mobile session (if geography demands it).
4. Implement 2 barrier-removal actions (transport timing, quiet options, cost/material support).
5. Publish one “You said / We did” update cycle.

Phase 3 (Days 61–90): Make value visible and secure next steps

1. Host a small community showcase (open house, screening, exhibition).
2. Collect partner feedback pulse (short form or 15-minute calls).
3. Confirm the next 6-week calendar and communicate it early.
4. Update risk register (top 5 risks + owners).
5. Identify at least one sustainability lever: municipal micro-grant line, venue stability, or in-kind partner support.



9.5 Starter KPIs (Small Set, High Signal)

Use a compact KPI set so results are legible without over-monitoring. (Templates and editable tools are in Annexes A–D, including dashboards, forms, logs, and consent/incident templates.)

Participation

- Unique participants/month
- Return rate (2+ visits/month)
- Session delivery rate (delivered vs planned)

Inclusion

- Newcomer retention (return within 2 weeks)
- Barrier removal actions completed (count)
- Entry channel mix (peer/school/outreach/online)

Youth leadership

- Youth-led sessions/month
- Youth in progression roles (helper → co-facilitator → lead)

Quality

- Safety/belonging pulse (quick item)
- “You said / We did” actions implemented per 6-week cycle



9.6 Communication, Visibility, and Compliance (Non-Negotiables)

All communication and dissemination activities must be based on reliable facts and must include the required EU disclaimer. The grant agreement also specifies requirements for correct use of the EU emblem, including that it must remain a distinct, independent element and must not be modified by adding other visual marks, brands, or text.

Practical compliance checklist

- EU emblem placed clearly and visibly (at least as visible as other logos).
- Required disclaimer included in communications and dissemination outputs.
- Consent and data protection respected in all media (especially photos/video with minors).
- Moderation plan for social media visibility (protect youth from harm).

Cross-References

**For operational routines and staffing: Chapter 4*

**For activity formats and facilitation: Chapter 5*

**For best practices by country: Chapter 6*

**For feedback loops and youth voice: Chapter 7*

**For MEL system and reporting templates: Chapter 8*

**For editable tools (dashboards, forms, consent/incident templates):
Annexes A–D*



What you'll learn	Description
---	---
Legal and institutional basics	How to operate a youth space legally, safely, and responsibly in a rural context
Cooperation with local authorities	How to build a durable partnership model with municipalities and public institutions
A practical start-up roadmap	A phased pathway from needs assessment to full operation and continuous improvement
Funding and sustainability	How to diversify funding and manage finances with long-term stability in mind
Inclusion and participation principles	How to design the space so it genuinely welcomes diverse young people and strengthens youth voice
What you'll learn	Description
---	---
Daily operations and governance	How to run a rural youth space day-to-day with clear roles, routines, safeguarding, and accountability
Staff recruitment and development	How to hire, train, support, and retain staff in low-resource rural contexts



Volunteer management		How to recruit, coordinate, and protect volunteers while keeping quality and boundaries	
Program planning and scheduling		How to design a youth-centered program that is inclusive, attractive, and realistic	
Monitoring, evaluation and impact		How to track progress (including inclusion targets), learn from feedback, and demonstrate results	
Organisational culture and sustainability		How to build a value-based, humanistic team culture and plan for long-term continuity	
Indicator	Target (Day 90)	Data source	Notes
---	---	---	---
Sessions with feedback collected	≥ 85%	1-minute forms	After each session
Quarterly focus groups held	≥ 2	Facilitator reports	With anonymised notes
Action items implemented	≥ 6	Weekly minutes	From "You said / We did" list
Youth satisfaction (quick score)	≥ 85%	5-item micro-survey	Mean across sessions

ANNEX D: TRAINING MODULES (ERC)



This annex contains structured training modules developed within the ERC project (Empowering Rural Communities: Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation). These modules were created through the local piloting phase, where rural youth and youth workers tested activities and provided feedback that directly shaped the final content.

Each module is designed to be:

- *Practical and ready-to-use:* Clear step-by-step instructions that can be implemented immediately
- *Adaptable to rural contexts:* Considerations for transport constraints, seasonality, limited resources, and mixed-age groups
- *Inclusive and safe:* Built-in safeguarding checks and inclusion adaptations
- *Evidence-based:* Grounded in feedback from pilot testing in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria

How to use these modules:

- Each module can be delivered as a standalone session or combined with others
- Modules are designed for 90–180 minutes, but can be adapted to shorter or longer formats
- All modules include rural-specific adaptations and inclusion considerations



- Before delivering any module, review the safeguarding and consent requirements

Training Module M1: Digital Skills for Creative Expression

Duration: 120 minutes (can be adapted to 90 or 180 minutes)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, *participants will be able to:*

- Use basic features of digital design tools (Photoshop, Canva, or MovieMaker)
- Create simple visual content (posters, social media graphics, or short videos)
- Apply digital skills to communicate youth space activities and engage peers
- Understand how digital skills support personal and professional development

Target Group

- *Primary:* Young people aged 15–25 from rural areas
- *Secondary:* Youth workers aged 18–30 who want to enhance their digital facilitation skills

Materials Needed

- Laptops or tablets (at least one device per 2–3 participants)
- Internet connection (or offline versions of tools pre-installed)
- Projector or large screen for demonstrations

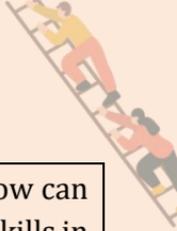


- Sample images, videos, or templates for practice
- Handouts with step-by-step instructions
- Flipchart and markers
- Consent forms (for participants under 18)

Module Structure (Minute-by-Minute)

Time	Activity	Description
---	---	---
0-10	Welcome & Icebreaker	Introduction, group agreements, digital comfort check
10-20	Needs Assessment	Quick survey: "What do you want to create today?" (poster, video, social media content)
20-35	Tool Introduction	Demonstration of chosen tool (Photoshop basics, Canva templates, or MovieMaker basics)
35-80	Hands-on Practice	Participants create their first project with facilitator support
80-100	Showcase & Feedback	Participants present their work, peer feedback, facilitator tips





100-115	Reflection & Next Steps	Discussion: "How can you use these skills in your community?"
115-120	Evaluation	Quick feedback form and closing

Rural Adaptations

- *Limited internet:* Use offline versions of tools or pre-downloaded templates
- *Device sharing:* Pair participants and rotate device use
- *Transport constraints:* Offer shorter 90-minute version for participants with long travel times
- *Mixed skill levels:* Create beginner and advanced tracks within the same session
- *Seasonal timing:* Schedule during school holidays when youth have more time

Inclusion Check

- *Accessibility:* Ensure screen readers work, provide large-print handouts, use clear visual demonstrations
- *Language:* Provide instructions in local language, use simple terminology
- *Economic barriers:* Ensure free access to tools (use free versions like Canva, free video editors)
- *Gender balance:* Encourage all participants regardless of gender stereotypes about technology
- *Learning differences:* Offer multiple learning formats (visual, hands-on, written instructions)



Safeguarding & Consent

- *Photo/video consent:* If participants create content with images of people, ensure written consent
- *Online safety:* Discuss privacy settings, safe sharing practices, digital footprint
- *Data protection:* Explain how any created content will be stored and used
- *Support pathways:* Have contact information for digital safety resources ready

Evaluation

Immediate (end of session):

- Quick 3-question survey: "What did you learn?", "What was most useful?", "What would you change?"
- Self-assessment: "Rate your confidence with [tool] before/after" (1–5 scale)

Follow-up (optional, 2 weeks later):

- Check if participants used the skills: "Have you created anything using [tool] since the session?"
- Collect examples of participant work (with permission)

Training Module M2: Assertive Communication and Public Speaking

Duration: 150 minutes



Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, *participants will be able to:*

- Distinguish between passive, aggressive, and assertive communication styles
- Use "I" statements to express needs and boundaries clearly
- Deliver a short presentation (2–3 minutes) with confidence
- Apply communication skills in youth space activities and community engagement

Target Group

- *Primary:* Young people aged 15–25 from rural areas
- *Secondary:* Youth workers aged 18–30

Materials Needed

- Flipchart and markers
- Handouts with communication frameworks
- Timer for practice presentations
- Video camera or smartphone (optional, for recording practice)
- Safe space guidelines poster
- Evaluation forms

Module Structure (Minute-by-Minute)

Time	Activity	Description
---	---	---
0–15	Welcome & Ground Rules	Introduction, safe space agreements, confidentiality reminder

15–30	Communication Styles	Interactive exercise: identify passive/aggressive/assertive examples
30–50	"I" Statements Practice	Role-play scenarios relevant to rural youth (e.g., saying no to peer pressure, asking for support)
50–70	Public Speaking Basics	Mini-lecture: structure (opening, body, closing), body language, voice projection
70–120	Practice Presentations	Each participant prepares and delivers a 2-minute talk on a topic they care about
120–140	Peer Feedback	Structured feedback using "What went well?" and "One suggestion" format
140–150	Reflection & Action Planning	"How will you use these skills?" and closing evaluation

Rural Adaptations

- *Small groups:* Adapt for groups of 5–8 participants (common in rural settings)
- *Community relevance:* Use examples from local context (talking to local authorities, presenting at community events)
- *Language:* Ensure facilitators speak local language/dialect fluently
- *Time flexibility:* Can be split into two 75-minute sessions if needed

Inclusion Check

- *Shy participants:* Allow option to present to smaller group or one-on-one with facilitator
- *Language barriers:* Provide translation support or use visual aids
- *Cultural sensitivity:* Respect different communication norms (e.g., eye contact, directness)
- *Disabilities:* Ensure accessible venue, sign language interpreter if needed, alternative formats for materials

Safeguarding & Consent

- *Confidentiality:* Emphasize that personal examples shared stay in the room
- *Emotional safety:* Have support person available if topics trigger difficult emotions
- *Recording consent:* If recording practice presentations, get explicit written consent
- *Boundaries:* Remind participants they can pass on any activity

Evaluation

- *Self-assessment:* "Rate your confidence in public speaking" (before/after, 1–5 scale)
- *Peer feedback:* Collect structured feedback from peers
- *Facilitator observation:* Note participation levels and skill development
- *Follow-up:* Optional check-in after 1 month to see if skills were applied



Training Module M3: Team Management and Leadership

Duration: 180 minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, *participants will be able to:*

- Identify different leadership styles and their strengths
- Use basic team management tools (delegation, feedback, conflict resolution)
- Plan and coordinate a small group activity
- Apply leadership skills in youth space management and community projects

Target Group

- *Primary:* Youth workers aged 18–30
- *Secondary:* Young people aged 15–25 interested in taking leadership roles

Materials Needed

- Case studies of team management scenarios
- Flipchart and markers
- Role-play cards
- Planning templates
- Team management checklist handouts

Module Structure (Minute-by-Minute)

Time	Activity	Description
---	---	---
0-20	Introduction & Leadership Styles	Icebreaker, overview of leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire)
20-50	Team Dynamics Exercise	Small group activity: "Plan a community event" (practice delegation and coordination)
50-80	Conflict Resolution	Role-play common team conflicts, practice "I" statements and active listening
80-110	Feedback Skills	Practice giving and receiving constructive feedback using structured framework
110-150	Action Planning	Participants create a personal leadership action plan for their youth space

150–170	Peer Coaching	Participants share action plans and give peer support
170–180	Evaluation & Closing	Reflection and feedback collection

Rural Adaptations

- *Resource constraints:* Focus on leadership without large budgets (volunteer coordination, in-kind resources)
- *Small teams:* Emphasize leadership in groups of 3–5 people (typical in rural youth spaces)
- *Seasonal planning:* Include examples of managing teams during busy seasons (harvest, school exams)
- *Remote coordination:* Discuss leading teams when members are spread across villages

Inclusion Check

- *Age diversity:* Ensure younger participants (15–18) feel valued in leadership roles
- *Gender balance:* Challenge stereotypes about who can be a leader
- *Cultural respect:* Acknowledge different leadership traditions and styles
- *Accessibility:* Ensure all activities are accessible to participants with disabilities

Safeguarding & Consent

- *Power dynamics:* Address how to lead without abusing power, especially with younger participants



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- *Boundaries:* Discuss professional boundaries in youth work leadership
- *Support:* Have supervisor or mentor available for questions about difficult leadership situations
- *Confidentiality:* Ensure team management discussions respect privacy

Evaluation

- *Knowledge check:* Quiz on leadership styles and management tools
- *Practical application:* Observation of participants leading a small activity
- *Self-reflection:* Written reflection on leadership strengths and areas for growth
- *Follow-up:* Optional mentoring session 1 month later to discuss implementation

Training Module M4: Project Writing and Fundraising Basics

Duration: 150 minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, *participants will be able to:*

- Identify key components of a project proposal
- Write a simple project description and objectives
- Understand basic budgeting for youth activities
- Locate potential funding sources for rural youth initiatives



Target Group

- *Primary:* Youth workers aged 18–30
- *Secondary:* Young people aged 15–25 interested in starting community projects

Materials Needed

- Sample project proposals (simplified examples)
- Budget templates
- List of funding sources (local, national, EU)
- Flipchart and markers
- Handouts with proposal writing checklist

Module Structure (Minute-by-Minute)

Time	Activity	Description
---	---	---
0–15	Introduction & Needs Assessment	"What project would you like to fund?" discussion
15–40	Proposal Structure	Overview: problem statement, objectives, activities, budget, timeline
40–70	Writing Practice	Participants draft a one-page project description for their idea
70–90	Budget Basics	Introduction to simple budgeting (income, expenses,



		in-kind contributions)
90–120	Funding Sources	Presentation and discussion of funding opportunities (local grants, Erasmus+, crowdfunding)
120–140	Peer Review	Participants review each other's project descriptions and give feedback
140–150	Next Steps & Resources	Action planning and closing evaluation

Rural Adaptations

- *Small-scale focus:* Emphasize proposals for activities with budgets under 5,000 EUR
- *Local partnerships:* Highlight importance of in-kind support from municipalities and local businesses
- *Simple language:* Avoid jargon, use examples from rural contexts
- *Realistic timelines:* Account for longer approval processes in rural areas

Inclusion Check

- *Language:* Provide proposal templates in local language
- *Literacy support:* Offer one-on-one help for participants with writing challenges



- *Economic barriers:* Emphasize free/low-cost funding sources and in-kind resources
- *Digital access:* Provide offline resources for participants with limited internet

Safeguarding & Consent

- *Data protection:* Discuss how to handle personal data in project proposals
- *Transparency:* Emphasize honesty in proposals (no exaggeration of needs or outcomes)
- *Support:* Have experienced grant writer available for follow-up questions

Evaluation

- *Practical output:* Quality of draft project description
- *Knowledge check:* Quiz on proposal components
- *Confidence survey:* "How confident do you feel writing a proposal?" (before/after)
- *Follow-up:* Track how many participants submit actual proposals within 6 months

Training Module M5: Emotional Intelligence and Self-Awareness

Duration: 120 minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, *participants will be able to:*



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- Identify and name their own emotions
- Recognize emotions in others (basic empathy skills)
- Use emotional regulation strategies in challenging situations
- Apply emotional intelligence in youth work and peer support

Target Group

- *Primary:* Young people aged 15–25 from rural areas
- *Secondary:* Youth workers aged 18–30

Materials Needed

- Emotion wheel or emotion cards
- Scenarios for role-play
- Relaxation/breathing exercise guide
- Flipchart and markers
- Safe space guidelines

Module Structure (Minute-by-Minute)

Time	Activity	Description
---	---	---
0–15	Welcome & Check-in	Introduction, emotional check-in ("How are you feeling today?")
15–35	Emotion Identification	Activity: "Name that emotion" using scenarios relevant to rural youth

35–60	Empathy Practice	Pair exercise: active listening and reflecting emotions
60–85	Emotional Regulation	Introduction to strategies: breathing, grounding, self-talk
85–105	Application Scenarios	Role-play: "How would you respond?" (peer conflict, disappointment, stress)
105–115	Self-Care Planning	Participants create personal self-care plan
115–120	Evaluation & Closing	Reflection and feedback

Rural Adaptations

- *Stigma around emotions:* Address cultural norms that may discourage emotional expression
- *Limited mental health resources:* Emphasize peer support and self-help strategies
- *Privacy concerns:* Acknowledge that in small communities, confidentiality is especially important
- *Seasonal stress:* Include examples of managing emotions during difficult seasons (exams, harvest, migration)

Inclusion Check

- *Cultural sensitivity:* Respect different ways of expressing and managing emotions
- *Mental health:* Have support person available, provide resources for professional help if needed
- *Trauma-informed:* Use trauma-informed language, allow participants to opt out of any activity
- *Age-appropriate:* Adapt language and examples for different age groups (15–18 vs. 19–25)

Safeguarding & Consent

- *Emotional safety:* Create clear boundaries, allow participants to step out if overwhelmed
- *Confidentiality:* Strong emphasis on keeping personal shares confidential
- *Support pathways:* Have list of mental health resources ready (even if limited in rural areas)
- *Trigger warnings:* Give advance notice if discussing difficult topics (grief, anxiety, conflict)

Evaluation

- *Self-assessment:* "Rate your ability to manage emotions" (before/after, 1–5 scale)
- *Practical application:* Observation of participants using emotional intelligence in role-plays
- *Qualitative feedback:* Open-ended questions about most useful strategies
- *Follow-up:* Optional check-in after 1 month to see if strategies were used



Training Module M6: Community Engagement and Local Authority Relations

Duration: 150 minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, *participants will be able to:*

- Identify key stakeholders in their local community
- Understand how to approach and build relationships with local authorities
- Plan a community engagement strategy for a youth space
- Navigate common challenges in rural community partnerships

Target Group

- *Primary:* Youth workers aged 18–30
- *Secondary:* Young people aged 15–25 interested in community organizing

Materials Needed

- Stakeholder mapping templates
- Case studies of successful community partnerships
- Role-play scenarios (meeting with mayor, presenting to council)
- Flipchart and markers
- Handouts with engagement strategies



Module Structure (Minute-by-Minute)

Time	Activity	Description
---	---	---
0-20	Introduction & Context Setting	Discussion: "Who makes decisions in your community?"
20-50	Stakeholder Mapping	Participants map key stakeholders (authorities, schools, NGOs, businesses, media)
50-80	Building Relationships	Strategies for approaching local authorities: preparation, communication, follow-up
80-110	Role-Play Practice	Participants practice presenting youth space idea to local decision-makers
110-135	Engagement Strategy Planning	Participants draft a 3-month community engagement plan
135-145	Peer Feedback	Participants share plans and give constructive feedback
145-150	Evaluation & Closing	Reflection and next steps



Rural Adaptations

- *Small communities:* Address "everyone knows everyone" dynamics and reputation management
- *Formal vs. informal:* Discuss when to use formal channels vs. informal relationships
- *Seasonal timing:* Consider best times to approach authorities (avoid busy seasons)
- *Resource constraints:* Emphasize low-cost engagement strategies (meetings, presentations, volunteer work)

Inclusion Check

- *Age respect:* Help young participants feel confident approaching older authority figures
- *Gender balance:* Address potential gender dynamics in authority relationships
- *Language:* Ensure participants can communicate effectively in formal settings
- *Cultural respect:* Acknowledge local power structures and traditions

Safeguarding & Consent

- *Boundaries:* Discuss professional boundaries when working with authorities
- *Transparency:* Emphasize honesty and transparency in partnerships
- *Support:* Have experienced community organizer available for guidance
- *Confidentiality:* Respect privacy of community members and authorities



Evaluation

- *Practical output:* Quality of stakeholder map and engagement plan
- *Confidence survey:* "How confident do you feel approaching local authorities?" (before/after)
- *Knowledge check:* Quiz on engagement strategies
- *Follow-up:* Track actual community engagement activities within 3 months

Notes on Module Delivery

General Guidelines for All Modules

1. *Preparation:* Review module content at least 1 week before delivery, adapt to local context
2. *Facilitation:* Use participatory methods, encourage active learning, create safe space
3. *Evaluation:* Always collect feedback to improve modules
4. *Follow-up:* Offer optional mentoring or support sessions after module delivery
5. *Documentation:* Keep records of attendance, feedback, and outcomes (respecting GDPR)

Adapting Modules for Different Contexts

- *Time constraints:* Modules can be shortened to 90 minutes or extended to 3 hours
- *Group size:* Adapt activities for groups of 5–8 (typical in rural settings) or larger groups
- *Language:* Translate materials and adapt facilitation to local language/dialect



- *Resources:* Simplify activities if materials are limited (use what's available locally)

Quality Assurance

These modules were piloted with:

- 10 young people (aged 15–25) per country (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria) = 30 total
- 5 youth workers (aged 18–30) per country = 15 total
- Feedback was collected through focus groups and written evaluations
- Modules were revised based on pilot feedback before inclusion in this Guidebook

Spółeczna Grupa Medialna, Young Improvers for Youth Development, & Filiala Asociatiei Se Poate (2025). "Annex D: Training Modules (ERC)." In: Empowering Rural Communities: Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation (ERC) Practical Guidebook. Erasmus+ KA210-YOU.



Asociația SE POATE (Romania) — a youth-centred non-governmental organisation founded in 2014, dedicated to fostering active citizenship, social inclusion, non-formal education, intercultural learning and sustainable community engagement. SE POATE plays a pivotal role in designing and delivering international projects that build skills, promote youth employability and strengthen cross-border cooperation.



Young Improvers for Youth Development – YIYD (Bulgaria) — a grassroots youth organisation established in 2015, deeply engaged in non-formal education, volunteering and international exchanges. YIYD works to expand opportunities for young people to learn, connect and co-create change both locally and across Europe, fostering active participation, personal development and community cohesion.



Spoleczna Grupa Medialna / Media Group (Poland) — a partner organisation skilled in youth mobility, capacity building and practical training for youth workers. Its engagement in this project includes provision of thematic mobilities and support for peer learning experiences that enhance competencies in youth space management, inclusion practices and cross-cultural cooperation.



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