Toolkit for youth workers and EU youth on rural development through social innovation and entrepreneurship[1]

This toolkit is the result of the collaboration of 10 EU organization who for twelve months reflected on the potential of European youth to change various socio-territorial dynamics, especially isolated and rural areas through innovative entrepreneurships and participatory actions for community empowerment. After months of research and interactions, the consortium met in France (Clermont-Ferrand) in July 2023 to test tools, visit innovative projects in order to develop this toolkit as a deliverable for all European project managers curious on how EU youth and youth work in general can contribute to territorial development processes. The mobility was attended by 30 EU project managers who brought on board their experiences and ideas to stimulate the creation of an interactive and innovative environment where the tools contained herein where tested and developed for the use of anyone aiming to spearhead local community actions through youth work, social innovation and entrepreneurship.

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summary

introduction

In recent years, rural areas across Europe have faced significant challenges, including service desertification, depopulation, and increasing poverty rates. These issues have been particularly acute in regions like Ukraine, where rural areas are in a catastrophic state due to declining natural resources, deteriorating infrastructure, and rampant unemployment and poverty, stimulating labor migration (Palapa et al., 2023). Similarly, in the European Union, rural communities struggle with rising unemployment, limited financing for development, reduced public investment, and social isolation (Golovina et al., 2022). This situation is further complicated by the aging rural population and the lack of opportunities for youth, leading to a brain drain as young people leave in search of better prospects.

Amidst these challenges, the European Union's Youth Strategy (2019-2027) emerges as a beacon of hope, offering a comprehensive framework to enhance the active participation of young people in democratic and societal processes. The strategy, fortified in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, is anchored in three core principles: mobilizing, connecting, and empowering youth. It outlines 11 targeted objectives, with Objective 6, «Supporting Rural Youth,» being particularly pertinent. This objective recognizes the unique challenges and potential inherent in rural settings, aiming to bridge the urban-rural gap by providing equitable opportunities and tailoring interventions to the specific needs of these communities (McCulloch & Crook, 2008).

Under this objective, the EU has set forth ambitious goals to improve the quality of life and prospects for rural youth. These goals encompass the provision of critical infrastructure, fostering sustainable employment opportunities, and decentralizing youth-centric activities to ensure inclusivity and tangible benefits for local communities. A pivotal element of this strategy is the active involvement of young people in decision-making processes, thereby empowering them to shape their own socio-territorial futures through entrepreneurial and socially innovative endeavors.

This toolkit is designed to operationalize these ideals, offering a comprehensive framework that integrates the principles of social innovation, youth participation, and impact-driven entrepreneurship. It aims to empower EU youth and youth workers, equipping them with the tools and knowledge to transform their communities through innovative approaches to entrepreneurship and community development. By doing so, it seeks to catalyze a paradigm shift in rural development, fostering a more inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant future for rural Europe.

conceptual framework

Rural development : A Definition «Rural development, as a concept, encompasses both a process and a policy area» (Harris, 1982). This dual nature of rural development as something happening and something to be actively pursued is central to its understanding. Whereas, the term "rural" in itself is ambigious, one must consider the characteristics of rural areas: low population density, an agriculture-dominated economy and landscape, and small communities spread across large distances. Challenges in rural development include dependency on natural resources, brain drain, high unemployment, service desertification, aging populations, social and economic vulnerability, and a low level of community engagement (Golovina et al., 2022).

Rural participation : «Participation is the process in which people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural, and political affairs affecting their lives. The success of various rural programs depends not only on the effective functioning of administrative agencies but also on the active participation of the people» (Lal, 2016). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations emphasizes that participation benefits all community actors: rural communities identify and implement priority activities, governments gain information for development programs responsive to local needs, and service providers become more accountable to communities. The theorists of community and rural participation argue that participation is not just a means to get things done successfully. Participation also encompasses intrinsic values which relate to the division of power and social cohesion within communities and can promote the general quality of life of the people involved (Asuman and Diedong, 2019[5]). The concept of rural participation when adopted and practiced in a beneficial manner has the potential to influence, challenge and modify the fortunes of the people of the community positively.

Rural areas : Enhanced Conceptual Understanding Rurality, as a concept, is inherently subjective and varies significantly based on geographical and cultural contexts. For instance, a French person in the southwest might envision vineyards under the sun, while someone from central or southeastern Poland may picture vast apple fields. The OECD offers a more quantitative definition, stating, «If 50% of the population of a region live in rural communities, this region is defined as a rural area. Communities with a population less than 100 inhabitants per km² are defined as rural communities» (Dijkstra, Galić, & Brandmüller, 2022). However, this approach can be exclusive, failing to account for communities that exceed this limit due to seasonal tourism. Beyond this idea of rurality being synonymous with agrarian communities and population density, infrastructure also plays a role in the extent to which a community or locality is considered rural.

A negative definition of rural areas helps isolate key impediments to growth: «Despite all differences among rural areas, one common concern is that their influence has decreased more and more as the main focus of public, political, and ecclesiastical interest lies in big cities» (MIJARC Europe, 2003). This perspective raises the question: Are rural areas intrinsically lacking?

Rural youth : «Youth is a concept without a universally applicable definition» (Bárta, 2020). In the EU policy context, young people are defined as those aged 15 to 29 years. Considering Eurostat statistics, between 2014 and 2019, approximately 18% (15 to 16 million) of young people lived in rural areas, with 45% (about 40 million) in urban settings. The specific challenges faced by rural youth, such as higher unemployment rates, distinguish them from their urban counterparts.

5_Asuman, M. K., and Diedong, A. L. (2019). Multiplicity of voices in community development through radio in Fanteakwa district, Ghana. Ghana Journal of Development Studies, 16(2), 178-198.

Rural entrepreneurship : «Entrepreneurship is the process of creating value by assembling unclaimed resources to exploit market opportunities». In the context of rural entrepreneurship, this process is shaped by unique social, economic, political, geographical, and cultural factors. Rural entrepreneurs drive community growth by creating jobs, mitigating brain drain, and fostering civic participation, thereby catalyzing rural development (López, Cazorla, & Panta, 2019).
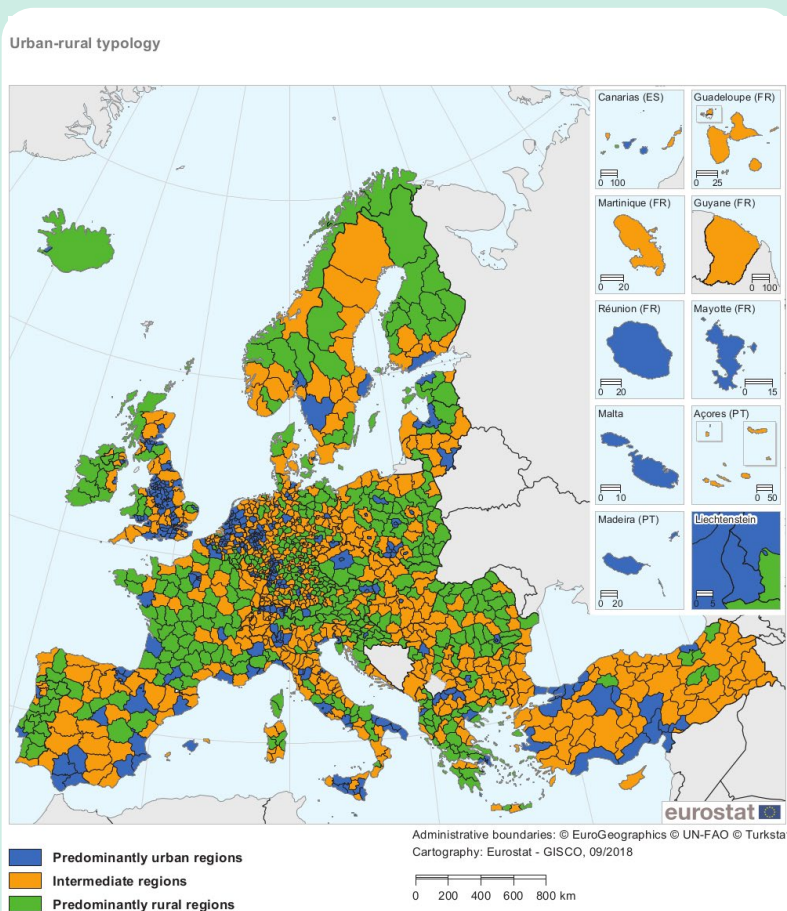
contextualizing the notion of rurality

Recognizing that the challenges, opportunities, and aspirations of young individuals in rural settings are profoundly influenced by the unique socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts of their respective countries, this chapter seeks to unravel the intricacies of national realities related to youth unemployment, rural context, etc.

By delving into localized perspectives from 10 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain), policy frameworks, and grassroots initiatives, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted forces at play. From examining the typology of rural areas to exploring key challenges to rural development, this chapter serves as a lens through which we can gain insights into the specific circumstances that mold the lives of rural youth. Examples are based on the realities of the 10 countries whose selected youth were members in the UpRural Project. Methology involved World Café and Snowballing where participants reflected on their local realities and converged their findings into main arguments elaborated below. While these findings are reflective of the general impressions of the participants as well as their personal realities, they are not exhaustive, and more research should be done through proper ethnographic and approaches such as participant observation to provide proper insights into the rural realities of various EU communities.

RURAL TYPOLOGY

Rural typology is a significant tool for rural zoning planning and the comprehensive promotion of rural revitalization. Various approaches and studies have been conducted to understand and categorize rural areas. For instance, the European Union has been involved in projects such as «Common Features of Diverse European Rural Areas» to review different approaches to rural typology. The project identifies three broad classes of rural areas or regions based on the percentage of the population living in rural communities. These classes include predominantly rural (>50% of the population living in rural communities), significantly rural (15% – 50% of the population living in rural communities), and predominantly coastal and mountain areas often equipped for mass tourism[6].

The Eurostat provides insights into rural development statistics by urban-rural typology, emphasizing the importance of rural areas in the European economy and the challenges they face in job creation and income generation[7].

Urban-rural typology

Predominantly urban regions
Intermediate regions
Predominantly rural regions

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turksta
Cartography: Eurostat - GISCO, 09/2018

0 200 400 600 800 km

Note: based on NUTS 2016 and GEOSTAT population grid from 2011, additional data from Columbia University, Center for International Earth Science Information Network - CIESIN (2015): GHS population grid.
Source: Eurostat, JRC and European Commission, Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy and Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Development

6_European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, «Common Features of Diverse European Rural Areas», 2008.

7_Eurostat, Rural development statistics by urban-rural typology, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive%3ARural_development_statistics_by_urban-rural_typology

The assessment done during the project found consistencies among the ten countries mentioned above in terms of location and type of rural areas:

> The majority have **rural areas deeply rooted in agriculture** (with specificities in certain countries, such as olive farming and viticulture in Greece or wine and olive oil production in Italy), contributing significantly to their economies and cultural identities;

> They are facing **demographic challenges** such as depopulation, particularly among younger generations, as they often migrate to urban centers for education and employment opportunities.

However, differences could also be observed, mainly related to:

> **The economic reliance on agriculture varies**. Countries like Austria and Italy may have more diversified rural economies, while Bulgaria and Romania might still heavily depend on agriculture;

> **Disparities in economic development and infrastructure** are evident, with some regions in Spain, Italy, and Austria being more developed than others;

> The **geography, terrain, and climate greatly influence the types of economic activities** viable in rural areas. Northern countries like Austria and Slovakia may face different challenges than those in Southern Europe.

KEY CHALLENGES TO RURAL DEVLOPMENT

Grivska - Serbia
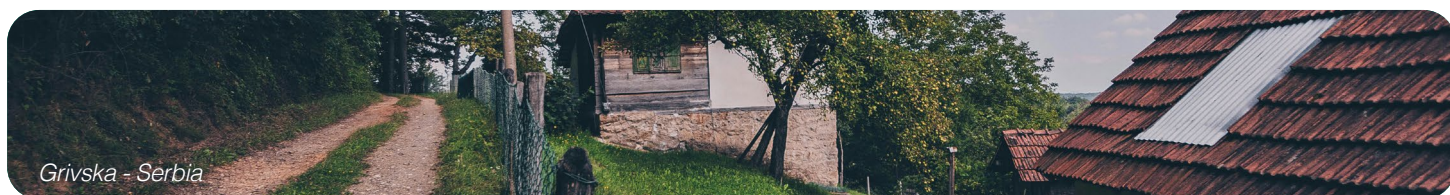
Aging population : An aging population is a prominent challenge to rural growth in the majority of the countries. For instance, Austria faces challenges in maintaining a dynamic rural workforce due to an aging population; Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia struggle with demographic imbalances as the rural population ages; Portugal faces challenges in maintaining vibrant rural communities due to an aging population, while Spain confronts challenges in rural sustainability as the population ages.

According to the World Development Report 2023, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over in 2020 in Austria was 19.5%, Bulgaria was 21.5%, France was 20.6%, Greece was 21.5%, Italy was 23.3%, North Macedonia was 12.9%, Portugal was 22.4%, Romania was 18.5%, Slovakia was 14.8%, and Spain was 19.8%[8].

Internal migrations : In rural areas, labor forces migrate to urban centers, in search of social or economic opportunities. The migration to urban centers affects availability of labor, impacts rural demographics, creates challenges for sustaining traditional practices,and impacts the agricultural sector.

According to a report by the European Commission[9] , the 10 countries targeted by this Toolkit have experienced a net inflow of internal migration since 2004, with the capitals being the main destination (Vienna, Sofia, Paris, Athens, Skopje, Lisbon, Bucharest, Bratislava and Madrid) in all cases but one -Italy has experienced a net outflow of internal migration since 2004, with Milan being the main destination.

8_World Development Report 2023, Migrants, Refugees and Societies, https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023

9_Labour mobility within the EU in the context of enlargement and the functioning of the transitional arrangements, https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7193&langId=en

Lack of public services : The closure of public services or desertification in rural areas deteriorates the wellbeing as well as the attractivity of affected villages. Countries such as Romania struggle with uneven distribution of public services, affecting access to healthcare, education, and infrastructure in some rural regions.

The lack of public services indicator encompasses the provision of essential services such as health, education, water and sanitation, transport infrastructure, electricity, and internet connectivity.

Barin drain : The assessment observed that the few numbers of highly qualified members of rural communities migrate to city centers due to a lack of opportunities in rural areas. This may impact the availability of skilled workforce in certain regions, local development, or the socio-economic fabric of rural regions.

According to the World Population Review[10], some of the countries that experience brain drain in Europe are: Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Portugal, and Slovakia. These countries have a high share of tertiary-educated emigrants, especially in science and technology fields, and a low share of tertiary-educated immigrants.

Access to funds : Participants shared a lack of awareness of funding opportunities at the European level. Lack of financial support was often identified as a barrier to the setting up of programmes, and thus, the implementation of a momentum leading to local development.

According to the European Investment Bank, some of the challenges that European firms face in accessing funds and innovation are: lack of equity financing, high cost of debt financing, insufficient public support, and low demand for innovation[11]. The European Innovation Scoreboard shows that some of the countries that perform well in terms of access to funds and innovation in Europe are Austria and France[12].

Innovation : The participants perceived the lack of innovative ventures in rural areas as a challenge as much as an opportunity: through the efforts of civil society organizations implementing targeted and empowering programs, they expressed the hope to be able to overcome it. The countries mentioned above encourage innovation in certain rural areas, but challenges may exist in fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and technological advancement.

According to the European Innovation Scoreboard 2023[13] , which provides a comparative assessment of the research and innovation performance of EU Member States and other European countries, the EU has improved its innovation performance by 8.9% since 2016. However, there are significant differences among the countries, which are classified into four performance groups: Innovation Leaders, Strong Innovators, Moderate Innovators, and Emerging Innovators[14].

10 FRIEND CCI: Open Call for Project Proposals Dedicated to SMEs

11 Delivering and receiving services in rural areas - Community Care

12 Levelling down - Public services in rural areas are not fit for purpose - Rural Services Network (rsnonline.org.uk)

13 The EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS): Closing the Innovation Divide in Europe | EIT (europa.eu)

14 Ibidem.

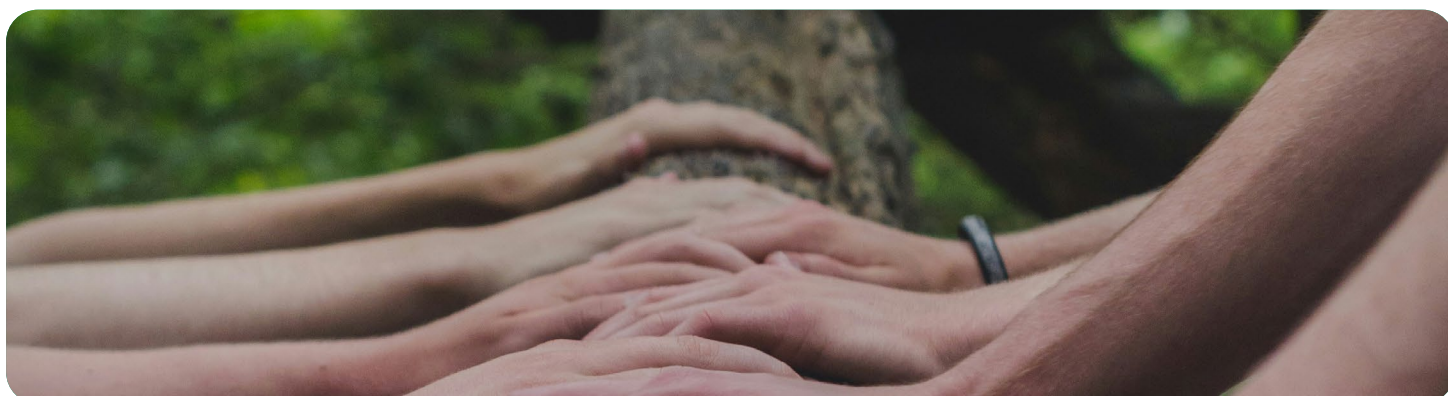# profile of youth workers in rural areas

In this chapter, we will delve into a comprehensive exploration guided by the theoretical model provided by the Peak Performance Center[15]. This model, centered around the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, serves as a robust framework for understanding the multifaceted roles and competencies required of youth workers operating in rural settings.

By drawing upon the theoretical foundations presented in the model, we can dissect the intricate interplay between knowledge, skills, and attitudes, shedding light on how these elements coalesce to empower youth workers in effectively addressing the unique challenges and opportunities present in rural communities.

15_ https://thepeakperformancecenter.com/educational-learning/learning/process/obtaining/obtaining-information/knowledge-skills-attitudes/

THEORICAL MODEL

aptitude

Digital skills : Rural Areas can not be left on the bench of the digital transition. Youth workers are competent in the use of ICTs and able to lead activities exploiting the benefit of digital tools.

Soft skills : Listening and communication aptitudes are crucial to the success of a programme: youth workers in rural areas navigate fragile communities. They are keen negotiators able to put pressure on institutions and to advocate the needs of the youth in front of governmental entities.

Goal oriented : Youth workers are versed in establishing strategies and reaching the agreed on goals, their priority is to deliver on the objectives and they help participants to focus on the big picture.

attitude

Patient : Change requires time. In rural areas, processes such as the allocation of resources, the mobilization of local communities, the creation of a firm, might be winding. Moreover, rural populations can be less inclined to discuss their needs with outsiders. The youth worker is flexible, patient, and can adapt the calendar to unannounced contingencies.

Positive : Empowering someone starts with the creation of a culture of experimentation. Youth workers have a positive mindset, they provide guidance to their beneficiaries, advice on how to progress and highlight successes.

Team oriented : Youth workers are not knowledge-holders, they co construct the outcomes of the program with the beneficiaries.

knowledge

Funding : A key obstacle to rural development is access to funds. Youth workers in rural areas know of funding opportunities, at the regional, national and European level. They can set up a sustainable budget that will convince stakeholders.

Legal framework and governance : Youth workers are aware of the legislation framing their activities and that of the participants. They are knowledgeable on the development policy of the location of the program and can harness its potential.

Rurality : Youth workers have a strong theoretical understanding of rural areas and its processes, from the economy, to sociology, typography, culture or history. They are mindful of their own cultural biases.

methods for youth engagement and participation in rural development

Recognizing the pivotal role that youth play in shaping the future of rural areas, this chapter delves into a diverse array of methodologies designed to foster meaningful engagement, participation, and collaboration. From community-driven initiatives to digital platforms bridging geographical gaps, we dissect methodologies that not only amplify the voices of rural youth but also cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility for sustainable development.

By drawing upon successful case studies, best practices, and emerging trends, this chapter serves as a practical guide for practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders seeking to cultivate a vibrant and inclusive landscape where the energy, ideas, and aspirations of rural youth flourish for the betterment of their communities. For this purpose, we will develop two of the methods used during the UpRural project.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creative expression is a powerful method for engaging and involving youth in rural development. It taps into the innate human drive to communicate and share stories, fostering a sense of connection and community. From childhood experiences of vibrant drawings and crafts to teenage expressions through poetry and songwriting, creative expression allows individuals to articulate their inner selves, make sense of their experiences, and find a voice in the world.

Implementing creative expression as a method for youth engagement and participation in rural development involves creating an environment that encourages artistic exploration and self-expression.

1
Identify goals and objectives : Clearly define the goals and objectives you aim to achieve through creative expression.

2
Create a safe and inclusive space : Establish a safe and inclusive space where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves. This can be a physical space conducive to artistic activities or a virtual platform for remote engagement.

3
Select artistic disciplines : Choose a variety of artistic disciplines based on the interests and preferences of the participants. Options may include drama, dance, music, creative writing, visual arts, or a combination of these.

4
Provide access to art supplies and ressources : Ensure that participants have access to the necessary art supplies and resources. This may include providing paper, drawing materials, musical instruments, or access to digital tools for creative expression.

5
Facilitate workshops and sessions : Organize workshops or sessions led by experienced facilitators or artists in each chosen discipline. These sessions can serve as a platform for learning, exploration, and collaborative creation.

6
Encourage personal expression : Emphasize the importance of personal expression and creativity. Encourage participants to share their unique perspectives, stories, and experiences through their chosen artistic medium.

7
Reflect and discuss: Facilitate reflection sessions where participants can discuss their experiences, the impact of the creative process on their perspectives, and potential solutions or insights gained.

8
Collect feedback: Gather feedback from participants to understand the effectiveness of the creative expression method. This information can guide future initiatives and improvements.

MAPPING GOOD PRACTICES IN RURAL AREAS

Using the method of mapping practices involves embracing a processual understanding of mapping, shifting from a representational to a dynamic perspective. Cartographic theory has evolved to view maps as ongoing and unfolding through various practices, including contingent, citational, habitual, negotiated, reflexive, and playful approaches within relational contexts.

This approach considers mapping as a continuous remaking process carried out by individuals in diverse ways—technically, socially, bodily, aesthetically, and politically. In this context, the focus is on understanding cartography through the lens of practices, exploring how mappings are (re)made by people within specific contexts and cultures as solutions to everyday tasks.

Implementing the method of mapping practices involves a thoughtful and systematic approach to studying how maps are created, remade, and utilized within specific contexts. Here are some tips on how to integrate this method, based on the activity of mapping good practices in rural entrepreneurship during the UpRural project:

1
Define research objectives : Clearly outline the objectives for mapping good practices in rural entrepreneurship. Specify the aspects to be studied, such as successful strategies, community engagement, or innovative approaches.

2
Choose appropriate methods : Select methods suitable for understanding and documenting entrepreneurial practices. Relevant methods may include: field Interviews, on-site observations, document analysis, etc.

3
Data analysis : Analyze the collected data using the chosen methods. Look for patterns, key success factors, and insights into the unique challenges and opportunities of rural entrepreneurship.

4
Interpretations and findings : Interpret the findings in the context of the research objectives. Explore how identified good practices contribute to the success of rural entrepreneurship, considering factors like community involvement, resource utilization, and sustainability.

5
Report and share results : Compile the results into a comprehensive report, emphasizing practical insights and lessons learned from mapping good practices in rural entrepreneurship. Share the findings with local entrepreneurs, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders.

RUNNING A CIVIC HACKATHON

This activity aims to capture the importance of leveraging digital technologies to enhance rural development, promote inclusivity, and address challenges faced by rural communities. This includes discussions on improving digital infrastructure, providing access to digital services, and supporting innovation in rural areas.

This is realised through guiding youth workers in organizing a Civic Hackathon focused on envisioning and planning smart villages, using the ENRD Smart Village roadmap as a foundation:

_**FIRST STEPS**: Be inspired by the success stories of smart villages in Europe
_**MAP**: Identify the challenges, opportunities, and stakeholders of your village, as well as its development strategy. Remember to engage the stakeholders in all the stages of the smart process.
_**DESIGN A STRATEGY**: An overarching process presenting a clear objective and operational actions to reach it
_**PLAN ACTIONS**: Detail each action (needed resources, expected impact, indicators, risks, involvement of the community, calendar...)
_**FINANCE**: Consider the funds available, the public and private actors present in the village, region, and/or country, the community funding ... don't forget the EU
_**MONITOR**: Use the S.M.A.R.T approach to track the impact of your activities.

METHODOLOGY

Objective: Encourage participants to envision and design an ideal smart village, addressing rural development obstacles.

Experimental Scenarios or Case Study examples to contextualize: *Coal Legacy, In the Shadow, The Power of the Many, Stuck in the Middle, and From Now On.*

Coal Legacy

Your village was once vibrant and enriched by a prosperous coal industry. However, as the country began to transition towards renewable energies, factories closed, people left the countryside for the city, and the economy collapsed. There may be hope! During the pandemic, families sought refuge in the village, away from the crowd of metropolises. With them, they bring an entrepreneur mindset and are set on shaking things up. How can the village re-develop, without negating its legacy?

The Challenge

The local population is reluctant to accept the projects of the young entrepreneurs and consider them as outsiders. Today, someone vandalized the storefront of a newly established merchant. The tension is growing.

L'AUVERGNE PITTORESQUE
1001. — SAINT-ELOY-LES-MINES. — Mine de la Gare
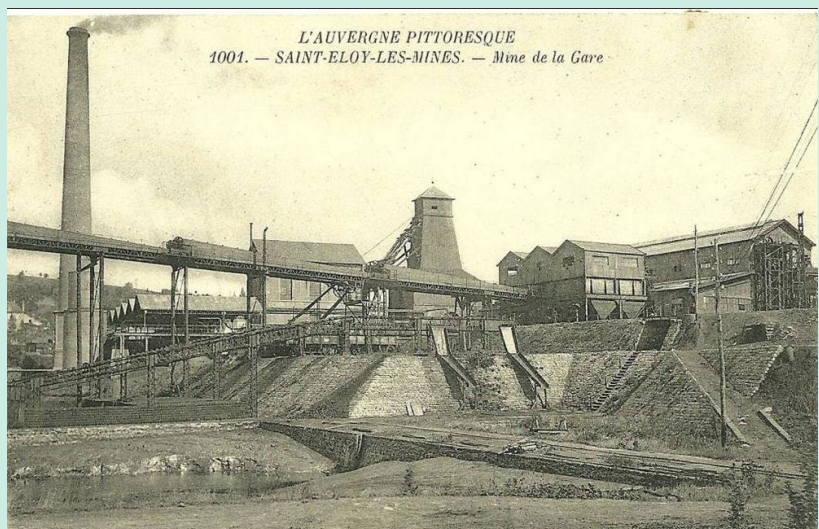
In the shadow

Your village is said to be idyllic, with a preserved seashore and its wildlife attracting tourists in the summer. Yet, in the winter, most of the tourists are gone and the village takes the allure of a ghost town. The village stands at the border of a growing city, where all the public services are located. Some fear that the expansion of the neighboring city will endanger the ecosystem of the seashore. How can the village impulse a rural development that is sustainable and fosters participation?

The Challenge

The village elected a new mayor. During his campaign, he promised to allow the construction of an apartment complex on the outskirts of the seashore. While the construction does not disregard the legislation on the protection of the coastline, the community feels it may endanger the wildlife due to light and noise pollution. Time is running out, the mayor will meet the investors in a few weeks.

The power of the many

Your village is joining a Community of Municipalities with two neighboring villages! Yours benefits from good connectivity and many infrastructures were constructed in its perimeter. In the last century, it was a retreat to renowned painters; the economy is now founded on culture and the organization of one of the country's biggest Art Fairs. However, if it once had a profitable agricultural sector, it is not the case anymore. As such, your village depends on the production of the two neighboring municipalities. How can the village break its dependency without compromising the merger project?

The Challenge

A pest had decimated the fields of the neighboring villages. Losses are monumental and the local economies could collapse. An emergency meeting is scheduled today, with the mayors, police forces, as well as the region's cooperatives and NGOs. Some say the neighboring villages will ask your village to provide assistance. However, your finances have been severely impacted by the pandemic, this year, the Art Fair could not be held.

Stuck in the middle

Your village stands at the border of two countries. Strong of a sustainable agricultural industry, it is currently intending on diversifying its economy. In the last decades, population density decreased alarmingly: the metropolises of both countries drain the brains out of your village and young people are migrating in hope of decent employment in the urban areas. Furthermore, most of the public services such as schools or hospitals are located in neighboring towns. They are far away and the village lacks the transport infrastructures that would make them accessible. How can the village counteract the brain drain?

The Challenge

The most renowned universities of the two countries are willing to establish an exchange program for their students, shedding light on the promiscuity of their cultures, of their future. They are searching for the location that could embody this interculturality

From now on

The region has just decided on a plan for your village to become smart: citizens will have a digital identity and the public services will be made available online. However, it does not seem to be enough as one key ingredient is missing: entrepreneurs. They are choosing to establish themselves in bigger cities or in rural areas with agricultural potential. Your village is sparsely populated and its most active sector in forestry. How can the village champion rural entrepreneurship?

The Challenge

Yesterday, the mayor reported that the village reached its highest ever registered rate of unemployment. He announced the formation of an emergency unit and is willing to invest in any initiative creating decent and sustainable employment.

STEPS

_PREPARATION AND ORIENTATION :
Team formation: Form diverse teams with a mix of skills (tech, design, problem-solving).
Scenario introduction: Present the five scenarios and explain the challenges related to rural development.
Smart village roadmap: Provide participants with the ENRD Smart Village roadmap.

_SMART PROCESS FRAMEWORK:
°*Discover:* Research successful smart village stories in the European Union. Isolate criteria and variables leading to success.
°*Map*: Identify challenges, opportunities, and stakeholders. Understand development strategies at the village, regional, and national levels.
°*Design*: Develop a coherent strategy with a clear, achievable objective. Break down objectives into operational actions.
°*Plan*: Specify details for each action: target group, needed resources, expected impact, calendar, stakeholders, manager, progress indicators, community involvement modalities.
°*Finance:* Seek financing opportunities and strategies for the proposed actions
°*Implement*: Decide on a calendar and procedure for monitoring the smart process.Use S.M.A.R.T indicators to track activity impacts.

_SPECIAL CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATION: Introduce surprise challenges to test adaptability and problem-solving skills. Encourage teams to revise plans based on new information or constraints.

_EVALUATION AND PRESENTATION:
°*Pitch preparation*: Guide teams in preparing a concise pitch for their smart village concept.
°*Judging criteria*: Creativity, feasibility, social impact, adaptability, and alignment with smart village principles.
°*Panel of judges*: Invite a panel with expertise in rural development, technology, and community engagement.

_POST HACKATHON FOLLOW-UP:
°*Documentation*: Compile and share insights, strategies, and solutions generated during the hackathon.
°*Networking*: Facilitate connections between participants, mentors, and experts for potential implementation of smart village ideas.

_RESSOURCES AND SUPPORT: Provide access to relevant resources, tools, and mentorship throughout the hackathon.

tools for social impact

WHAT ARE SOCIAL INNOVATIONS ?

There are two conceptual frameworks for the notion of social innovation. On the one hand, there are reformist approaches and, on the other, transformative approaches. To illustrate the former, we can take as examples the introduction of CSR in companies, social entrepreneurship or the modernization of public action.

These are not so-called «breakthrough» innovations, but rather changes to the rules of the game. We remain on a market logic, where we seek novelty to meet social needs.

Transformative approaches are inherently disruptive. They include the democratization of public action and socio-territorial dynamics. They are based on a plural economy, with institutional change to meet social aspirations.

The plural economy means taking into account both the market and non-market economies, such as voluntary work.
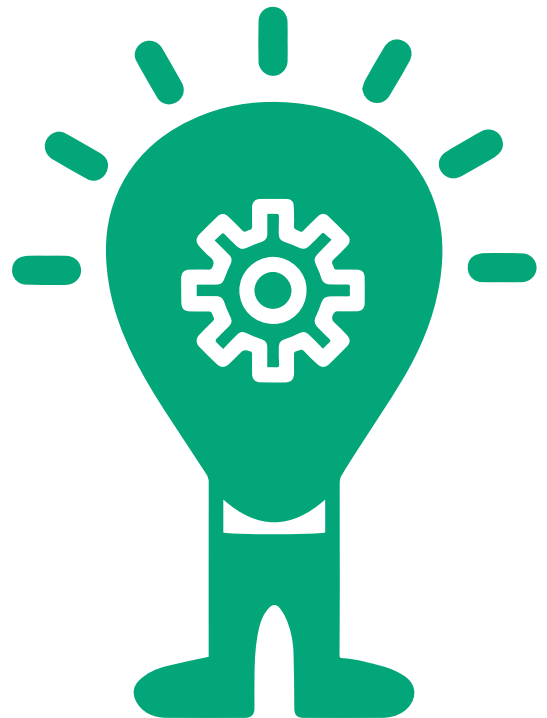
SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Corporate Social Responsability	**Social entrepreneur-ship**	**Modernization of public policies**	**Democratization of public action**	**Social enterprises**	**Socio-territorial innovations**
Social innovation seems as reforming principle in an entrepreneurial logic	Social innovation carried by an entrepreneur at the service of a social goal : a «changemaker»	Social innovation as a new modality of action to overcome the limits of public action	Social innovation resulting from citizens dynamics and supported by the public force	Social innovation from a bottom-up process based on a democratic and non-profit organization.	Social innovation as a democratic co-construction of multiple actors in a given context and history
ex: fondations	*ex: 360° EST*				

Characterised by :	**Characterised by :**
Market Logic Newness Social needs (purpose) Social responsabilty	Plural economy Newness Noveltv/Breakthrough (institutional change) Social needs and aspirations

Reformist approaches Little footsteps	**Transformatives approaches** Break

11 INDICATORS FOR SOLIDARITY PRACTICES

These 11 indicators can be a tool for organizations seeking to make a social and ecological impact. These indicators can act as a compass for thinking and developing actions on all dimensions of an organization. These indicators are diverse in nature: some address the practical application of values or major concepts, others address issues of justice and well-being, and finally others focus on the economic model.

Target audience: Members of an organization or outsiders.

Duration: 3h minimum

Description : At a workshop, you need to bring together a small group of people who are not necessarily connected with the project. The aim of the workshop is to investigate various aspects of the project.

Around the table, there's a facilitator, a project owner and interviewers. The project leader will be the one to present the project and answer questions from the others.

Each person around the table owns an indicator. He or she has an indicator sheet with a description and questions. It is thanks to this card that each investigator comes to dialogue with the project leader.

Democracy

This indicator deals with questions of internal organization and the way in which an organization operates.

Social justice

This indicator focuses on the organization's impact on its audience or members.

Sustainability

There are two conceptions of sustainability. There's strong sustainability and low sustainability...

Solidarity

Solidarity can be viewed from a philanthropic perspective, or as a principle of action and organization.

Social utility

This indicator focuses on the organization's impact on society and the local community.

Proximity

Proximity can be approached geographically or through social relationships and interactions.

Well-being

This indicator invites reflection on the well-being of the organization's members or public. How can it be qualified or quantified?

Social innovation

The aim of social innovations is to meet unmet or poorly met social needs, or to solve social problems not covered by the market or by institutions.

Non-profit

As a not-for-profit organization, it is not allowed to distribute profits to its members or owners, and its activities are focused on missions of general interest or social utility.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a type of non-market exchange whose primary aim is to forge social links.

Resource hybridization

3 types of resources: market resources, non-market redistribution resources and non-monetary reciprocal resources.

For more details on indicators...

PROJECT ACCELERATOR

This method derives from the mental training created during the 39-45 war by **Joffre Dumazedier** and subsequently developed by the popular education movement «peuple et culture». It is used a little differently in professional practice analysis.It's a very fast-paced method for bringing lots of ideas to bear on a problem.

Objective : Reflect together and unblock a situation

Type of tool : Group facilitation / Peer-to-peer

Group size : 6 to 12 people OR 13 to 30 people

Duration : 30 to 60 minutes

Step 1: Presentation of the problem or situation (5 min) The person who has agreed to submit the problem explains the situation and its context as clearly as possible. He/she then expresses how he/she defines the problem. The other team members listen.

Step 2: Clarification of the problem (5 min) Group members formulate questions to clarify the situation. At this stage, they should stick to factual information questions (e.g., to better understand the context). The person who has presented the situation provides clarification.

- Step 3: Contract - reformulation of the question (1 min) The person who presented his/her situation clearly specifies what he/she expects from the other members of the group (I would like the group to help me at ....).

- Step 4: Reactions, comments, suggestions (20- 30 min) The other members of the group intervene, giving their impressions, reactions, interpretations, experiences... They suggest a different way of looking at the situation. They may offer practical suggestions or advice. The person who has presented his or her situation listens and agrees not to intervene. It's a good idea to write down what you think is relevant.

- Step 5: Summary and action plan (5 to 10 min) The presenter takes a few moments to formulate a mini-action plan based on the comments made by group members (a personal synthesis of what she has retained). During this time, the other participants take note of ideas and remarks that may be useful to them in their projects (cross-cutting ideas, etc.).

- Step 6: Evaluation and integration of learning and experience (5 -10 min) To bring the meeting to a close, it's a good idea to look back at what's happened. The person who asked for help can express his or her experience; the group can evaluate the way he or she proceeded and, if necessary, make adjustments for the next meeting. It's a good idea to take a few minutes to write down what each person remembers from the meeting.
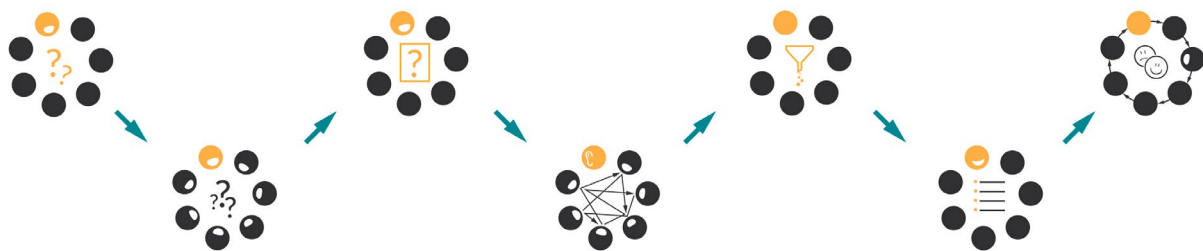
1. The exhibitor presents his problem. The consultants listen. *5 min.*

2. The consultants ask questions to get a clear picture of the situation and their families. *5 min.*

3. The exhibitor clarifies and formulates his request. "I would like the group to help me..." *1 min.*

4. The consultants share their ideas, the exhibitor listens without debate. *20-30 min.*

5. Exhibitors take individual time to summarize what they have learned. *5 min.*

6. The exhibitor presents his action plan and indicates the follow-up action he intends to take. *5 min.*

7. Exhibitors and consultants share their learning after the session. *10 min.*

Punctual grouping

1 hour session

safety frame

DESIGN THINKING METHODOLOGY

In the dynamic landscape of rural development, embracing innovative approaches is essential to drive impactful change. Design Thinking, a human-centered problem-solving methodology, emerges as a potent tool for crafting solutions that resonate with the needs of rural communities. This chapter delves into the principles and application of Design Thinking as a robust framework for managing projects geared towards sustainable and impactful rural development.

Design Thinking (DT) is a methodology for creative problem solving. It is used to provide innovative solutions to problems in a specified domain or territory. The method is mostly used by social entrepreneurs, project managers, youth workers and people from all angles of society to answer specific questions[16].

This method is very famous and adequate for solving territorial or social problems because it uses an approach that facilitates constant contact with the territory or people concerned by the problems and co-constructs lasting and impactful solutions for the problems.

The Dt method has five steps which enable its efficiency: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test.

Design Thinking is not a one-size-fits-all approach; its adaptability makes it suitable for a wide array of rural development projects. Whether addressing agricultural challenges, improving access to education, or enhancing healthcare services, this methodology allows project managers to co-create solutions with the community and its benefits range from developing community-centric solutions tailored to each unique rural context, to encouraging innovative solutions going beyond traditional approach.

EMPATHY MAP by Berta San Martín Moreno

Empathy is the ability to relate to the emotions of others; a key workplace skill. You can put yourself in someone's shoes and get to know what they see, hear, think, say and do.

The Empathy Map is a visual tool designed to understand the reality and needs of people, users, customers, etc. It helps you to identify the thoughts and feelings of a particular group on a specific issue and guide you to decision making and innovation regarding that issue.

Before filling up an Empathy map, you should decide on the subject and the scope:

Who are you mapping? In UpRural, we focused on the people living in the national rural areas of the participants.

What is your main goal? In UpRural, we decided our main goal was comparing the national rural areas of the participants.

How to fill an Empathy Map

Traditional empathy maps are split into 4 quadrants (Say&Do, Think&Feel, Hear, and See), with the user or persona in the middle. Empathy maps provide a glance into who a user is as a whole and are not chronological or sequential. You can fill it up with your own knowledge and thoughts or ideally collected data from research.

Empathy Map Canvas - Rural Realities

What do they
THINK & FEEL?

What thoughts and feelings might motivate (or not) people living in rural areas?
What do they think about their own reality?

What do they
SEE?

What do they see in their country?
What do they see in their immediate environment?
What do they see others saying and doing?
What are they watching and reading?

What do they
HEAR?

What are they hearing others say? (neighbours, politicians, news...))
What are they hearing from friends?
What are they hearing from colleagues (from work, high school, college...)?

What do they
SAY & DO?

What have we heard them say?
What can we imagine them saying?
What do they do today about their situation?
What behavior have we observed?
What can we imagine them doing (maybe to improve their situation)?

PAINS

What are their fears, frustrations and anxieties about living in a rural area?

GAINS

What are their wants, needs, hopes and dreams about living in a rural area?

_The **Say & Do** quadrant contains what the users say out loud in an interview or what you have heard them saying in the news, the actions they are taking in their communities, etc. Ideally, it contains direct quotes from research. Example: "I want to live in a rural area because it's where I belong to." (and the person physically lives there, or not).

_The **Think & Feel** quadrant captures what the user is thinking and feeling throughout the experience. Ask yourself "What matters to these people? How do they feel about the situation?". It is possible to have the same content in both Say&Do and Think&Feel. However, pay special attention to what users think, but may not be willing to say out loud. Try to understand why they are reluctant to share — are they unsure, self-conscious, polite, or afraid to tell others something? Example: "Not having public transportation at my village is really annoying."

_The **Hear** quadrant exposes the messages that the users are listening to in the news, from the politicians, from their neighbors, etc. Ask yourself if these messages are optimistic, realistic or even pessimistic. Example: "We've been hearing promises from the mayor for years and they never come true."

The **See** quadrant shows literally what people can see around them, in their place. Example: "There is a new bus stop next to the grocery store."

_**Pains and Gains**: this is a bonus for your Empathy Map. If you can, gather information about your users' fears, worries, etc., also about their hopes and dreams, all related to the issue you are mapping.

Some of these quadrants may seem ambiguous or overlapping. Do not focus too much on being precise: if an item may fit into multiple quadrants, just pick one. The 4 quadrants exist only to push our knowledge about users and to ensure we don't leave out any important dimension. (If you don't have anything to put into a certain quadrant, it's a strong signal that you need more user research before proceeding in the design process.)

Finally, reflect on what you've discovered and draw conclusions to take action about the issue you have mapped.
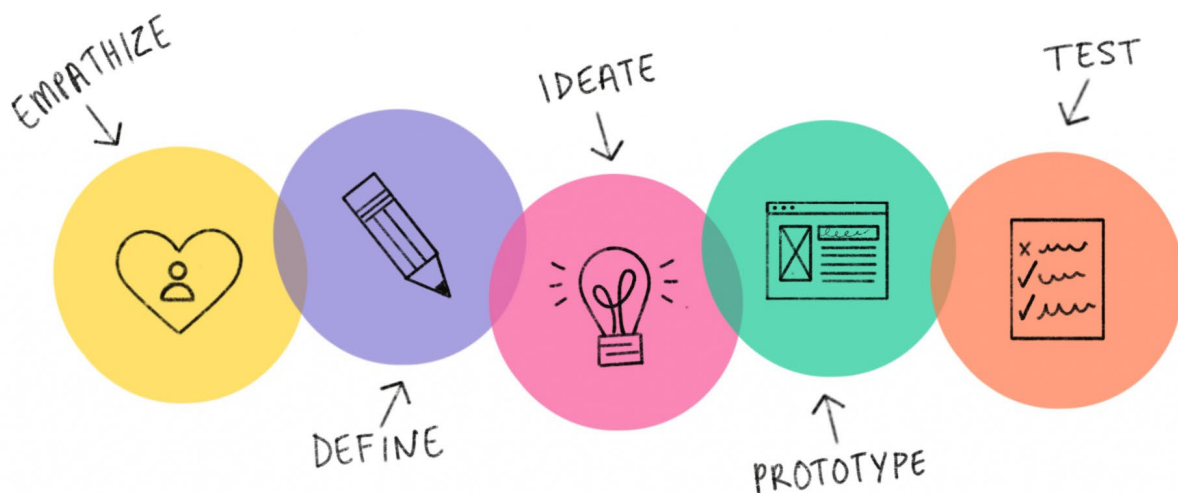
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ANOTHER EXAMPLE

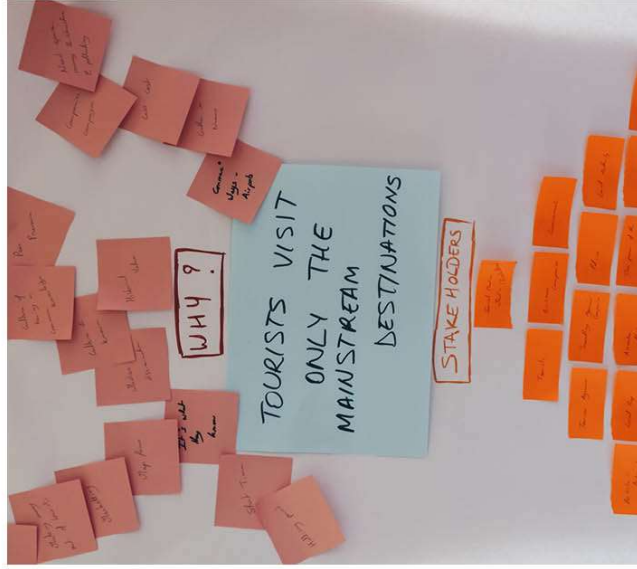## CASE 4: Tourists visit only mainstream destinations

FINDING THE WHYS

METHOD: Initially, through brainstorming and observation of the territory, the team came up with the follow whys:
-Tourists only know the mainstream destinations
-The mainstream destinations are connection ways at airports (easily accessible).

STAKEHOLDERS:
-Media marketers
-Tourists
-Government
-Business companies
-Tourism agencies

Afterwards the team selected 2 stakeholders to interview: Travel agencies & tourist guides.
After the interview the team came up with more concrete whys and stakeholders related to the problem

NEW WHY (AFTER DEFINITION THROUGH INTERVIEWS)

Mass Targeting of the tourist by travel agencies (no specific targeting based on the tourist's profiles)
-Big overcrowded market
-Focus on what people know already (the over visible, the culture)
-Media dissemination
-Peer pressure

NEW STAKEHOLDERS
-Media marketers
-Business companies
-Travel & Tourism agencies

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY THE TEAM DURING THE IDEATION PROCESS:
-Promoting cool alternatives
-Campaign which shows the gap between mainstream and non-mainstream destinations
-Contact with travel-bloggers in order to create more content on non-mainstream destinations
-Create social media competitions, challenges and super offers on non-mainstream destinations.

STRATEGY ADOPTED BY THE TEAM:

The team chose the small city of Nea Makri which lies a few kilometers from Athens and offers a very relaxing environment to tourists. In order to promote the city of Nea Makri, the team proposed to:
Create flyers/posters showing the advantages of visiting Nea Makri instead of overated spots like Athens.

PROTOTYPING

Developing a brochure that compares Athens to Nea Makri. Nea Makri is portrayed as a cheaper alternative to Athens-is more beautiful and heterogenous when it comes to activities and relaxation.
Testing:
The brochure is tested in partnership with a travel agency and a tourist guide in order to see how tourists will react to the new campaign. After testing the impact of the brochure with these service providers, the team returns to the design board to make changes.

ITERATION

Now as changes, the team opts to no more compare Nea Makri to Athens but rather add it as a complementary destination which offers extra opportunities in the Athens Metropolis. Also, the team decides to focus more on Nea Makri as a little city which offers less crowd, more relaxing atmosphere rather than comparing it with Athens.

european opportunities for youth in rural areas

In this chapter, we delve into the many opportunities available for youth in rural areas within the European context. As we explore the landscape of possibilities, our focus will be on empowering and engaging young individuals through initiatives that foster solidarity, participation, cultural exchange, and volunteerism. The chapter will comprehensively cover Solidarity Projects, designed to promote social cohesion and community development, as outlined by the European Solidarity Corps. We will also delve into Participatory Projects, which encourage active youth involvement in decision-making processes. Additionally, the chapter will explore the enriching experiences offered by Youth Exchanges and Volunteering opportunities, allowing young people to broaden their horizons and contribute meaningfully to society.

Beyond these initiatives, we will shine a light on noteworthy projects, including the European Youth Village network originating from Romania, providing a platform for cross-cultural collaboration, and the High-level Rural Policy Forum, a forum shaping the future of rural areas through strategic discussions and policy formulation. Through this comprehensive exploration, we aim to equip young individuals in rural areas with the knowledge and resources to actively participate in and benefit from these transformative European opportunities.

SOLIDARITY PROJECTS THROUGH VOLONTEERING

The European Solidarity Corps offers a transformative opportunity for young individuals aged 18 to 30 residing in participating countries, including all European Union nations, Iceland, Turkey, and North Macedonia.

At the heart of this initiative is the Solidarity Project, a collaborative endeavor where groups of at least five youth design and implement activities to instigate positive change within their local communities. The projects, lasting from 2 to 12 months on a part-time basis, provide flexibility for participants to engage while managing other commitments.

The scope of these projects goes beyond local challenges, extending to address regional or national issues, all while embodying European values such as inclusion, climate change, democratic engagement, citizenship, or gender equality. Financial support, amounting to 500€ per month, is allocated to cover project-related costs, with additional funding available for the involvement of a coach.

The application process is accessible through web forms, inviting participants to articulate the purpose of their project, its community impact, and the planned activities during preparation and implementation. Whether individually or with the support of experienced organizations, young people are empowered to shape their communities and contribute to broader European priorities through the EU Solidarity Corps.

Embarking on a volunteering journey through the European Solidarity Corps opens doors to impactful cross-border activities, allowing young individuals aged 18 to 30 to contribute to various causes, broaden their skill set, and create lasting memories. With projects spanning diverse areas such as environment, health, inclusion, digital technologies, culture, and sport, there's an opportunity for everyone to align with their interests and background.

Types of Volunteering:

_Individual Volunteering:
Duration: Ranges from 2 months to 12 months, with the possibility of shorter engagements (2 weeks to 2 months) for participants with fewer opportunities or disabilities.
Scope: Full-time commitment (30 to 38 hours a week) contributing to the daily work of an organization benefiting local communities.
Location: Typically cross-border, offering a chance to experience life in a different country.

_Team Volunteering:
Duration: Lasts between 2 weeks and 2 months, providing a shorter-term commitment.
Scope: Full-time engagement (30 to 38 hours a week) within a team of 10 to 40 volunteers from at least 2 different countries, including individuals with fewer opportunities.
Location: Primarily abroad, though some projects may be in your home country.

Supporting and Host Organizations:

_Individual Volunteering: Involves two organizations – a supporting organization (in the home country) to help with preparation and a host organization (in the destination country) to receive and assist the volunteer.

_Team Volunteering: No supporting organization is required.

ERASMUS + PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS

Erasmus+ Participatory Projects empower youth in European democratic life through non-formal activities at local, regional, national, and European levels. It aims to enhance civic, economic, social, cultural, and political participation by: -

_Pathways to Engagement: Providing opportunities for daily and democratic participation.
_European Integration: Raising awareness of European values and fundamental rights.
_Digital Competences: Developing digital skills and media literacy.

Activities:

_Non-formal learning activities for exchanges, cooperation, and civic actions;
_Innovative, smart, and digital youth participation in diverse sectors.
_Dialogues, consultations, and civic actions with decision-makers.

Examples of Projects:

_Local workshops and debates on relevant issues.
_Consultations and awareness campaigns for targeted topics.
_Utilization of digital tools (webinars, e-participation) to enhance digital skills.
_Organizing youth participation events for impactful milestones.

Erasmus+ Action 1 provides a platform for youth, including those in rural areas, to actively contribute to societal changes and policy shaping.

Youth exchanges provide a unique opportunity for young people from diverse countries to come together, live, and collaborate on shared projects for short, intensive periods. This experience extends beyond the classroom, offering participants aged 13 to 30 a platform for cultural exchange, skill development, and fostering lasting connections. In rural areas, where opportunities for international engagement might be limited, youth exchanges become a gateway to broader horizons.

Key Features:

_Activities: Participants engage in a variety of activities, including workshops, exercises, debates, role-plays, and outdoor endeavors, creating an immersive and dynamic learning environment.
_Duration: Lasting between 5 and 21 days (excluding travel time), youth exchanges provide an intensive yet manageable timeframe for cross-cultural collaboration.
_Recognition: Participants' learning experiences are formally recognized through a Youthpass, acknowledging the skills and competences gained during the exchange.
_Organizers: Youth exchanges are managed by youth organizations, informal groups, or other organizations, allowing for flexibility and diverse approaches.
_EU Grant: Financial support covers travel expenses and necessary practical and activity-related costs, making the exchange accessible to youth from various socio-economic backgrounds.

NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS

EUROPEAN YOUTH VILLAGE

European Youth Village is a strategic program dedicated to the development and community organization of young people in rural environments. The initiative aims to foster the entire youth ecosystem in rural areas, not only within Romania but also at the European and international levels. By implementing this program, the goal is to contribute to the creation of autonomous youth communities in rural settings and strengthen the framework of public policies both nationally and within the European context. The program, initiated in 2018, is nationally coordinated by the Association for Active Development and Go Free Association.

Objectives and Impact:

_Community Autonomy: Develop autonomous youth communities in rural areas.
_Policy Framework: Contribute to national and European public policy development.
_Best Practices: Establish and promote best practices in youth development.
_Positive Model: Offer a positive model of community organization for rural youth, replicable at the county, national, and European levels.

European Youth Village Title: The title of «European Youth Village» is conferred by the program's governance to villages or communes aspiring to create positive changes within their community. Throughout the designated year, all local activities, projects, events, or actions aim to enhance youth and authorities' participation in addressing the needs of young people in the community and improving aspects directly impacting rural youth.

Governance Support:

The program's governance provides support, consultancy, and training to representatives of rural youth interested in applying for the «European Youth Village» title or actively participating in the program at the local level. By engaging the program, youth from the finalist villages become

more aware of available resources, more visible, and prepared to strategically act towards desired changes at local, national, and European levels.

Key Features:

_Awareness: Enhances awareness of available resources among rural youth.
_Visibility: Increases the visibility of rural youth in their communities.
_Strategic Action: Prepares youth to strategically address desired changes locally, nationally, and at the European level.

The High-level Rural Policy Forum aimed to prepare a substantive debate in the Council of the EU and provided support to Member States in unlocking the vast potential inherent in rural areas.Objectives and

Objectives:

_Policy Exchanges: Enabled high-level policy exchanges among national authorities to contribute to the Council of the EU's conclusions on the implementation of the long-term vision for EU's rural areas (LTVRA).
_EU Policy Exploration: Shared experiences on how EU policies and funds could optimally contribute to realizing the rural vision, focusing on key policy priority areas for the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU. Explored ways the Rural Pact could add significant value.
_Enhanced Governance Frameworks: Established a dialogue to explore enhanced multi-level governance frameworks and participatory structures. Emphasized the importance of listening to the voices of rural actors and stakeholders. Enhanced the design of rural policies that empower them within the framework of the Rural Pact.

Key outcomes:

_Achieved greater complementarities among diverse policy instruments and strategies.
_Provided strategic insights and shared experiences to inform the Council of the EU's conclusions on the LTVRA.

The Forum was organized collaboratively by the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission, with support from the Rural Pact Support Office.

conclusion

This toolkit embodies the potential for social innovation and entrepreneurship to make a real impact on the challenges faced by rural communities in Europe. Navigating the complexities of rural development—marked by depopulation, economic hardships, and social isolation—the toolkit provides a practical guide for change. Grounded in the principles of the European Union's Youth Strategy, it acknowledges the importance of youth participation in bridging the urban-rural gap.

The toolkit strategically focuses on Objective 6 of the Youth Strategy, «Supporting Rural Youth,» taking a crucial step toward reshaping the narrative of rural areas. By addressing the unique needs and opportunities within these communities, it aims to counteract depopulation and youth migration. Encouraging active involvement in decision-making processes, the toolkit recognizes the agency of young people in shaping their local environments.

Through the integration of social innovation, youth participation, and entrepreneurship, we provide a practical and comprehensive approach to empower EU youth and youth workers. It serves as a guide, offering the tools and knowledge needed to implement impactful initiatives that enhance the quality of life in rural Europe. More than just a set of strategies, this toolkit is a catalyst for a profound shift in perspective, envisioning a future where rural communities thrive with vibrancy, sustainability, and inclusivity.

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