

WP5: EXCHANGE OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIC PARTICIPATION PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

GUIDELINES FOR MUNICIPALITIES working with international projects

The recommendations have been developed based on the following grounds:

- results of a project which was funded by the South-Baltic Programme in 2016 „Local Youth Councils in SB - an Effective Way to Promote Youth Participation“ (No. STHB.05.01.00-28-S066/16) and
- results of a project “Youth Core Group Network” (No. STHB.05.01.00-28-0117/17) which was implemented in 2018-2019 as a continuation of the above-mentioned project (hereinafter – the Project).

According to various analyses, European and partner countries’ statistical data, as well as some other actual proofs, partner states and their societies have been experiencing very rapid change processes (ageing of the population, overall unemployment and “brain drain” of young and qualified people who seek better education and better job opportunities in urban areas or outside their countries). The processes create new challenges for young people and markedly affect youth policies. Bearing this in mind, it is clear that various society actors (schools, universities, youth centres, municipality administrations, municipality councils, youth councils, non-government organizations, informal youth groups, etc.) should be involved in the process to assist the youth, and develop adequate opportunities and possibilities for young people in order they could utilize their skills and knowledge for their own benefit as well as for the benefit of the society.

Currently, local municipalities in the Project countries do implement numerous projects targeted at environment and economy. Probably only a few municipalities are implementing a couple or more projects targeted at development of international cooperation, and strengthening youth participation on any level, and the international one in particular. We all understand that integrating international youth work in any municipality’s everyday youth work is a challenge. First of all, because youth work in general lacks higher recognition on the local level, and therefore lack of attention from municipalities for youth work on the international level – is even more critical.

Major reasons, as indicated by Project participants at various events, meetings, discussions and the scientific research could be: hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the work of municipalities and other related budgetary institutions; lack of skills by the institutions’ employees, decision-makers and local politicians; lack of cross-border initiatives at the institutions in general; lack of relevant skills by youth leaders – either in formal organizations (e.g., schools and NGOs) or informal youth groups; lack of funding and dedicated youth development programmes.

The Project therefore has developed a list of recommendations for municipalities, which would be willing to more reasonably contribute to youth participation on the international level, and at the same time - increase their own capacities for working with youth, involving them in decision-making, enabling young people to share their ideas with local municipality councils, and enable young people to more actively cooperate with peers across borders.

1. First of all - “international projects” increase awareness of other countries and their cultures, provide an opportunity to explore different working environments, enhance cultural competencies, reduces cross-cultural misunderstandings, and much more!
2. Begin with exploring cross-border initiatives of all stakeholders in your own town, city or region;
3. Revise municipality strategic plans in order to include “youth participation” aspect wherever possible;
4. Consider strengthening overall cross-border aspect of the work of municipality;
5. Explore EU programmes dedicated to various goals of youth work, youth motivation, youth volunteering, etc. goals (e.g., European Youth portal for more information https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en; <https://www.welcomeurope.com/european-subsidies-sector-Youth.html>; Erasmus+ https://www.welcomeurope.com/european-funds/erasmus-plus-813+713.html#tab=onglet_details; Europe for Citizens https://www.welcomeurope.com/european-funds/europe-citizens-822+722.html#tab=onglet_details; Youth actions in Europe https://ec.europa.eu/youth/node_en;
6. Explore nationally available youth programmes, such as State scholarships, Sports programmes, Creative youth, etc.;
7. Analyze structure and work mode or type of local and cross-border youth networks , such as: European Youth Network <http://www.eyncrin.net/>; Ytough networks <https://youthnetworks.net/>, South-Baltic youth network developed in the course of the Project (Youth Core Groups Network) <https://southbaltic.eu/-/sb-ycgn>; etc.;
8. Seek funding and cross-border partnership for projects targeted at the following goals;
 - 8.1. Spreading a universal tool for communication among young people - use of LUPP tool among communities (methodology of conducting local youth policy);
 - 8.2. Establishment of formal groups and connecting them to the ones existing on the local level in different countries – municipal youth councils, NGOs, individual young people in different countries at a local level;
 - 8.3. Developing participation training for young people;
 - 8.4. Development of a system of decision-making in a local government’s partnership with young people and/or their organizations in policy areas of relevance to young people;
 - 8.5. Promoting young people’s participation in political parties (e.g., trainings on democratic decision-making structures and procedures, involvement in the party political system in general);



- 8.6. Putting in place structures or arrangements enabling the participation of young people in the decisions and debates affecting them;
- 8.7. Organizing “debates” or public hearings to involve youth;
 - 8.8. Youth forums, councils, youth parliaments, structured dialogues, etc.;
 - 8.9. Capacity building activities - improving skills of actors by participation in thematic workshops, seminars, conferences;
 - 8.10. Strengthening international cooperation by creating a regional platform for communication - joint international website, open-space online tool for voting;
 - 8.11. Youth mobilities.
9. Find partners and develop a joint project;
 10. For development of a project quite a few things are important: clear goals, availability of “internationalization” aspect in the goals, relevant partners, availability of project implementation skills;
 11. When working with international projects, the following aspects are critical:
 - 11.1. Clear and quality leadership;
 - 11.2. Relevant size of partnership – countries or institutions involved or to be involved in a project;
 - 11.3. Regular collaboration with all partners and exchange of views and ideas;
 - 11.4. Exchange of problems and challenges;
 - 11.5. Distribution of tasks;
 12. Core principles of international project partnerships:
 - 12.1. Trust in the team (trusting each other, while leaving open communication lines);
 - 12.2. Shared objectives and working together;
 - 12.3. Commitment to learning;
 - 12.4. Gender equality;
 - 12.5. Common values;
 - 12.6. Transparency;
 - 12.7. Accountability;
 - 12.8. Observing deadlines;
 - 12.9. Working bottom-up.
 13. Keep in mind “culture importance” (often share expectations, don’t be afraid of differences – emphasize them, clarify everything you don’t understand);
 14. Overcome “language barrier” by speaking slowly, using more written communication, highlight topics in a discussion using signposts;
 15. Manage time zone differences (sometimes they are small, sometimes pretty big);
 16. Consider cross-border finances (not all EU members and also some EU countries have Euros). Ask advice from your finance department even though internal accountancy and international project accountancy systems sometimes differ;
 17. Organize trainings for all partners on general topics, not necessarily on issues specific to a concrete project.

Working with international projects is fun and life-long-learning!