

Handbook:

Empowering communities

The aim of the handbook is to:

- To offer more tools for professionals to use empowering methods
- To provide a fresh approach to supporting youth who may otherwise struggle to find their place in society
- To enhance the skill sets of professionals engaged in working with youth

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1 INTRODUCTION

"A person becomes a human being only through participation in a human community."

- Paul Natorp 1899

In many ways, European society is better than ever, but it is increasingly difficult for people to feel a real sense of belonging. Inequality has increased in Europe: those who are doing well are doing better. On the other hand, those who do not succeed at school or in work face increasing challenges. NEET young people face economic, social and emotional problems. If young people cannot cope with their studies or find work, they can easily feel a sense of not belonging and find it difficult to meet their basic human psychological needs for closeness/community, ability/capability and volunteering (Ryan and Deci 1985). There has been an increase in mental health challenges among young people and an increase in treatment waiting lists. For example in Finland, 2 600 young people retire each year due to depression. Young people are under increasing pressure to be self-directed and to cope, and the pressure is piling up on younger and younger people. Social media gives the impression that anyone can be anything, which makes career choices even more difficult, because with situations changing so quickly, you can never be sure what is a good choice. What is certain is that high interest rates have further increased loneliness and isolation.

We want to offer a proven solution to the challenges faced by young people and demonstrate how their well-being can be improved through an empowering community. Our desk research and surveys conducted for the book show that there is a real need for activities that promote low-threshold community involvement. The book begins by detailing the situation of NEET youth in Portugal, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Finland, along with professional recommendations and survey results. We also provide an in-depth look at the empowerment methods we used and present case studies of four young people involved in the activities.

Additionally, we describe how to establish a low-threshold community that empowers young people and the ways to increase and maintain community engagement. At the end of the book, we offer practical tools for those interested in the themes of empowering communities: outlines for two training programs and self-reflection questions. One training program is designed for educating young people to become active community actors, and the other for training

professionals to empower young people. The self-reflection questions cover themes such as empowerment, community, interaction, and self-development.

We hope that this book will raise awareness about the empowering impact of communities especially for NEET youngsters and, hopefully, encourage even the establishment of new communities aimed at young people.

2 THE SITUATION OF NEET YOUTH

Sommario

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There are risks, both for the individual and in the long run for society, if young adults find themselves disengaged from both education, social participation and the labour market.

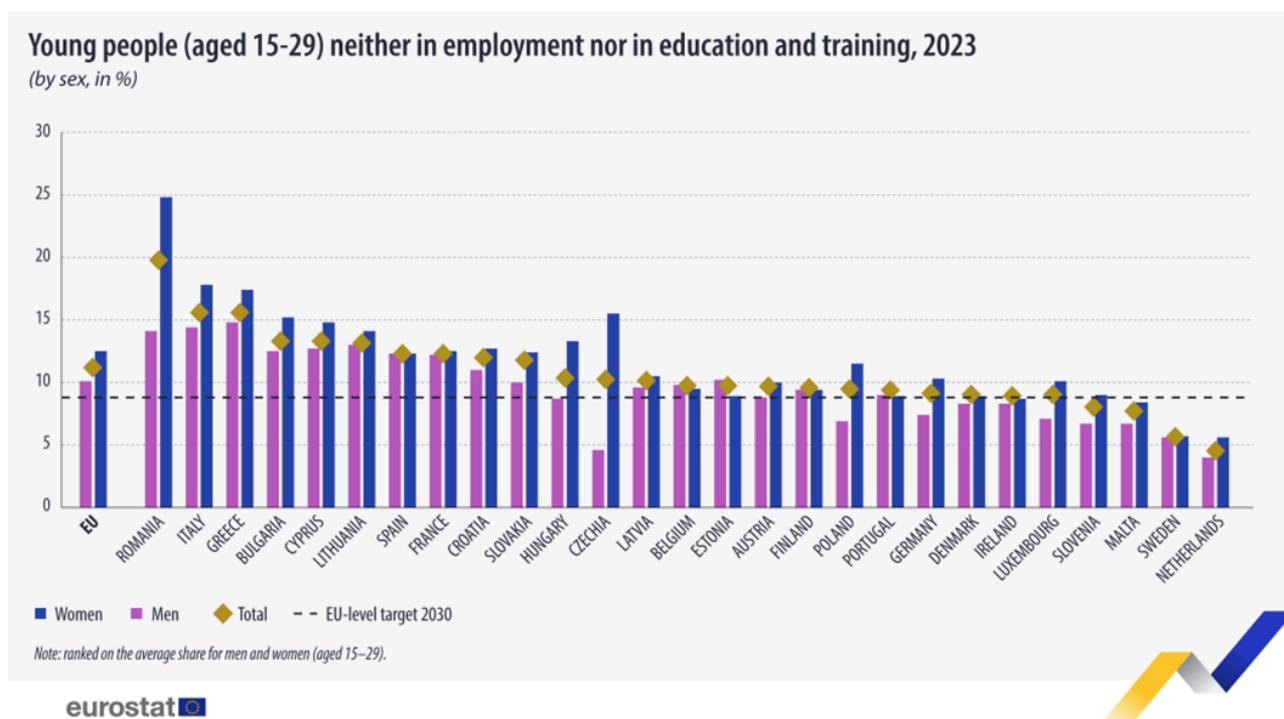
From a desktop study which the MPOW partners carried out during last 10 month, some evidences lead to reply to new and emerging needs that young people that are not in education or in some active policy involved, claim.

In particular our focus is those young that, for personal, social or cultural reasons, are considered as a NEET.

2.1 An European Overview

While background information is provided for those aged 15–34 years, the main age group in this overview consists of young adults aged 15 to 29 years. For this age group, the European Union has set an EU-level target[1] stipulating that the share of young people neither in employment nor in education or training should be less than 9 % by 2030. In 2023, an average of 11.2 % was identified as NEET within EU. However, there are differences between Member States as several countries have already reached the goal for 2030 , as the following figure shows.

Fig.1 – NEET Young people (aged 15-29) in Europe



Source: Eurostat, 2023

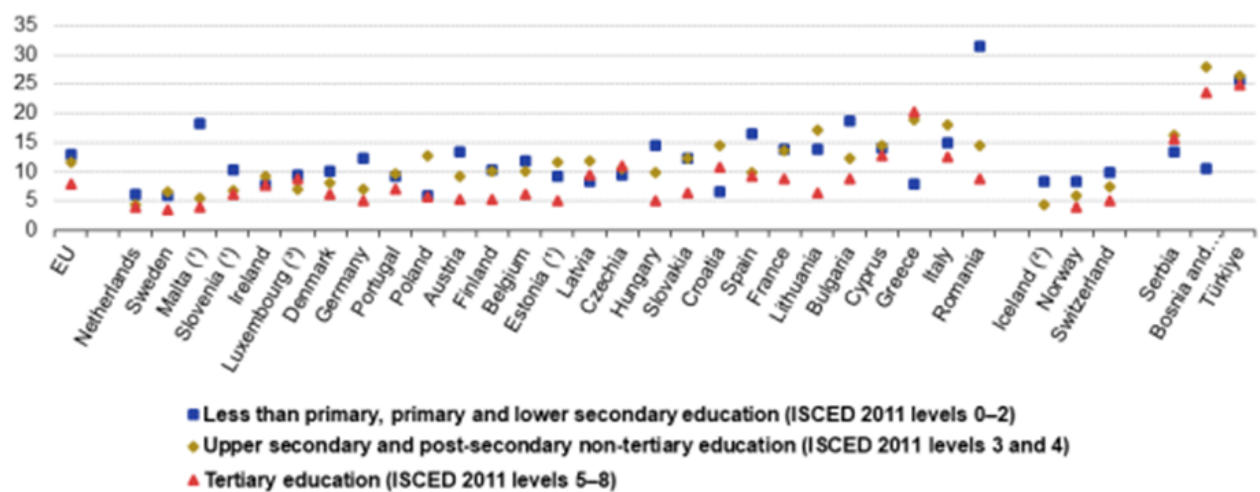
Italy shows an high level of NEET (more woman that men), while Czechia is under the EU average for men and over the average of the women. Portugal and Finland show values under the EU average.

In Italy 16 % or more of all young people aged 15–29 years were neither in employment nor in education or training.

Being in a training activity is relevant to avoid the risk to become a NEET. In 2023, the NEET rate for young people aged 15–29 years in the EU was 12.9 % among those with a low level of education, compared with 11.6 % among those with a medium level of education and 7.8 % among those with a high level of education.

Fig.2 - Young people (aged 15-29) NEET,by educational attainment level, 2023

Young people (aged 15–29) neither in employment nor in education and training, by educational attainment level, 2023 (%)

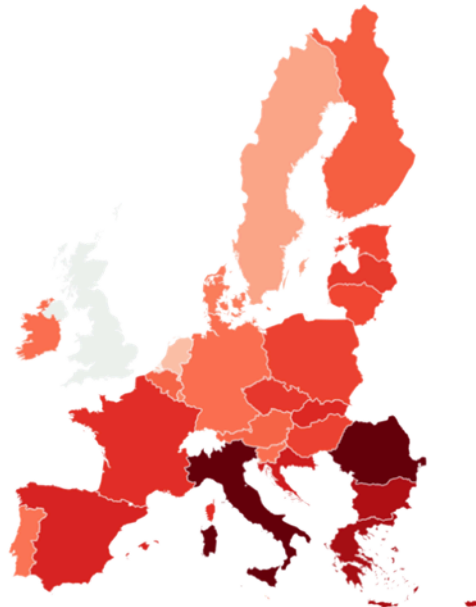


Note: Ranked on the overall NEET rate.
 (*) ISCED 2011 levels 5-8: low reliability.
 (†) ISCED 2011 levels 5-8: not available due to very low reliability.
 (‡) low reliability.
 Source: Eurostat (online data codes: edat_lfse_21)



Fig. 3 - Percentage of Neet on 15-29 young (2023)





Eurostat data show that education attainment very strongly impacts chances of becoming a NEET. An important factor **which can reduce the negative impact of lower education attainment is participation in some various forms of life-long learning**. Unfortunately, new evidence confirms that the low skilled, in particular, tend not to take part in life-long learning activities and, in consequence, risk being locked in a "low-skillstrap". The analysis of the composition of the NEET group among young adults shows that **the majority of them are people who are inactive** for example they do not look for a job. When compared with the younger age group the young adults aged 25-29 keep nearly the same rate of people who unsuccessfully seek employment but there is a big rise in the category of inactive persons. Of course, the latter is related to end of formal education period but it also related to sex and parenthood.

2.2 Policy and measure adopted by FI, PT, CZ, IT

Policymakers have sought to address particular groups of young people such as unemployed youth, early leavers from education and training, or young people whose qualifications do not meet labour market needs, there remains a high number of young people in the EU who are neither in employment nor in education or training: NEETs.

High rates of youth unemployment and the socio-economic consequences associated with the NEET situation have led to an urgent need for policy intervention. By promoting opportunities to realize each young person's individual potential and preventing the effects of a prolonged NEET experience, the socioeconomic costs associated with this phenomenon could be reduced. For this reason, EU Member States have proposed measures that guarantee greater participation of young people in education and employment (Krauss et al., 2015)[2].

The different needs and characteristics of the various subgroups of the NEET population must be considered when designing policies to re-engage them in the labor market, education or training. Only an approach adapted to the needs of different subgroups can effectively reintegrate them (Eurofound, 2012). Identifying this heterogeneity and exploring the life trajectories that lead to the NEET situation will be an essential contribution to the definition of policies that promote change

In 2012, a specific Youth employment package was launched, which led to an increased focus on providing quality traineeships and apprenticeships for young people and called for the introduction of a 'Youth guarantee', designed to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 should receive a quality job offer, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. **In 2013, the 'Youth employment initiative' was launched: it was designed to specifically support young people not in education, employment or training in regions where the youth unemployment rate was over 25 %.** In October 2020, all EU countries committed to the implementation of the reinforced **Youth guarantee** in a Council Recommendation which steps up the comprehensive job support available to young people across the EU and makes it more targeted and inclusive, also when it comes to the challenges caused by the pandemic.

The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out 20 key principles and rights essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems. Principle 4 ('Active support to employment') states that 'young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education'. An overall commitment to an inclusive high employment rate is made by setting an EU-level target: the overall goal is that at least 78 % of the population in the EU aged 20–64 years should be in employment by 2030. In order to reach this goal a decrease in the rate of young people neither in employment, nor in education or training (NEETs) aged 15—29 years to 9 % is aimed at, namely by improving their employment prospects.

At the European and national level, several measures can be cited to increase skills in order to counter the NEET phenomenon. These include the **EU Council resolution on a strategic framework for cooperation in education and training for the years 2021-30**, which updated the targets for access to education and learning.

There are also the resources earmarked for skills development and retraining under the **European Social Fund Plus (EUR 99 billion between 2021 and 2027)**, those for the recovery and resilience facilities for member states, as well as the **Digital Europe, Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ programmes**.

In our desktop study partners gathered information about policy, interventions and measures aimed at reducing the risk of being NEET among young people in each country.

The more is the effort in terms of supporting young people to be active the more the results seems better, comparing the country.

But the good schemes of interventions to support young people are not enough if they are not well addressed to the young's changing needs.

NEET youth are a heterogeneous group with diverse life situations. This group includes marginalized youth (e.g., "hikikomori youth") and young individuals taking a gap year from their studies. Many of them may face social, health, and functional challenges that could lead to exclusion. Due to their individual situations, each young person needs to be approached as an individual with unique needs.

2.2.1 In Finland

Those with NEET status also experience higher than average levels of mental and other health challenges (Goldman-Mellor et al. 2016, O'Dea et al. 2014, Larja et al. 2016)[3]. When looking at risk factors for exclusion, studies highlight various challenges related to education, socio-economic status and well-being that make it difficult to stay in employment. These include lack of upper secondary education, health problems, lack of social relationships, prolonged unemployment, income support and intergenerational exclusion (see Sipilä et al. 2011, Aaltonen et al. 2015, Lehtonen & Kallunki 2013, Ilmakunnas et al. 2015, Paananen et al. 2019)[4].

The mental health problems of children and young people have been on the rise. The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions further exacerbated the situation. About 19% of upper secondary school students, 17% of vocational school students, and 22% of high school students reported experiencing moderate or severe anxiety. This represented an increase of six percentage points for vocational students, eight points for high school students, and seven points for upper secondary students. One-third of university students, and up to 40% of females, suffer from symptoms of anxiety and depression. According to the regularly conducted Kansalaispulsso survey since spring 2020, individuals aged 15-29 experience the most stress. In April-August 2020, 25% of young people reported experiencing a high or moderate level of stress, while for those aged 30-75, the figure was 16%.(Helakorpi Satu & Kivimäki Hanne, 2021)[5]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, long waiting lists for mental health services became a significant issue. The number of children and adolescent psychiatry patients waiting for over 90 days increased significantly in just two years. In 2019, there were 82 such patients, but in 2021, the number had risen to 330. The number of 16-24-year-olds receiving support for rehabilitation psychotherapy has also increased substantially. In 2021, over 15,000 young people received KELA's support for rehabilitation psychotherapy. In 2021, nearly eight percent of young people received reimbursement for antidepressant medication.

Suicides are one of the most common causes of death among young people aged 15-29. In 2021, 147 young people took their own lives, with approximately two-thirds of them being males.

This survey concerns all young people in Finland. They have experienced the following adversities:

- 46% have been bullied at school
- 35% have sought help for mental health and substance abuse problems
- 29% have experienced bullying outside school

- 25% have received minimum income support

- 14% have been in contact with child protection services - 16-18% of secondary school pupils and students experiencing frequent or persistent loneliness. Loneliness has increased significantly since 2019.(Kivijärvi 2022)

Policy adopted

Some of the measures and policies aimed at avoiding NEET status in Finland include:

- **Comprehensive Education System:** Finland offers high-quality, comprehensive education from pre-primary to higher education, which is accessible to all residents. This system helps ensure that young people have opportunities for education and skill development.
- **Guidance and Counseling:** Finnish schools provide guidance and counseling services to help students make informed decisions about their educational and career paths. This support helps students stay on track and make well-informed choices.
- **Flexible Education Pathways:** The Finnish education system offers flexibility, allowing students to choose from a variety of educational pathways, including vocational education and training (VET) programs, general upper secondary education, and apprenticeships.
- **Active Labor Market Policies:** Finland has active labor market policies in place to help young people transition from school to employment. These policies include support for job-seeking and job placement services.
- **Youth Guarantee:** Finland has implemented a Youth Guarantee scheme, which aims to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, or training within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.
- **Targeted Programs:** Various targeted programs and initiatives are implemented to support young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. These programs may provide additional support, mentoring, or training opportunities.
- **Monitoring and Research:** Continuous monitoring and research into NEET rates and the factors contributing to NEET status help policymakers make informed decisions and improve existing policies and initiatives.

2.2.2 In Portugal

In Portugal there are no significant differences between the NEET rate of boys (11.0%) and girls (11.1%) in Portugal, but there are relevant differences between young people born in Portugal (10.8%) and those/ young women born outside Portugal (14.5%).

Young people in this group (NEETs) have low qualifications due to social exclusion and early leaving of the education and training system, which creates difficulties in entering the labor market. At the moment, we have 8.5 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 classified as NEETs, young people who are not working, studying or attending any training, and are therefore in a situation of non-occupation. The number of "young NEETs" has fallen significantly, after standing at 13.2 per cent in 2015, with the highest percentage of "young NEETs" aged between 15 and 29. The incidence between the ages of 15 and 19 is lower due to the reduction in early school leaving. The majority of young people in this group have low qualifications as a result of successive social exclusions and early leaving of the education and training system, which creates difficulties in entering the labor market. The overwhelming majority of these young people are deeply marked by

situations of social exclusion and economic vulnerability. Motivating "young NEETs" into the training and education system and the labor market is very difficult, and the first challenge is to know who they are, where they are and how to reach them.

In this way, local communities can act as a network of support and help for these young people. Resilient communities are better able to respond to the difficulties encountered because they are close to these young NNETs and live alongside with their difficulties and needs. One example of how important it is to have communities that are connected to

In order to reduce social and geographical exclusion from an early age is the Ekusing Communities initiative. The Ekusing Communities initiative is an inclusive organization, made up of a transdisciplinary team, which works in small rural communities, both in person and through a digital platform. It involves and empowers children, families, schools and professionals so that they can autonomously recognise barriers in the learning and communication of their peers, children and pupils, based on a standardized manual.

BOX 1 - Implementing Organization

VERDEKUI - SOCIAL ACTION ASSOCIATION

It is an initiative co-financed by the European Social Fund, the Portugal 2020 Fund and the Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and Employment.

Its area of action is social exclusion, within the area of education. It is an initiative that falls within the Centre of Portugal region with total funding of €414.976: 70% comes from Portugal 2020 funding (€290.413) and 30% from Social Investment (€36.804 from

the Municipality of Fundão and €87.658 from the Municipality of Sabugal). As mentioned above, this is one of several examples of initiatives working in local Portuguese communities. There is still a long way to go, but there is no doubt that having a network of support, training and monitoring that reduces social and geographical exclusion, as well as helping with the early identification of mental health problems, is the basis for solving the problem of NEETs.

In Portugal we have 3 examples of good practices:

1. EPIS – Entrepreneurs for Social Inclusion
2. PIEF - Integrated Education and Training Program
3. “Escolhas” Program

All these measures aim to prevent early school leaving, but the “Escolhas” program also deals with the reintegration of young people who have left school early.

Some difficulties that promote the existence and increase of NEET are:

- Low socioeconomic status;
- Housing problems;
- Instability in population movements;
- Labor problems;
- Unemployment;
- Married women with more than three school-age children;
- Elderly and socially isolated men;
- Retired;
- Early loss of parents;
- Nuclear families (just parents and one or two children);
- Increased longevity (due to reduced stimuli in old age);
- Culture “inducing” feelings of guilt;
- Culture oriented towards the gratification of youth (through advertising, television, cinema) which can lead younger people to feel rejected and inferior;
- “Consumer society” in which it is often not those who behave socially in a positive way who are rewarded with high levels of consumption.

Currently, there is constant pressure against the large mass of workers that exist almost everywhere in the world. A threat with a clear objective makes thousands of people feel alarmed, as the only tool they have at their disposal, their workforce, can be dismissed at any time.

In Portugal, the study of NEET trajectories implies taking into account the situation of increased vulnerability in which a large number of children and young people find themselves who, for their

own protection, were placed in residential care and exploring how these trajectories of vulnerability intersect in the lives of so many young NEETs.

2.2.3 Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has the lowest rate of NEETs among young men in the European Union (with Netherland), but also the highest gender gap in the EU by this measure (25%). The lowest gender gap is in Portugal (0.5%). Inactivity status (not seeking employment nor taking part in education and training) is several times more popular among women than among men. Staying out of the labour market can be a necessity or a choice, depending on local circumstances (insufficient availability of nurseries, kindergartens and other caregiving institutions, lack or too limited number of attractive or at least sufficiently flexible employment options within the reach of available transport, cultural factors supporting “stay-at-home” maternity, etc). Activation project for caregivers, mostly women, need a specialised approach, including provision of care services to let the NEET them take part in activation projects and take up a job afterwards[6]

Upstream of all this can only be the education pathway, which must provide not only knowledge but also the ability to read the changing world and the ability to operate in it with a view to improving one's condition one's own condition. Early school leaving must be reduced and the ability to reduce inequalities must be increased. The basic message is that when the family fails in its educational role, the child cannot be left to his own devices, he must be taken care of through expert systems that recognise the specificity of his situation and envisage targeted actions to help him or her acquire not only technical skills ('know how'), but first of all of 'life skills', i.e. the ability to relate to others, to manage daily tasks, to implement positive behaviours to improve the quality of life. implement positive behaviour to improve their quality of life. The family/care responsibilities in which women have the overwhelming role is also the most common reason of being a NEET in the EU-27 countries – even among the very wide age group aged 15-29. In the Central and Eastern European countries the subgroup of young people (15- 29) who “stayed at home” due to family or care responsibilities was the biggest in Czechia.

2.2.4 Italy

In Italy we have a huge geographical differences: one aligned with the EU average, the other far behind. A gap that can often be traced back to the fault between the centre-north and the south.

The main key is to succeed in triggering a virtuous circuit in which training, youth employment development and innovation are mutually supportive.

ISTAT 2024 report shows that over the last two decades education in Italy has shown continuous progress, although large social and territorial differences in learning levels remain, which have widened during the period of distance learning necessitated by the pandemic.

By 2023, out of the total number of 15-29 year olds, the share of NEETs is 16.1%, down from 2022 (19.0%). However, four regions in southern Italy present values above 20 per cent: Sicily with 27.9 per cent of NEETs, Calabria with 27.2%, Campania with 26.9% and Apulia with 22.2%. The share of NEETs among young women remains higher (17.8%) than among men (14.4%). Breaking down the data by age group and gender, the different components that influence the overall share of NEETs emerge. The percentage among very young people aged 15-19 is minimal (7.0% for boys and 5.5% for girls), a sign of the greater integration into the education system, especially among girls. Among young people aged 20-24 years, the share of NEETs rises to 19.0% for both sexes, due to the high

For decades, surveys on the condition of young people have been carried out in Italy and study reports have been drawn up, sometimes on an annual basis (see, for example, 'The Condition of Young People in Italy. Rapporto Giovani 2023' by the Istituto G. Toniolo- Il Mulino. Ed. 2024). These surveys constitute 'population' studies that seek to examine the condition of young people as a whole, providing descriptions of their relations with the school/training system, leisure time, the labour market, social and family relations, participation, perceptions and experiences regarding the present and the future.

The characteristics of youth policies in Italy fully reflect the prevalence of a public policy culture strongly marked by a 'reparative' and welfarist approach, which is well testified to by numerous findings that point to a lack of specific projects and sometimes a failure to make use of funding earmarked for young people.

On the contrary, it can be stated with reasonable certainty that, in recent times, the attention paid to young people has gradually decreased. A few decades ago, numerous specific initiatives were launched, such as the Informagiovani projects, the projects pursuant to Law 285/1977, the numerous observatories aimed at preventing hardship, etc.

There is currently a 'Department for Youth Policy and Universal Civil Service' in Italy, but not all regions have specific legislation and resources.

There are interesting general provisions, such as the one on national and universal civil service (which, however, has recently undergone a reduction in funding) or other more specific regulations on employment, such as the 'Youth Guarantee' or initiatives to combat hardship, such as the school psychologist, or sometimes 'controversial' measures such as counselling counters or the 'psychologist bonus', but there is no unitary reference framework, and proof of this is the fact that there has been talk for some time of the need for a specific national law on young people, which should perhaps be enacted this year.

According to most observers, the main critical issues to be addressed seem to be the following

- the lack of an overall vision and the separation of systems (e.g. the educational system, the social system, the training and labour system, the health system, etc.)

- the separation between services for the age of development and services for adulthood, which has already been mentioned;
- the difficulty of offering 'light' responses capable of 'meeting' and stimulating the interest of young people;
- educational 'poverty' and the lack of aggregation contexts: in the whole city of Rome, for example, there is only one Informagiovani and no more than fifty aggregation centres;
- the difficulty of knowing and strengthening informal support networks (starting with those of peers).

2.3 Education and Active Policy are enough?

Being in a NEET situation can be described as a consequence and a defining characteristic of disadvantaged young people and young people at greater risk of social exclusion. Education is the most important variable and the one that most strongly influences the probability of being in a NEET situation, both individually and in family terms. Family context is an important factor in increasing the risk of becoming NEET, as is having divorced parents or parents with a history of unemployment.

Some of the measures and policies aimed at preventing the NEET phenomenon include giving all young people the opportunity to realize their potential and avoid the significant effects resulting from a prolonged NEET situation, as well as policy measures aimed at ensuring greater participation of young people in education and employment. These measures involve a wide variety of initiatives that intervene at different points along the journey, from formal education to employment, which includes measures to combat early school leaving; measures to reintegrate young people who have left early school into the education system; measures to facilitate the transition from school to the world of work and measures to promote youth employment, either by improving transversal and specific professional skills or by eliminating practical and logistical obstacles to employment.

Targeted interventions are also necessary, as young people excluded from the job market and education are extremely heterogeneous and form part of several subgroups, each with their own characteristics and needs. In this sense, adapted interventions typically require coordinated approaches and different forms of policy intervention.

Studies and research has shown that the young people not in education neither in employment or in active research of it have a huge, different, and complex needs. Moreover, research has highlighted that pandemia has particularly affected the well-being of those who were already

more vulnerable before the corona. These young people have experienced more loneliness and difficulties in seeking and receiving help.; Two out of three young people aged 15-24 who had used mental health services believed the corona would have a permanent impact on their lives. (Manner ym., 2023)[7]

There is a real need for empowering communities for young people.

Empowering communities can be part of the answer to the need described by the experts. There are long waiting lists for psychiatric care, but both experts agreed that it is not a lack of resources. On the contrary, the lack of interaction, the lack of attention to the patient's social and physical environment, and the fact that psychiatry also treats distressing and unpleasant situations that are part of normal human life, cause queues for access to treatment. Clients expressed a desire for open dialogue, maintaining hopefulness and a sense of community. (Valto 2023)

Resilience, loneliness, anxiety, stress, the challenges of learning, well-being and social relations; Isolating young people for long periods at home during the interest rate pandemic was not a good solution. Even in exceptional circumstances, it is essential to support young people's sense of community and belonging. The results of the EduRESCUE study of silent voices show that the corona pandemic significantly worsened young people's perceived well-being, increased loneliness and made learning more difficult.(Panula ym., 2023)

Among the most important trends in recent years are commonly reported:

- the increase in indicators of uncertainty and concern among the younger generations about the present and the future;
- the increase in signs of unease and actual mental suffering

2.4 Neet and mental health

There is a great deal of evidence that identifies the vulnerable situation of young people (even before the pandemic events) as one of the main critical issues facing our society.

Even before the pandemic events, it was possible to trace an extensive literature on the conditions of mental suffering of young people.

The dramatic events of the last few years (lockdown, war, energy crisis, climate crisis, etc.) have definitely brought out an even more dramatic picture that is recognised not only by mental health professionals, but by the entire community.

2.4.1 In Portugal

The link between unemployment and mental health can be addressed by making work positive for each individual. Let's look at some functions that are given by the job:

- Work imposes a time structure on the day;
- Work allows you to regularly share experiences and contacts with others;
- Work connects the individual to goals and purposes that transcend their own;
- Work defines aspects of an individual's social status and identity;
- Work reinforces activity;
- Work promotes safety.

In a situation of unemployment, these functions, which are crucial to mental health, can be affected or even lost.

Furthermore, there is a persistent belief that paid work is a socially acceptable means of earning a living, although there are a wide range of activities outside this context that can be equally rewarding. Unemployment affects not only the unemployed person himself, but his entire household and, in general, an entire community.

Research has shown that there are very close relationships between unemployment and changes in the level of mental health.

The condition of unemployment thus appears related to a set of negative results in the individual:

- Loss of happiness;
- Dissatisfaction with life;
- Low self-esteem;
- Generalized stress;
- Family discord;
- Anxiety;
- Depression;
- Substance abuse;
- Suicide.

As can be seen, a set of negative situations for the mental health of the unemployed person are present in relation to their professional situation.

In Portugal, there is a lack of epidemiological studies on the prevalence of mental disorders, although in October 2013, the 1st National Epidemiological Study Report on Mental Health was published. In this study, some of the results obtained: Caldas de Almeida et al (2013) “ (...) More than 1 in 5 of the individuals in the sample presented a psychiatric disorder in the 12 months prior to the interview. This prevalence is the second highest at European level, with a value almost equal to that in Northern Ireland, which occupies first place.”; “A significant number of people (almost 65%) with a psychiatric disorder have not had any treatment in the previous 12 months.”; “Portugal is one of the countries with the highest use of psychotropic drugs, especially among women.” (...).

The comorbidity between depression and anxiety is significant, thus affecting the severity of symptoms. Studies carried out in Portugal registered a strong correlation between depression, anxiety and stress. The evidence shows us, and as proven in the 1st Report of the National Epidemiological Study of Mental Health, Caldas de Almeida et al (2013) “Anxiety disorders are the group with the highest prevalence in our country (16.5%)”. Anxiety is part of what is considered normal, as a response to situations that appear threatening or challenging. Although this, if it is intense, persistent or inappropriate, it can negatively affect people's daily lives and have serious personal and social implications, due to the physical and emotional disability it causes.

2.4.2. In Finland

Mental health and substance abuse problems and disorders significantly increase the risk of social exclusion among young people and may contribute to intergenerational disadvantage. Moreover, especially for those under 18 who are out of education and work, there is an increased risk of developing mental health and substance abuse issues. Among young people who are not in education or employment, mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, and suicide risk) and disorders (mood disorders, anxiety disorders, psychosis, neurodevelopmental disorders, conduct disorders, features of borderline personality disorder) as well as harmful substance use (alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs) are remarkably common.

There are plenty of young patients Adolescent psychiatry wards are overcrowded in all five major hospital districts. The number of referrals of young people has increased dramatically, while at the same time the length of stay has decreased. Young people's discomfort spills over into the help channels run by NGOs. For example, children and young people aged 7-15 contact the SOS Children's Village Helpline a hundred times a day.(Ojala Ulla, 2022)

Young people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders or psychosis, who have not completed secondary education, are at particularly high risk of social exclusion. Other risk factors for social

exclusion include neurodevelopmental problems, learning difficulties, involvement with child protective services, and experiences of institutionalization and placement. In addition to mental health and substance abuse issues, NEET youth often face other challenges, such as exposure to violence, financial problems, and involvement in criminal activities.

Unlike physical illnesses, work disability due to mental health and behavioral disorders (including substance use disorders) is more common in younger age groups because these disorders typically develop at a younger age than physical health conditions. The number of 18-24-year-olds receiving sickness allowance due to mental health and behavioral disorders in Finland has increased over the past decade and was around 3% of the entire age group in 2021. The proportion of 16-24-year-olds receiving disability pensions due to mental health and behavioral disorders has also slightly increased.

The risk of cumulative problems is highest for young people who were in a NEET situation at the ages of 17 and 18. As the situation prolongs, the risk of social and psychological problems significantly increases. Just one year in a NEET situation increases the risk of social and psychological issues. With a prolonged situation, young people's use of services also increases. For example, NEET youth use specialized psychiatric healthcare services more frequently than their peers of the same age. The use of psychiatric medications is also common among them. Despite using more services, mental health services are perceived as inadequate, according to both the young people's own experiences and the professionals who assist them.

According to Finnish young people, barriers to seeking or accessing mental health and substance abuse services include:

- Lack of information or guidance
- Waiting for referrals or the absence of referrals
- Lack of timely assistance or otherwise inadequate services
- Inflexible appointment times
- Unwelcoming facilities
- employee unfamiliarity
- Unfriendly or dismissive treatment by staff
- Staff not answering calls or follow-ups
- Geographical distance from services
- Costs associated with service utilization

- Reactions or protecting parents

Additionally, young people may not seek help or access services due to reasons such as not recognizing or downplaying their own problems, fear of not being taken seriously, anxiety about reaching out or attending appointments, fear of the consequences of service use, embarrassment about needing services, and feeling guilty about taking someone else's place in services.

In the 2021 School Health Survey, 16-18% of upper secondary school students and secondary education students reported experiencing loneliness often or constantly. It is important to note that the number of those experiencing loneliness had significantly increased compared to the 2019 survey, where the corresponding percentage was 10-12%. (Helakorpi Satu & Kivimäki Hanne, 2021)

Previous research has repeatedly suggested that unemployment is linked to feelings of loneliness (e.g., Välimäki et al., 2020). This is also evident in the barometer data. Among the unemployed, a significant 29% felt that the definition of frequently experiencing loneliness applied to them at least fairly well. Obvious consequences of unemployment include a lack of workplace interaction in everyday life and often feelings of being marginalized.

According to Noora Knaappila, Silja Kosola, and Riittakerttu Kaltiala (2021), problematic behavior (referring, for example, to heavy drinking, smoking, cannabis use, delinquent behavior, and bullying) is more common among young people in families with greater socio-economic disadvantage. Additionally, positive mental health levels have been found to be lower in families with lower economic status and education levels (Appelqvist-Schmidlechner et al., 2019). Children and young people placed outside their homes also experience lower well-being, particularly in terms of mental well-being, substance use, and experiences of violence compared to other young people (Ikonen et al., 2020).

2.4.3 In Czech Republic

The National Action Plan for Mental Health until 2030 (hereafter NAPDZ) is an implementation document three strategic documents. It establishes specific procedures for fulfilling those parts of the Psychiatric Care Reform Strategy 2013—2023 (MZd, 2013) where there are obvious implementation deficits. He is one from the implementation documents of the Czech Republic 2030 Strategic Framework approved by the Government of the Czech Republic and, last but not least, develops a specific area of the parallel emerging Strategic Framework for the Development of Health Care in the Czech Republic until 2030 "Health 2030" (item no. in preparation for submission to the Government of the Czech Republic for approval) incl. implementation plan (Implementation of integrated care models, integration of health and social care - section for mental health care reform).

Affecting mental illness is a complex and challenging: some literature shows how to contribute to the expansion of knowledge and to the reduction of the ambiguities that in many ways still accompany mental illness. (Miroslav Orel Na Freuda nemám čas, doktore).

The reform of care for persons with mental illness consists in shifting the focus of care from the elderly psychiatric inpatient facilities towards the client in his natural environment. This process started in a number of economically and democratically developed countries already in the sixties of the last century. The backbone service for the care of people with mental illness directly in the community has become community, multidisciplinary teams that began to form a new functional system. In the territory of the Czech Republic, in the area outside of hospital services, a system of psychiatric services existed for a long time dispensaries and a certain number of day care centers, however, community services have begun to a greater extent develop only after the fall of the "Iron Curtain" in the nineties of the twentieth century. Mostly they were established by non-governmental non-profit organizations. The team members were mainly social workers, workers in social services. These teams have already implemented a work approach based on the key principle workers (case management) and were oriented towards longer-term support of people with more serious mental illness. Support focused on all areas of needs of people with severe mental illness disease. These teams also started working on the principle of "catchment area". (MUDr. Jan Pfeiffer, Bc. Gracián Svačina, Mgr. Kateřina Povolná, DiS., Ing. Jan Mikulenka, Bc. Michaela Loudová, DiS., Simona Řičáňková *Centrum duševního zdraví a jeho role v systému péče*)

2.4.4 In Italy

According to the latest survey by Telefono Azzurro 1 in 5 children feel anxious, and for 1 in 3 asking a mental health expert for help is a source of shame.

In Italy, some sources testify to substantial increases (of about 3 times) in requests for help from adolescents (see e.g. Borgatti R. 2021)[8].

Manifestations of mental suffering range from extreme social withdrawal (hikikomori), to severe eating disorders, generalised anxiety, to full-blown psychotic outbursts. Epidemiological findings also point to an increase in self-harming behaviour and suicide attempts.

There is also an exponential increase in signs of inadequacy linked specifically to the education system, such as certifications of specific learning disorders and, as already mentioned, school drop-outs and drop-outs.

In the face of such a problematic picture, the condition of young people's mental distress remains mainly submerged and the institutional response appears to be absolutely insufficient.

In this regard, in brief, the main problems in Italy concern

- the scarce socialisation and learning opportunities for young people with mental distress in contexts outside the strictly healthcare circuit;
- but at the same time the poor propensity of mental health services to intervene early and with a preventive perspective;

- the lack of 'low-threshold' experiential opportunities capable of stimulating young people's interest in expressive, artistic and sporting forms;
- the organisational/operational separation between mental health services for the developmental age and mental health services for adulthood;
- the scarcity of funding for mental health in the developmental age: only in the latest NAPSM (National Mental Health Action Plans) is there an explicit economic reference to services for childhood and adolescence, but within overall availability that is not increasing;
- the inadequacy of networking and aggregative contexts, of cooperative approaches and of the enhancement of peer support.

According to most observers, the main critical issues to be addressed seem to be the following

- the lack of an overall vision and the separation of systems (e.g. the educational system, the social system, the training and labour system, the health system, etc.)
- the separation between services for the age of development and services for adulthood, which has already been mentioned;
- the difficulty of offering 'light' responses capable of 'meeting' and stimulating the interest of young people;
- the difficulty of knowing and strengthening informal support networks (starting with those of peers).

2.5 Methodology suggested by experts and studies

The heightened importance of friends and acquaintances has been considered a distinctive feature of adolescence, which was also evident in the interviews we conducted with young people. In this article in the Youth Barometer 2022, Antti Kivijärvi and Riikka Korkiamäki highlight how friendships are strongly related to the resilience of young people.(Kivijärvi, 2022)

According to the data from the School Health Survey, experiences of loneliness are constantly increasing as students transition from elementary to secondary school and further to vocational or upper secondary education. The significance of in-person meetings in preventing loneliness appears strong. Regular phone conversations and online communication, on the other hand, are

not statistically significantly associated with experiences of loneliness. Therefore, one can consider that recurring face-to-face meetings are an indication of the closeness of relationships and their well-being-producing power.

A young person committed to using services tries to solve their problems and feel better through the services. Often, this is successful. When young people are asked what has helped them, they do not mention professional groups or service sectors but rather human encounters with a safe and supportive adult.

Benefiting from services often requires a comprehensive understanding of the young person's situation. Young people's mental health, substance abuse, and neuropsychiatric problems are strongly intertwined, and in addition, there are often various concrete life situation-related questions to be addressed. Comprehensive support for young people requires cooperation among different professionals and service providers. However, network work aiming for comprehensiveness and cooperation requires clearer coordination.

The diverse situations of young people often required the combination of different working methods. Ideally, a young person's situation was managed by combining, for example, municipal social work and a non-governmental organization's social rehabilitation. Young people often needed various forms of simultaneous support: in addition to regular meetings with social workers or healthcare professionals, they found value in support persons, outreach work, low-threshold meeting places, and digital communication options. The comprehensive handling of young people's challenges appeared to be a safe situation for them, where they could focus on building a more balanced life.

From the young people's perspective, problems in changing services were sometimes catastrophic: missing services could drop a young person who had already received help back to the bottom, cause a young person to interrupt their studies, lead to self-destructive behavior, and take away years of their youth. Transitioning a young person from one service to another and providing support before the start of a new client relationship are responsibilities that should be clearly divided among service providers. (Huhta et al.).

In Portugal, the study of NEET trajectories implies taking into account the situation of increased vulnerability in which a large number of children and young people find themselves who, for their own protection, were placed in residential care and exploring how these trajectories of vulnerability intersect in the lives of so many young NEETs.

Deliberate self-harm is a form of self-injurious behavior. Like alcohol and other substance abuse, binge eating and starvation can serve as a coping strategy, a relaxation-inducing technique, an escape from painful reality, or a toll on social interaction. Therefore, following a deliberate self-harm should be understood as a serious problem and evidence of deep psychological discomfort that requires the attention of experts and the wider public. Its occurrence is also increasing in the Czech Republic, and the public media are beginning to take an interest in this

issue, but the level of awareness of the lay and professional public is still rather low. The publication "Deliberate self-harm in childhood and adolescence" is the first Czech monograph and is primarily intended for experts who encounter this phenomenon in their practice. (Marie Kriegelová, *Záměrné sebepoškození v dětství a adolescence*)

Changes in Young People's Leisure Time during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Researchers' Recommendations:

1. The importance of leisure time for the well-being of young people must be acknowledged.

Young people come from diverse backgrounds, and some of them have more limited opportunities to engage in meaningful leisure activities. Special attention and support should be provided to these young people to enable well-being-enhancing leisure activities. Good leisure time means different things to different young people – they should be allowed to define it for themselves. Young people should be consulted on various leisure-related matters, and a variety of spaces and forms should be provided to support good leisure time. (See also Kauppinen & Laine 2022, 68.) Different forms of leisure should not be valued but treated as alternative and complementary dimensions of young people's well-being-supporting activities.

1. Young people must be guaranteed versatile leisure spaces and an adequate number of safe adults.

This should be done while taking into account the privacy and space needs of young people. Urban planning should consider young people's right to public and semi-public space and arrange them to be inclusive and inviting for young people as well. Over the long term, the number of youth centers and spaces has decreased (see Kivijärvi et al. 2022, 21). However, the number of youth centers and spaces should not be reduced – quite the opposite. They should be located close to their users. Youth centers and spaces offer young people a safe and low-threshold place to hang out and engage in hobbies, as well as interactions with trusted adults in situations where home is not a good place to be. There should also be an adequate number of safe adults for young people in other public and semi-public spaces. For example, mobile youth work is important as it goes to the spaces that young people prefer for their own leisure time activities (see Tormulainen & Kauppinen 2022, 10–12). The need for online youth work has also increased in a time when young people's social relationships and leisure time are increasingly intertwined with digital spaces. Young adults need their own, free-time spaces since their leisure time needs differ from younger age groups. The opportunities for leisure activities provided by organizations are important to consider when promoting young people's well-being-supporting leisure time. They complement the alternatives provided by the public sector and commercial operators.

2. Any potential future restrictions must be reasonable from the perspective of supporting young people's well-being during their leisure time.

Youth is a special and unique life stage in which peer relationships and togetherness play a significant role. Encounters among young people must also be preserved during exceptional circumstances. Youth involves important transitions, and these transitions include communal events, celebrations that restrictions should not hinder. Young people should be listened to and consulted when creating possible restrictions. During a pandemic or pandemics, the right of older youth to engage in hobbies must also be ensured. Low-threshold participation should not be compromised in the future, as giving it up deprives some young people of the only way to participate in activities that interest them. Youth centers should not be closed entirely. In possible future exceptional situations, ways should be found to enable even small groups to meet at youth centers – for those for whom youth center activities and adult supervisors are essential for their well-being. The closure of leisure spaces and the isolation of young people from each other cause various fractures in the well-being of young people, which our society cannot afford.

The mental health crisis among young people deepened, and young people still haven't received the help they need

Researchers' Recommendations:

1. Local and basic services for children, young people, and families must be supported.

Early support services are crucial in preventing congestion in specialized services. Therefore, the threshold for early support should be low, and services should be as accessible as possible, and efforts should be made, for instance, in school-related work. Likewise, supporting youth and school-based youth work helps bring assistance as close as possible to those in need. A national therapy guarantee should be fully implemented.

2. Targeting support to young people who already face challenges.

To prevent the growth of well-being disparities, services should be developed so that people whose functional capacity is already compromised do not require special activity to access services. Targeted support helps prevent the exacerbation of inequality and its negative consequences. The availability of mental health services should also be guaranteed for young people who are not in work or education.

3. Services must take into account the specific needs of young people.

A young person seeking help should be supported at every stage of the service path. Services should be able to adapt to the young person's situation and provide sufficiently intensive support. The stability of structures and staff should be developed, as they enable long-term client relationships that enhance the quality of assistance. Accessibility should take into account the

communication tools used by young people, and staff should be trained to interact with different young people.

Various means are needed for hearing the voices of young people, which cannot be developed during a crisis.

Researchers' Recommendations:

1. The diversity and uniqueness of youth should be considered in decision-making.

The period of early independence should be better taken into account during crises. Young adults should also be regarded as a special group who may not yet have the same resources or opportunities for participation in crises like the adults. Support and understanding are needed for this delicate life stage when individuals are still finding their own paths.

2. To ensure intergenerational dialogue, there is a need for active and well-functioning systems that hear a variety of voices.

Creating such systems during a crisis is much more challenging. The direct contact of socially and economically disadvantaged children and young people with decision-makers and the audibility of their voices could be improved. Interaction also requires youth-oriented communication.

3. Participation must not be a rubber stamp; young people must genuinely be present in decision-making.

Sustainable decision-making is based on the participation of young people, and opportunities should be provided for young people to participate in decision-making in meaningful and safe environments. The opportunity to participate in decision-making about their own future is crucial. Participation increases the sense of meaning and hope for the future. The responsibility for the well-being of young people rests with adults."

Tips and suggestions from the desktop study (good practices ecc.)

Recommendations for policy:

- 1) A low-threshold youth service in every municipality
- 2) A trusted worker and a single plan for each young person
- 3) A link between stages and continuity of support
- 4) Future support instead of income support
- 5) The youth support system should be managed as a whole

(Määttä & Määttä, 2015)

The results of this report confirm the already existing view that special attention should be paid to the situation of families, children and young people who are at risk of social exclusion or exclusion from services. Measures should focus on developing services that are accessible to all on an equal basis. The findings of the report confirm the results of previous studies on the need to invest in low-threshold support and preventive services. For young people, particular attention needs to be paid to mental health support, both in preventive and low-level support services, as well as in therapeutic and restorative services. (Majlander ym., 2023)

Supporting NEET young people requires smooth cooperation between the education provider and the NGOs. This cooperation can develop flexible services that meet the needs of young people and create new inclusive approaches. (Lignell & Naakka, 2023).

<https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

Sławomir Nałęcz, *Young adult NEETs aged 25-29 in Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia*, YOUTH IMPACT project, https://www.youth-impact.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Expert-study_3.pdf

Situation of NEET (Portugal)

Young people in this group (NEETs) have low qualifications due to social exclusion and early leaving of the education and training system, which creates difficulties in entering the labor market.

At the moment, we have 8.5 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 classified as NEETs, young people who are not working, studying or attending any training, and are therefore in a situation of non-occupation.

The number of young NEETs has fallen significantly, after standing at 13.2 per cent in 2015, with the highest percentage of young NEETs; aged between 15 and 29. The incidence between the ages of 15 and 19 is lower due to the reduction in early school leaving.

The majority of young people in this group have low qualifications as a result of successive social exclusions and early leaving of the education and training system, which creates difficulties in entering the labor market. The overwhelming majority of these young people are deeply marked by situations of social exclusion and economic vulnerability.

Motivating young NEETs into the training and education system and the labor market is very difficult, and the first challenge is to know who they are, where they are and how to reach them.

In this way, local communities can act as a network of support and help for these young people. Resilient communities are better able to respond to the difficulties encountered because they are close to these young NETs and live alongside with their difficulties and needs.

One example of how important it is to have communities that are connected to each other in order to reduce social and geographical exclusion from an early age is the Ekusing Communities initiative.

The Ekusing Communities initiative is an inclusive organization, made up of a transdisciplinary team, which works in small rural communities, both in person and through a digital platform. It involves and empowers children, families, schools and professionals so that they can autonomously recognise barriers in the learning and communication of their peers, children and pupils, based on a standardized manual.

Implementing Organization

VERDEKUI - SOCIAL ACTION ASSOCIATION

It is an initiative co-financed by the European Social Fund, the Portugal 2020 Fund and the Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and Employment.

Its area of action is social exclusion, within the area of education. It is an initiative that falls within the Centre of Portugal region with total funding of €414.976: 70% comes from Portugal 2020 funding (€290.413) and 30% from Social Investment (€36.804 from the Municipality of Fundão and €87.658 from the Municipality of Sabugal).

As mentioned above, this is one of several examples of initiatives working in local Portuguese communities. There is still a long way to go, but there is no doubt that having a network of support, training and monitoring that reduces social and geographical exclusion, as well as helping

with the early identification of mental health problems, is the basis for solving the problem of NEETs.

3. WHAT IS AN EMPOWERING COMMUNITY?

3.1 Definition of empowerment

The empowerment method is an approach that emphasizes the support and development of individuals' abilities to gain more control over their lives. Also the development of communities that gain more self-confidence and hope that they can work for a better environment in which they live.

Julian Rappaport, a expert in the concept of empowerment, defines this method as a process by which individuals, communities and organizations gain more control over their lives and environment, enabling them to achieve better outcomes and quality of life. According to Rappaport, empowerment is more than an individual state or characteristic; it is a dynamic process involving different levels and contexts. Key aspects of its definition include:

1. Control and influence: Empowerment involves gaining control over one's life and the ability to influence decisions that impact the individual and their community.
2. Involvement and participation: Emphasis is placed on the active involvement and participation of individuals and communities in decision-making processes. Rappaport emphasizes that people need to be involved in the processes that affect their lives in order to feel empowered.
3. Sharing Power: Empowerment involves the sharing of power and authority between individuals and organizations, enabling people to have greater influence over their environment.
4. Development of competencies and capabilities: The process of empowerment involves supporting the development of skills and capabilities of individuals and communities to be able to effectively use new opportunities and resources.
5. Social Justice: Rappaport also emphasizes the aspect of social justice where empowerment means creating fairer and more equal structures and systems that allow all people access to power and resources.

The authorization method is also recognized by the World Health Organization, which defines the method as follows:

Empowerment is the extent to which a participants can make decisions, influence and control events in their life (WHO, 2010)

3.2 Definition of community

Community (from Latin *communitas* – community) does not have a single definition. Professor Matoušek (2003), a prominent Czech scientist, defines community as follows: "community is a place where a person can receive emotional support, appreciation and practical help in everyday life". A community can be local, such as a neighborhood or village, or it can be virtual, such as an online community. The traditional form of community is considered to be family or kinship.

In sociological thinking, the community is a central form of social and societal organization. Classical sociology highlighted the view that the continuity of social life is based on economic exchange relationships, political agreements, and state-controlled coercive power, in addition to community-maintained values and norms. Sociology was thus developed as a field of science specifically to study communities and their moral nature (Aro, 2011).

The concept of community has countless meanings. According to Leena Kurki, the community has a central significance in sociology; so central that the theoretical history of sociology can even be understood as the history of the invention and study of the ideological community (Kurki, 2002). The subject of sociological research is the functioning of the ideological community, which manifests as values and norms, in various and varying sizes of human groups. The starting point in defining the concept of community remains that members of a community must have something in common.

Kangaspunta defines in his book that the foundation of a community is, for example, economic, political, or regional factors. Additionally, communalism can be based on kinship, interests, beliefs,

shared activities, interaction, socializing, hobbies, worldviews, preferences, or even emotions. Communities can also be classified according to their goals, such as care communities, and the nature of interaction, such as ideological communities (Kangaspunta, 2011).

A community is referred to as a social relationship through which social activity is guided by people's shared goals and values (Kurki, 2002). This means that individual members of the community, as well as the community as a whole, have the same interests and needs. People come together for a specific purpose. Charles Vogl defines the concept of community even more strictly: "A community is a group of individuals who share a mutual concern for each other's well-being" (Vogl, 2016).

When discussing the empowering effect of communities, it is essential to also introduce the concept of a therapeutic community. It is one approach in community treatment for the care and rehabilitation of psychiatric patients and substance users. In this context, facing and addressing internal challenges of the community form an essential part of the community's daily life. In a therapeutic community, activities are based on collaboration among people: regular meetings between management, staff, and clients on various collaborative platforms. Community meetings, staff meetings, and various group activities are organized. On these platforms, common rules are created, adherence to them is monitored, violations are addressed, conflicts are resolved, and the community is developed. The most significant therapeutic and rehabilitative power lies in these diverse human relationships and community activities. (Murto, 2003)

In this book, an empowering community refers most closely to Kurki's view of a community, meaning that all members of the community have a common interest and need that unites them. In other words, people have come together for a specific purpose. The purpose of a community designed for NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth could be, for example, increasing participation, social empowerment, and making future plans. The activities and atmosphere of an empowering community are such that they enable the participant's inner sense of strength to grow.

3.3 Community spirit

In sociology, a traditional communal social bond is defined as a sense of belonging, a kind of "social sentiment" (Kangaspunta, 2011). This means that in community spirit, the emotional experience of belonging to a community is crucial. For classical sociologists, the contradiction of modernization was about what the communal bond between people could be based on when traditional communal ways of life are accompanied by new forms of modern sociality (Aro, 2011).

Community spirit can be experienced, for example, when members share values and principles, have common internal and external experiences, and express solidarity with each other's failures or successes. In a community based on friendship, individuals are not isolated, but they have not lost their individuality either. There is a balance between individual personality and group pressure. Cooperation is voluntary, and people are able to adjust their personal goals while working towards the group's objectives (Kurki, 2002).

The foundation of communal relationships includes affectionate, emotional, or traditional elements. Examples of communal relationships include religious brotherhood, personal loyalty relationships, national community, and the camaraderie of a military unit. A typical community is a family. However, these relationships can also involve rational societal characteristics. Conversely, even the most instrumentally profit-oriented shopkeeper may develop some kind of emotional relationship with their customers. A communal social bond is formed between actors only when their sense of belonging also leads to actions during which they orient towards each other reciprocally as actors (Aro, 2011). It is not enough for people to consider each other friends; they must also act like friends towards each other to establish a social bond.

Charles Vogl defines a community in his book "Art of Community" as a group of individuals who share a mutual concern for each other's well-being (Vogl, 2016). Such a community differs from a group whose members share ideas, interests, proximity, or anything else, but do not care about each other's well-being. These non-communal groups can be large, such as various civic organizations, professional unions, or even supporters of a sports team. These groups may share many interests and goals, but their members do not necessarily have strong social connections with each other. Vogl believes that when we feel that community members care about our

well-being, we start to feel connected to them and are thus ready to invest more in building the community.

3.3.1 On the Concept of Community Spirit in English

In English, there are also numerous parallel terms for community spirit, some of which emphasize more functionality, while others emphasize feeling. The overarching concept, community, is translated as "community" in English, while the term community spirit can be described by the following words: communality, sense of community, and community spirit. The term sense of belonging is also closely related to the feeling of community spirit. Although all terms are related to community spirit or the experience of community, they have slight differences in their meanings.

Communality generally refers to how much something is shared or communal. It can relate to resources, values, or experiences that are shared within a particular group. The term does not necessarily involve a strong emotional bond but can simply mean that certain things have a common feature or characteristic.

Sense of community, on the other hand, refers to a personal experience or feeling of belonging to a community. This feeling often arises from sharing common goals, values, or experiences with others. The sense of community can be strongly tied to the emotional experience and sense of belonging within a particular group.

Community spirit describes the spirit or atmosphere of a community, especially one that encourages cooperation, support, and solidarity. This term often refers to a positive and energetic atmosphere that arises when individuals collectively support each other and work towards common goals.

Sense of belonging, in turn, refers to when an individual feels part of a group, community, or place, creating a sense of connection and belonging. This feeling can arise from family, a circle of friends, school, a work community, or other social connections.

In summary, communality is a more objective concept, sense of community is a subjective experience from an individual's perspective, and community spirit describes a positive and

cooperative atmosphere in a community. Of these, perhaps the best equivalent to the Finnish term for community spirit is sense of belonging.

3.3.2 Community Spirit as the Opposite of Loneliness

The flip side of the weakening of the communal social bond is the increase in individuality. Aro states in his book that the classics of sociology saw individuality as definitely civilizing, enriching culture, good, and worth preserving. At the same time, they pointed out that the growth of individuality and the differentiation of society could lead to problems. These include Tönnies' view that in *Gesellschaft*, relationships between people are potentially hostile and calculative. Durkheim, in turn, believed that in the modern world, there are no longer such communal organizations that guide people's lives and through which people could collectively defend their interests against the anonymous powers of the state and markets. Simmel saw individuality being realized in modern urban life both as liberation from class-based constraints and as an opportunity for individual creativity and uniqueness. However, he also pointed out that urban life can lead to problematic forms – indifference, loneliness, and exaggerated individualism (Aro, 2011).

Communities and the sense of belonging they provide are still important to people today, part of their identity, and a desired characteristic. In modern society, community membership is more freely chosen than before. At the same time, community spirit has become lighter and less binding on the individual. Membership in these communities is based on a common interest or hobby, and members may not otherwise interact with each other. This concept has also been examined as the theory of social worlds, developed by David Unruh and Anselm Strauss (Aro, 2011). People can be members of various communities, or social worlds, which may have nothing in common with other communities. In these communities, a person can present the aspects of themselves that are relevant to the shared interest. The degree of commitment to such communities also varies. The good thing about these communities is that a person's social status does not necessarily affect participation. The reason for belonging to these communities may simply be the desire to meet others interested in the same things. Often, however, trust-based and genuinely reciprocal relationships form in such communities.

3.3.3 Community or Cult

Sometimes a community that has succeeded in creating a sense of community and perhaps even friendship among its members may appear to outsiders as a closed inner circle. This can be the case even if the community is genuinely open to all who share its values. On the other hand, a seemingly warm and friendly association may turn out to be more of a cult than a community genuinely concerned about each other's well-being.

Vogl presents some points in his book where it is worth waking up to the fact that something may be wrong in a community. The first noteworthy points relate to leadership. It may be a cause for concern if the moral decisions of the leader cannot be questioned, if the community requires strong commitment to the leader or the community's ideology, or if expressing dissent is punished, and in extreme cases, members may be expelled from the community. In cults, members may also be encouraged to sever ties with people outside the community, such as family and friends.

Another point of concern, according to Vogl, is if leaving the community is made challenging. The group may make it difficult or even impossible for an individual member to leave the community. This can be done through physical, emotional, or psychological threats, blackmail, or financial manipulation. In a healthy community, members can leave whenever they decide that their values no longer align with those of the other members. In a cult, the worldview is polarized. The group has a "us versus them" mentality towards the rest of the world. This is the opposite of a healthy community, which sees itself as part of the world and strives to make the world a better place. Within the cult, it is believed that its exceptional status and important goals justify using any means to achieve them. These means can be unethical, disapproved, or even illegal.

3.3.4 Reflection

Community and community spirit are two closely related but still somewhat different concepts. A community refers to a group of people who share common values, goals, interests, or a living area. A community can be local, like a neighborhood or village, or it can be virtual, like an online

community. A community consists of individuals who interact with each other and can be organized in different ways.

Community spirit, in turn, refers to how individuals feel they belong, participate, and are committed to their community. It relates to individuals' sense of belonging, shared values, and responsibility for each other. Community spirit emphasizes interaction, participation, and a sense of connection among community members.

3.4 Concrete examples of communities

Portugal

There are various types of communities in Portugal, and they can be extremely different from each other. While some are centralized, hierarchical and formal, others can be decentralized, horizontal and informal. Here are a few examples so that you can better understand the types of communities that can be found in Portugal.

3.4.1 Intermunicipal Communities

Metropolitan areas were established in 1991 as individualized spaces, but it wasn't until 2013 that the legal regime for intermunicipal entities in Portugal was established, which includes both metropolitan areas and so-called intermunicipal communities.

Intermunicipal communities are free associations of municipalities, through the creation of a higher sub-regional entity (supramunicipal), to which the associated municipalities delegate part of the functions or competences conferred on them by law, with the aim of providing services to all of them, aimed above all at solving common problems and which are therefore of a cross-municipal geographical scope. For this reason, these supramunicipal entities are an example of economies of scale (a reduction in the unit cost of a service or good as a result of an increase in the number of paying users), because in a broad sense, it is easier to implement strategies when they are concerted between several municipalities, reaching a wider territory and number of users.

Given their inter-municipal competencies - in the planning of educational supply networks, health units, school transport, promotion of sub-regional tourism, management of projects financed with European funds and management of investment attraction programs - inter-municipal communities are effectively an example of complementarity, interdependence and territorial cooperation. An example of an Intermunicipal Community is CIMBAL - Comunidade Intermunicipal do Baixo Alentejo (Intermunicipal community from the region of Baixo Alentejo). CIMBAL is a legal entity under public law of an associative nature and territorial scope, and aims to achieve the common interests of its member municipalities. The Community is made up of the municipalities of Aljustrel, Almodôvar, Alvito, Barrancos, Beja, Castro Verde, Cuba, Ferreira do Alentejo, Mértola, Moura, Ourique, Serpa and Vidigueira. CIMBAL corresponds to the Level III Statistical Territorial Unit (NUT III) of Baixo Alentejo and has its headquarters in Beja. Without prejudice to the duties transferred by the Central Administration and the municipalities, CIMBAL aims to pursue the following public purposes:

- a) Promoting the planning and management of the economic, social and environmental development strategy of the territory covered;
- b) Articulating municipal investments of inter-municipal interest;
- c) Participation in the management of regional development support programs, namely within the scope of the National Strategic Reference Framework - NSRF;
- d) Planning the actions of public bodies of a supra-municipal nature.

3.4.2 Rural communities

A rural community is the name given to people who develop and live in the countryside, far away from urban centers. The concept can refer both to the people themselves and to the people who live there. Rural communities make their living from agriculture or livestock farming. In general, these are regions where industry is not developed and the economy is therefore quite precarious. Another characteristic of rural communities is their weak infrastructure. Unlike cities, rural communities tend to have dirt roads and lack street lighting, internet connections and other services. Public services are therefore limited to the bare minimum. There are governmental and local efforts to attract more people to these communities, particularly through birth incentives and home ownership, in order to repopulate the regions where they are located and make them more dynamic. This is exactly why we have many digital nomads joining these communities. One

example of a rural community focusing on renewable energy is Aldeia de Ilha. The Ilha Energy Community is located in the north of the district of Leiria, in the municipality of Pombal, and already has more than 40 members, including private individuals, companies, associations and IPSS as consumers. Producers who belong to this community have the opportunity to increase the area in which they can install solar panels up to 10,000 m² of roof space. With the expected increase in the number of neighboring consumers within a maximum radius of 2 km, it is also hoped that there will be more producers and also more organizations willing to make their roofs available.

3.4.3 Concrete example of community Trigon association, Czech republic

Czechia

Community building in the Czech Republic involves a variety of processes and approaches that reflect the needs, interests and values of the people involved in these communities. This process may involve several steps and factors:

1. Historical and cultural factors

- Traditional village communities: in historic villages, communities are often formed around agricultural activities, local customs and cultural traditions. Common festivals, craft markets and local associations play an important role in maintaining community life.
- Regional identity: In certain regions, such as Moravia, Silesia or South Bohemia, communities are formed on the basis of a shared regional identity, dialects and specific cultural traditions.

Customs and traditions:

- Feast: An annual celebration associated with the patron saint of the local church, including a procession, mass and joyful celebrations with dancing and music.
- Mardi Gras: Celebrations before the beginning of Lent including processions of masks, dancing and feasts.
- Costume festivals: events in which people wear traditional Moravian costumes and participate in folk dancing and singing.

Community attractions:

- Costumes: Specific traditional clothing for different occasions.
- Folklore groups: Groups of people who maintain and present traditional dances and songs.

2. Social and economic factors

- Associations and organisations: Many communities are formed around various associations and organisations that offer cultural, sporting or social activities. For example, the Sokol, firefighters, hunting clubs or wine clubs in South Moravia.
- Social enterprises and NGOs: NGOs play a key role in supporting people and creating communities that provide help, support and opportunities for social integration.

3. Educational and leisure activities

- Scouting organisations: The “Junák” Scout Movement offers children and young people opportunities for personal development, learning new skills and building strong community links.
- Cultural and artistic communities: Theatre groups, music bands, art workshops and festivals often serve as centres of community life where people share their interests and creativity.

4. Religious and spiritual factors

- Parishes and religious societies: Parishes and religious societies often provide spaces for meeting, support and shared activities. Religious communities play an important role in shaping social and cultural life in many communities.

5. Environmental and sustainable activities

- Ecological communities: groups focused on ecology and sustainable development, such as environmental organisations, create communities around environmental activities and conservation campaigns.
- Ecovillages: communities focused on sustainable living, organic farming form around ecovillages and projects focused on self-reliance and organic farming.

6. Digital and online communities

- Online forums and social networks: In modern times, online platforms and social networks play an important role in community formation. People connect based on shared interests, hobbies or professional activities through online forums, social networking groups and dedicated websites.

7. The Roma community

The Roma community in the Czech Republic is one of the major ethnic minorities with a rich culture and traditions. The Roma have a long history and their culture is very varied and diverse. Here is an overview of some aspects of the Roma community in the Czech Republic:

Customs and traditions

1. Family celebrations and holidays:

- o Christenings and weddings: very important events that are celebrated with a large number of family and friends. These celebrations include music, dancing, lavish feasts and traditional costumes.

- o Roma Vardos: A celebration of family and ancestors that may include special rituals and ceremonies.

2. Music and dance:

- o Music: Roma music is known for its rhythmic and melodic elements. Traditional instruments include the violin, dulcimer, guitar and accordion. Music is an integral part of many Roma celebrations and events.

- o Dance: Traditional Romani dances are energetic and express joy and emotional experiences.

3. Traditional clothing:

- o Roma costumes are often colorful and ornate. Women wear long skirts and colorful scarves, while men may wear vests and hats.

The rules of the Roma community

1. Strong family cohesion:

- o The family plays a central role in Roma life. Intergenerational support and respect for elders are very important. Family ties often influence many aspects of daily life and decision-making.

2. Traditional values and practices:

- o Respect for traditional values, such as hospitality, respect for ancestors, and adherence to family traditions is key.

4.4 In Finland, a typical community is a leisure activity association

Finland is a promised land of associations: in a country with a population of 5.6 million, there are over 100,000 registered associations. A typical Finnish community is often an association: a sports club, hobby organization, cultural association, or civic organization where participants volunteer around a common interest. Finnish associations are diverse and play a crucial role in enriching people's social lives and promoting community. They offer opportunities for active participation and community building in many areas of life.

Sports clubs are very popular in Finland. They can focus on various sports, such as ice hockey, football, skiing, or athletics. They provide not only exercise but also a sense of community and social activities for members of all ages. Sports clubs are often an important part of local identity and community.

Hobby organizations can focus on any shared interest, such as crafts, gardening, hunting, or photography. These associations offer members the chance to gather, share experiences, and learn together.

Cultural associations focus on music, theater, art, or literature. They organize concerts, exhibitions, reading circles, and other cultural events. Such associations can be significant promoters of local cultural life and offer members opportunities to participate in and experience culture together.

Civic organizations often operate on a voluntary basis and focus on issues like environmental protection, human rights, animal welfare, or other societal topics. They may organize campaigns, events, and other activities aimed at addressing societal issues and promoting the common good.

4.5 In Italy the relevance of territorial network services (welfare community for young)

Territorial service's network for young people is multifaceted, providing significant benefits that span education, career development, mental health, social inclusion, and overall well-being. The network is mainly focused on specific needs and target.

Examples of Territorial Service Networks in Action are:

- *Informagiovani (Youth Information Centers)*: These centers provide information and services on education, employment, and leisure activities, tailored to local youth needs.
- *Youth Guarantee (Garanzia Giovani)*: A European initiative implemented at the regional level, offering job search assistance, training, and internships to young people.
- *Universale Civil Service (SCU)*.

Among them the SCU is a very relevante initiative. This is a voluntary program that offers young people the opportunity to participate in social utility projects both in Italy and abroad. The main objective of SCU is to contribute to the personal and professional growth of volunteers while promoting solidarity, cooperation, and community improvement. Following the main characteristic:

Target: Young Italian citizens, citizens of European Union countries, and non-EU citizens legally residing in Italy from 18 to 28 years old (up to the day before their 29th birthday).

Duration: SCU typically last between 8 and 12 months.

Fields of Intervention:

- **Environment:** Projects focused on environmental protection and the preservation of artistic and cultural heritage.
- **Education and Cultural Promotion:** Educational and cultural initiatives aimed at various targets, including children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.
- **Assistance:** Support activities for people in difficulty, such as the elderly, disabled, and migrants.
- **Civil Protection:** Prevention and emergency management interventions.
- **Development Cooperation:** Sustainable development and international cooperation projects.

Volunteers receive both general and specific training related to the chosen project. The training covers both theoretical and practical aspects. Moreover young people receive a monthly allowance (approximately 439.50 euros) and insurance coverage. Some universities recognize educational credits for the activities performed during civil service and SCU provides an opportunity for personal and professional growth, enhancing the participants' resumes.

4 How we are using empowering method for now

4.1 Empowering community - how is this method used in TRIGON - Czech Republic

The role of the mental health center staff is to empower the client. He often comes to us in a situation where he feels hopeless, is passive and does not want anything. With comprehensive care, we gradually get to the point where he is able to solve things completely independently. Ultimately, full recovery requires people with mental illness to gain some meaningful role in their lives that has nothing to do with their illness. Being a victim is not a role worthy of a recovered person, and frankly, neither is the role of a survivor. Newly acquired attitudes such as hope, confidence and greater responsibility for oneself must be applied in the "normal" roles of employee, son, mother, neighbor and the like.

It is important for people to join the wider community and socialize with those outside the spheres associated with mental illness. Meaningful roles will end isolation and help people with mental illness recover and 'get their lives back'. From our experience, the following topics should be worked on in the journey to human empowerment:

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OURSELVES We begin to believe that we can change many things in our lives. We look ahead to what we want as well as what we don't want. To reach our goal of recovery, we begin to do things ourselves. But we also accept help from others. As people with mental illness gradually recover, they realize that they must take responsibility for their lives. This means they need to start taking "healthy risks", trying new things and learning from their mistakes and failures. It also means that they have to let go of the feelings of guilt, anger and disappointment that are somehow associated with their illness. This stage is very difficult for people with mental illness and their service providers. There is a need to break old patterns of dependency, supporting clients to take 'charge' instead of remaining in the easy and safe role of 'cared for'.

EMPOWERMENT We are set up to accept help. But we hope that someone will solve the problems associated with the disease for us. In order for people to make progress, they need to believe in their own abilities and to be aware of their own power. Their hope needs to be focused on what they can do for themselves, rather than relying on new drugs or treatment methods that someone

else will introduce or provide. To feel empowered, they need access to information and the ability to make their own decisions. They may need support at first so that they can begin to focus on their strengths instead of their losses. Sometimes they will need someone else to believe in them before they are confident enough to believe in themselves. "Readiness" often comes only in hindsight, that is, after something has been accomplished. Therefore, waiting until a person with a mental illness is ready to take a step forward can often lead to stagnation and "de-illness". People often have to experience success first before they believe they can be successful.

HOPE We do not feel able to face problems. We have trouble accepting help. We may experience a sense of hopelessness and a feeling of being "stuck" in the disease. Anyone experiencing despair needs to feel hope, some sense that things can and will get better. Without hope there is nothing to look forward to and nothing positive can be done. Hope is a great motivator, but to be truly motivating, hope must be more than an ideal. It must take the form of a concrete, reasonable vision of what it could be like if it were better. It is not so much that people with mental illness should achieve the exact vision they create, but that they have a clear idea of what is possible, as a result of which they can more easily accept complex changes and make steps forward. It is possible that a person with experience of mental illness may return to the "lower rungs" several times. Even such a journey, if it is well processed and grasped, can be a significant experience. Recovery is a normal adaptive process following tragedy, just as grief is a normal adaptive process following loss. Indeed, many people in recovery describe going through the stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) as part of the recovery process. However, both of these processes often complement each other. People with experience of mental illness themselves see the following areas as key: **KEY AREAS FOR RECOVERY WORK WITH HOPE** "IT WAS IMPORTANT TO ME THAT SOMEONE BELIEVED IN ME WHEN I DIDN'T BELIEVE IN MYSELF YET." Being open to all possibilities for one's future life path is important, that is not foreclosing certain possibilities because one is going through or has gone through an experience with mental illness.

DEVELOPMENT OF STRENGTHS Attention is paid to the development of a person's potential and talent. To what one can, more than what one cannot.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH Human support is focused on all areas of life (housing, finances, work, free time, social, partner – family life, personal and professional growth, etc.).

4.2 Empowering community - how is this method used in Check-IN (Portugal)

Check-IN works in close cooperation with public and private entities, actively participating in quality of life improvement activities.

The NGO aims at promoting lifelong learning opportunities, to encourage and promote social integration, education for sustainable development and social entrepreneurship. Check-IN is actively involved and collaborates with various entities in various projects and activities aimed at promoting inclusion.

Check-IN cooperates with Raizes in the development of different activities. The focus is on promoting inclusion mechanisms for children, young adolescents and young adults, especially between the ages of 9 and 25, in central areas for their personal, school, professional and community development, not neglecting the specifics of the socio-economic context of these audiences and their families.

The main objective is to develop projects and activities that seek to minimize and reduce factors of exclusion and social inequalities, according to an approach of a holistic way of working with and for children, young people and their families, enhancing the added value of the relationship with the different generations. accompanying the various children in the key moments of their life in the school context, in family mediation, in professional training and in job support.

This follow-up is achieved through the development of skills in the field of sport, culture, art, recreation, values of environmental sustainability and active citizenship. The results obtained with several young people attending university, others in the job market after completing their vocational training and many others who have returned to school after leaving are undeniable indicators that lead the associations to levels of success recognized by public members and users.

Description of the process

One of the main focuses is that of social and digital inclusion. This digital divide refers not only to lack of access to digital resources but also to digital illiteracy. For this reason are planned different activities, which tend to favor the following aspects: the acquisition of school skills; professional training; identity and better inclusion of participants; training to be agents of change in the face of a problem; digital autonomy and the competent use of information.

Regarding the different methods and activities, we can list, as an example, the following ones:

- Support the school's radio activity, where it is contemplated the creation of a space for citizenship, with a view to greater participation and action of the school community in the reflection and resolution of scholastic and/or global problems;
- Promotion of academic success and the mobilization of cultural, scientific and technological knowledge to understand reality and deal with everyday situations and problems.

In each situation, problems are analyzed and then there are solutions and practices that can be useful to overcome them. As an example:

A)Problem: Weak personal, social and civic skills that make interpersonal relationships difficult.

B)Good practice/Solution: Informal activities that promote the development of personal, social and civic skills; local actions e inter institutional efforts to improve the security situation in the neighborhood; Initiatives that promote coexistence between cultures; Preventive actions of vandalism, violence and promotion of equality.

A) Problem: Digital exclusion and illiteracy

B) Good practice: Digital literacy actions with a view to developing digital skills; Promote the use of ICT in a way responsible and ethical in the light of digital citizenship; facilitate digital access; temporary assignment of computers or tablets for access, training and consolidation of learning in the field of ICT, as well as the exercise of the right to digital culture.

Similarly, it is possible to turn to the private sector in order to obtain the donation of computers and information equipment, building up a bank of resources which will be available to the various customers, in order to be able to overcome the difficulties in acquiring this resource, and to ensure that, in case of need for isolation, confinement or any other adversity, they will be able to stay connected (On) and socially included.

Values

A) Honesty

This value is the foundation on which to build everything. If a person is joining a community in which honesty is a fundamental value, they feel encouraged to be honest too. Honesty is attractive as it allows the other person to open their heart, share their ideas, getting closer to the other members of the community.

B) Trust

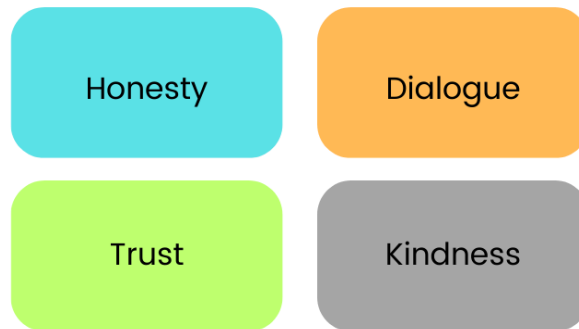
Working in an international context is a unique opportunity. The idea is to create an environment as if we were one big family, where every person who enters knows they can rely on everyone. The people who work here are always available to provide support, to have a chat.

C) Dialogue

Communication plays a key role in every area. Many times, when there are people belonging to different cultures and another language is spoken (for example, English), everything could become more difficult: then, it is easy to fall into misunderstandings. And that's why it is important to underline the fact that dialogue plays a key role, because communication helps different people to meet and understand each other.

D) Kindness

It is key to understand that kindness is essential for our survival as a society. Kindness holds communities together by creating and strengthening relationships among people, therefore helping everyone live harmoniously despite the differences (experiences, backgrounds, etc).



Challenges

The territory of intervention of the project is limited to Ameixoeira (in Lisbon), an area that includes an entire area of resettlement and clandestine housing where multiculturalism emerges. This factor, although it can be enriching, is also a factor of risk and vulnerability: This area has a high concentration of young people characterized by indicators lower than the national average, in terms of education and employment which are aggravated by the poor structure and organization of the community with limited resources.

Immigrants and people facing different problems are organized in numerous aggregates and single parents (mother), in overcrowded rented accommodation, with legal situations still to be resolved. They often experience situations of violence and discrimination motivated by racism, showing high demotivation, low self-esteem and an academic self-concept substantiates his educational paths of failure and dropping out of school, and in the search for precarious jobs.

Most empowering aspects

Regarding the most empowering aspects, it is possible to list the following ones:

Knowledge Pays

A) Activity to support and promote study methods that can be organized both online or in person and is carried out with the collaboration of volunteers from different consortium partners. As results of the process to which this activity contributes: enhance the involvement of children, young people and their families in activities that promote educational and training success as well as promoting school success

B) GAP (Psychosocial Monitoring Office)

This is another action that provides individualized care for children, young people and families for psychosocial support and coaching school and it is performed twice a week. The main objective of this is promoting school success, as well as forwarding to education/training responses

C) + Community

This activity could be seen as a service to the community with a view to providing information and support in resolving social issues.

As result, it wants to promote the reduction of stereotypes (territory, ethnicity, gender, religion, orientation sexual, etc)

4.3 Empowering community - how is this method used in Sosped Foundation (Finland)

"A Culture House is a kind of platform for action, where the participants create the content. The workers are the maintainers of the platform."

The activities of Culture House Virta are aimed at young adults aged 18-35 with a mental health challenge or other challenging life situation. Activities are based on the Culture House model, i.e. it is based on guided functional peer support. In practice, this means that the Culture House has a variety of functional groups run by trained volunteer peer tutors. The peer facilitators receive support and guidance from the Culture House staff according to their needs. The model is based on a rehabilitation approach that focuses on the person's resources and interests rather than on the illness. It emphasizes functionality over speech through community and peer interaction.

The aim is to use creative group activities to find natural tools for developing life skills and improving social capacity. The content of the groups is designed together with the peer tutors and participants according to their interests. Themes include among other things music, visual arts, crafts, games, excursions, events and exercise. The key is a creative, open and safe atmosphere. Staff support the groups, but the majority of group action is done by peer facilitators. The activities are voluntary and free of charge.

The Culture House model is participatory in its approach: anyone interested in joining is asked what they would like to do and is either directed to a suitable existing group or, if one does not exist, an effort is made to organise one. Similarly, peer tutors decide for themselves what kind of group to start running, and plan the group's activities independently, with the support of staff if necessary.

Community spirit is an important part of the Culture Houses. Almost all the activities take place in groups, with other young people in the same type of situation. Culture House is a warm and safe environment, where young people dare to come, regardless of their difficult backgrounds and life situations.

It is a real low-threshold activity: you can come without a diagnosis or referral, and there is no form of income that prevents you from coming. It is up to the young person to decide how and in which activities to participate, and how long to stay. As the young person's strengths increase and if he or she asks for it, the Cultural Centre will provide guidance on how to move forward in life.

The Culture House concept

At the heart of the Culture House is functional peer support. It consists of three important elements: peer-to-peer support, functionality and professional support. The Culture House trains peer tutors, volunteers who want to lead their own group. The peer tutor training is a training course of about seven weeks, which covers personal resources and strengths and the basics of facilitating a group. After the training, peer tutors will lead groups or other activities according to their own interests. The Culture House groups are functional, so although they are led by peer tutors, they do not focus on talking about mental health challenges, but on creative activities. The third element is professional support, which also plays an important role, although it is often seen as rather tacit support. Professionals consider that there are opportunities for all groups: a suitable place and time and materials available, but also provide emotional support, for example through mentoring sessions. Therefore, it can be said that Culture House is a kind of platform for action, where the participants create the content. The workers are the maintainers of the platform.

A summary of the Culture House process

1. ENCOUNTER. In the Culture House model, the attitude and the way in which the individual who applies for an activity is encountered is essential. We focus on building a relationship of trust and making the young person feel heard and cared for. The participant's own voice is heard right from the first meeting, when we ask them what they are interested in and what they would like to do in the Culture House. Participation does not require a diagnosis or a referral, but the participant's own experience of mental distress is enough.

2. EMPOWERMENT IN ACTION. We offer creative group activities and a sense of community – as well as the opportunity to lead your own group. All activities are voluntary. The activities focus the young person's attention on something other than life's challenges – we consciously shift the focus to resources and opportunities. Staff take an interest in each participant's issues and interests, and engage in discussion through open dialogue. The aim of group activities is to strengthen social skills.

3. GUIDANCE FORWARD. We also provide individual guidance and support in life change. When the young person is ready to move on, we help them to access the services they wish to access. Most often, this means applying for an educational institution or a job, but vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitative work placement or work try-out (or internship) is also an option for many.

Values of the Culture House

1 Volunteering

All activities at the Culture House are based on volunteering. There is no referral to the Culture House and no separate contracts for participation in the activities. You will be invited to the House through an introductory visit, where you will be informed about the activities and, if you are interested, we will conduct a short initial interview, after which you are welcome to join the House whenever you want. Volunteering is also reflected in the fact that the young person decides when to come, which activities to take part in and how. They can be a group leader, an active participant or even just come to observe the group's activities.

2 Inclusion and participation

Every participant in a Culture House is also an active participant, i.e. practically all young people take part in the group activities according to their own capacity. A Culture House is also a community, so when a young person becomes familiar with a Culture House, it often becomes a group to which he or she can belong and thus experience inclusion. Everyone also has the opportunity to contribute to the activities of the Culture House by requesting different groups, coming up with ideas and guiding and organizing activities. The Culture House also has a community meeting system, which means that people come together to discuss and decide on common issues. The information flow is open and targeted to all.

3 Resource orientation

The Culture House does not set out to fix what is broken in a person but focuses on the healthy side of the young person, looking together for resources and strengths and making them visible. When young people are given the opportunity to try out different activities and work on things that interest them, they can discover new aspects of themselves and new skills. It is also proven (*annual participant survey) that many other aspects of life management are strengthened.

4 Peer support

The focus of the Culture House is on the peer tutors and when we talk about peers, the background is that the majority of people have mental health challenges or otherwise challenging life situations, but peer is also seen as a strength in the Culture House, which means that people have common interests such as playing in a band or doing art. Of course a similar experience in the background peer is also associated with a genuine encounter, walking alongside and understanding.

5 Hope

The Culture House maintains an atmosphere of hope, with a focus on recovery. Tomorrow holds the promise of a better, more meaningful life. We take small steps towards our own dreams. Many people who come to the Culture House Virta say their main hopes are to find more resilience, balance in their lives, find their own path and make new friends.

4.4 Empowering community - how is this method used in Il Grande Carro (Italy)

Mental Health Day Centres in Italy and soft-skills study

The functions of Day Centres are clearly described in the “Mental Health Action Plan”. This represents the normative reference for Mental Health Services in Italy, following the Basaglia Law after which psychiatric hospitals were closed. In the Mental Health Action Plan it is stated that, through rehabilitation treatment projects, patients experience and learn how to take care of themselves in everyday life, in interpersonal e group relationships. They also take training activities for work placement. (National Mental Health Care Action Plan 1998-2000).

Day Centres represent one of the paramount services for the assistance of mentally impaired people. Each Mental Health Department should have one, together with Mental Health Centres, psychiatric services, hospitals, communities, and group homes.

You cannot enter Day Centres without a complex project agreed and defined by the Mental Health Centre, which will organize the care assistance. Day Centres deal with treatment and rehabilitation, prevention of hospitalization, and much more. They can be defined as intermediary places between services and interventions, between inside and outside, before and after, thoughts and actions, static and dynamic proceduralism. They are intermediate horizons among extreme ones, and can allow convergence and integration, i.e., a *Fusion of Horizons* (Gadamer) between individuals and contexts. Since they are halfway structures, they should be transitional, and include a variety of goals, organisational arrangements, solutions, and activities.

The experience conducted in Rome (that also “Il Grande Carro” Cooperative belongs to) has its own features because it:

- Is financially supported by the Local authority that favours inclusion and other health and social aspects.
- Promotes network and activities in the local community.
- Focuses on social and work integration through social cooperatives.

Many surveys on Day Centres have witnessed positive outcomes not only in terms of decreasing hospitalizations, drug treatments and family responsibility, but also in terms of increasing self-empowerment and number of patients who have succeeded in getting a rewarding job thanks to social cooperatives.

The study on soft skills

During the years the Day Centres for Mental Health have been subjected to a series of assessments that have provided meaningful contribution in different directions.

Among the various experiences, which the Social Cooperative Il Grande Carro particularly actively participated to, it is worth highlighting a deep research and action work that has involved operators in Daycentres and integrated social cooperatives of Lazio together with ISFOL (former Workers' Educational Institute of the Ministry of Labours), which was carried out through focus group and other analysis techniques.

The study lasted around 3 years, at the end of which a book was published in 2013 with the title: "The soft skills of the Mental Health équipes".

A model of soft skills emerged that characterizes the work of all the professionals that deal with people in the Centres. We are talking about social skills whose main feature is the fact that they come from a common work in the field that belongs to all the experts, no matter if they are psychologists, educators, nurses, administrative staff, regardless of their roles or functions they have and the services their Centre provide.

Soft skills are shared skills, which means they are common, and non-specific, because they do not belong to a specific profession, but they are distinctive of the relationship that each staff member establishes with the user in the Centre.

A list of soft skills that has been identified includes:

Teamwork: working well with others as a group rather than individuals, valuing cooperation rather than competition, sharing objectives and working on a common project.

Learning to unlearn: getting rid of “defensive” cage and being open to dialogue and reception.

Communication: learning and using a wide range of communication tools and techniques to inform, to build positive relationships with others, promoting new behaviour to obtain support and alliance.

Self-awareness: managing oneself and handling interactions effectively, especially under pressure, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Providing a perspective based on reasonability to manage difficult or conflicting situations.

Empathy: listening carefully and understand thoughts, reasons, feelings and worries even when they are not openly or completely expressed by the speaker. Understanding, or trying to, the reasons of the other person’s behaviour even when this is complex, twisted, ambiguous.

Adaptability: being flexible and working in different situations with different people; understanding and welcoming different and contrasting perspectives on a problem. Managing time, plans and activities prioritising according to the constantly changing needs of the situations.

Creativity: finding pragmatic, original, creative, astonishing but effective solutions to tackle problems, critical and complex situations.

Letting grow: letting people develop and realize their potentials, realistically evaluated, through guidance and support.

Being result-oriented: being motivated to reach a fixed goal with patience and optimism, without giving up. Trying to dig deep into the root of matters, seizing opportunities and realistically adapting paths and rhythms to the ability of the people involved in a project and to the success achieved.

We believe that this makes the difference between simple professional qualification and competence. It does not refer to educational background but to the “climatic broth” they are immersed in.

This is in our opinion the most effective way to recognize the primacy of groupwork: the best tool to counter the hyperspecialized and neo corporatist models that are somehow disrespectful towards suffering and probably unsuited to relieve it.

We think that part of the future of the services depends on the real and effective enhancement of workgroup and groupwork. It is necessary to create and improve the opportunities to understand and describe how cooperative learning works, and it is for this reason that we consider this kind of ability as the principal background for training.

This is where we can build new professionalism, starting from the inadequacy of the bio-medical paradigm.

4.5 Case story from TRIGON, Czech Republic

I am 23 years old. Everyone around me tells me that I am a psychiatric patient. But I don't think so. I may be strange, different, but that doesn't mean I'm a psychiatric patient right away. When I was a little girl, I lived with my parents. They got divorced and I didn't really see my father much and I don't remember him. When I started living with my mother, it was very difficult. We argued together. She didn't understand me and I didn't understand her either. I lacked support a lot in my childhood. Later, I started studying hairdressing and graduated in this field. I wanted to finish my

matriculation exam, but at that time I started hearing voices in my head. I sometimes talked to them out loud and everyone else thought it was strange and started telling me I was weird. My friends and acquaintances stopped talking to me. My mother became ashamed of me and secretly took me to a psychiatrist. I immediately started taking medication. Mom moved out to live with another friend and I stayed in the apartment alone, where my conditions started to worsen. One day I ended up in a psychiatric hospital. I don't remember anything, I just woke up and there were white walls everywhere and the doctor in a white coat was telling me that I had a psychotic attack and destroyed all the things in the apartment. I was in the hospital for about 3 months. I don't want to talk about this experience at all, I didn't like it there. When I was released and I came home, she didn't recognize anything. Everything was broken, scattered. I didn't know where to start. I had no money or desire to do anything. I went to the store to eat, I always ate there and then left without paying. My friends helped me a lot and they once brought me to an organization called TRIGON.

The situation now

I have been using a therapeutic workshop since I was 19 years old. There is a good community of people with similar problems to me and I understand them. I started coming to Trigon regularly, first once a month and later every week. I sewed blankets, we created various products, which I later sold. The most important thing for me was that I had the trust of the social workers, when I suggested something and others agreed with the idea, we tried it. In some cases, it happened that my idea didn't work out, but others didn't criticize me, and I could learn to improve from failure. Later, I started working at Trigon and received a salary every month. It was my first job. I was so happy with myself and all the more I tried not to disappoint others around me. There were situations when I didn't want to go to work, I heard voices again, but I told myself that I had to overcome it. Such a chance must not be wasted. From the beginning I had a big problem with money, I didn't know how to plan, so for the first three days I lived like a queen, I bought everything I liked, and the other days I lived a poor life and sometimes I even stole. I knew I was doing bad things, but I was hungry. I had no one to tell or confide in. I was angry with myself and often cried. I asked my supervisor if he could help me, we agreed that he would divide my salary and I would receive a part every week. That helped me a lot. Now I manage to get paid once a month and I will go out. I currently clean at TRIGON and also still go to therapy workshops, I feel safe here and also that I can confide in myself. I'm not afraid of the future, but I'm still very sorry for how I behaved in the past, I won't do anything about it anymore, but I blame myself for my thefts, drug use, betrayals of my loved ones, I know I've let a lot of people down.

About the importance of community

As a part of my community, I see TRIGON in the first place, I have friends, my superiors, colleagues there. I also have an online dating site where I mainly chat with guys. It's definitely better to have friends with whom I can go out, but when I'm alone at home I miss communication, so I text people on the PC. I really like to write about music or any artistic field such as painting. I have such

a community on the Internet. We philosophize with people I've never met, we talk about various proposals, situations that would be good to capture either with a drawing or a photograph. I write with people who are either sick or healthy and I don't notice any difference in communication. The most important thing for me is the feeling that I belong somewhere and that the environment accepts me as I am. I feel useful. In my job, I get paid as an expression of a job well done. On the online chat, I get feedback that people communicate with me, thank me or develop communication, this is very important to me, and in therapy workshops I get praise for the work done. All of that is important to me and it makes me feel good and it makes me feel like I have something to offer.

Characteristics of a good community

In order for the community to be strong, honesty is important in my opinion, because when each of us feels that whether we say what is pleasant or unpleasant to us, it is necessary to know that a person can say it. Another important thing is a sense of belonging, so that the community has one circle of things to work on and all members have something in common, such as friendship, working on a joint project, a good feeling of meeting, whatever. The third area is communication. Each member should be able to say what bothers him, what makes him happy, and others should be able to listen. Communication is difficult for me because I am sometimes afraid that I will say something stupid and inappropriate. Sometimes I'm afraid that others will laugh at me. So I think some safety in the community is also important. It occurs to me that it is important for the individual to have the opportunity to influence the community. For example, if someone can draw nicely so that they have the opportunity to present their work and have the opportunity to supplement the joint work with their drawings. All of this is related to the fact that every voice must be heard and everyone must feel that they are a full member of the community.

4.5 Case story from Check-IN, Portugal

The situation before joining Raizes

Before starting my adventure in the community/family of Raizes, I was a boy who attended school and played soccer. I grew up in a drug neighborhood, a pretty insecure place. I was influenced by this world, as I didn't trust people from other cultures. I got stressed a lot spending time with people who were different from me: I had little confidence and wanted to take refuge in my own world, to escape from this situation. This is why I tried to spend as little time as possible in these parts of the city and I took refuge in football, where I gave vent to all my energies.

Once I joined this project, I changed completely. A world opened up to me, where I discovered volunteering activities, workshops and laboratories, with many cultures. Something I never imagined, with people I never thought I'd know and share so many moments with. It opened my eyes, seeing all things from another perspective, understanding myself much more, trying to see things from different points of view and meeting so many people that I always carry in my heart.

How is the situation now

Entering this world has taught me many things. As a youngster I was more insecure and having grown up in an environment where I didn't feel comfortable and there was always a fear of meeting people. So I discovered myself, my passions came out, my inner strength, I understood many things. Some time ago I bought a house, where I currently live. If I just think back to a few years ago, it seems like an impossible thing. Instead, since I have been part of the community, I have resumed studying and obtained a degree. Today I work in the crew of an airplane: I feel very good relating to so many people. I'm still very attached to the community where I grew up, that's why I try to always be in contact with them (even if it's not always easy because of the job I have today): every time I go back there I feel at home and it's a pleasure every time meeting friends, acquaintances and people with whom I have shared important moments of life.

Importance of the community

Becoming part of a community like the one I was lucky enough to meet is something I wish for every person. It made me grow as a person and as a man, it changed my perspective on life. Within this community I have found people I trust completely and who even today, after so many years, are fundamental in my life. I try to find and take advantage of every possible opportunity to spend time together, because I feel it is an added value. These people have become like brothers to me: always ready to help you, always smiling and available. It is not a community, it is a real family. It's amazing to find out how people so different from each other can become such friends. Being part of a community where we feel at ease, where we can discover ourselves, with all our strengths and weaknesses, is priceless. I will never stop thanking them for welcoming me from the first moment.

Characteristics of a good community

One of the key characteristics of a good community is having people who care about you. They are always available, always ready to help you. You can see them often, or a little more rarely, but you know they're always there. A constant presence: many times you don't have to look for them, they understand that you need something. Closely connected to all of this is the empathy that arises between them: this is one of the main aspects on which an entire community rests. Another characteristic that distinguishes a good community is its interest in the future. We live in the present which is the moment that counts, but at the same time it is essential to have a vision, a direction where we want to go, to build something (a bond, an idea, a project, small or large) together: this can create even stronger and more stable bonds.

4.6 Case story from Sosped Foundation, Finland (man 29 yo)

Time before coming to the Culture house

Before I came to the Culture House, I was enrolled at a university of applied sciences, but my studies were stuck and I couldn't really complete anything. I didn't have the energy to go to school

and spent most of my time alone at home. I saw friends now and then, but they also have their own lives. I was also afraid of burdening my friends with my own problems. My life was lonely, dreary, monotonous. On the other hand, I had time for hobbies, and at least I started my own YouTube channel. But life was overshadowed by a lack of social life.

In addition to loneliness, I had depression and anxiety, and a general bitterness towards the world. The pandemic put further strain on my already overstressed mental health. On the other hand, the realisation that I was living such an isolated life, with little impact from the pandemic, also depressed me. Eventually I went to the student health centre and told them I needed something to do and company. They suggested a Culture house among other activities; it sounded to me like what I needed, so I got in touch and came for a visit. I've been involved for just over a year now.

The situation now

Participating in the Culture house activities has given me, in particular, the social company and a certain affirmation of myself and my actions that I have always longed for. Just the other day, people came up to me and praised me so much that I was blushing. I have also received positive feedback and a feeling of being seen. For my part, I try to maintain a nice vibe in the Culture house, so it's great to be seen and to be able to say it out loud.

Here I have the opportunity to make music, visual art and share my enthusiasm for movies. It has given me back the drive for goals and dreams; the feeling that I have something I can take forward. It's a big change just to talk about these things out loud. Nowadays I'm constantly trying new things: here at the Culture house I've unexpectedly gotten involved in things I never thought I would do, even if it felt like it would be cool. For example, I've ended up rapping on a song, and recording it for the studio.

At the moment, though, it's a pretty stressful time in my life because I'm turning 30 this year, which means that a lot of services for young adults, like NUOTTI coaching, will end for me. I still need support to battle with bureaucracy and make various applications. The kind of 'getting my arse off the bench', i.e. getting things done better, already having company to do it with. I need to talk to someone about my affairs from time to time.

On the other hand, I've learned to see the value in the volunteer work I do at the Culture house and what I do with my own Youtube channel. I would be quite happy with my situation if I could get some money from this. I feel like the world doesn't appreciate what I do.

I have a few good friends, and I have a little more open relationship with my family now than I did before. For the most part I get on well with people, but I'm afraid I'm a burden on others. Sometimes I can lose my concentration in large crowds, and sometimes I find myself overloaded. The communities I belong to are important to me: a few online communities and a Culture house. I was recently told that I was the "soul of the Culture house"; that felt good.

On the importance of the Community

For me, being part of a community means not being alone and having my values seen. When I can make a concrete contribution to the community, it gives me something to do and something to live for. The most important thing about peer-to-peer interaction is that there is not a higher authority watching, but that people have similar experiences. The great thing about Culture house is, for example, that you are allowed to be silent in a group or that people understand that there may be problems with time management. Some people are able to show their feelings, even cry, in front of others. That's important. If there is a clear authority in the community, then they need to be consistent and even-handed in their approach.

It is very important that a community member can trust his or her co-workers: otherwise you cannot create a good and functioning community. At the same time, it is also important to trust participants: for example, we were allowed to keep the Culture house open all by ourselves when the staff were on Christmas break.

For me, inclusiveness means inviting everyone to participate. The Culture house is largely open to everyone for all meetings; of course there are some things only for the peer leaders, but on the other hand, everyone can apply for training if they want to be peer leaders. Anyone can get involved in decorating the common space or outings and events – there are very few any gates that need to be opened before you can act and decide.

Characteristics of a good community

A sense of community is built by being listened to and seeing your impact on the community in a tangible way. This can be the case, for example, when your suggestions are discussed together. And being able to raise issues and being invited to participate in activities. It's important to have open doors and transparency in what happens in the community. The flow of information is open, not gossip behind your back.

The hallmarks of a good community are a smooth flow of information, openness, transparency, trustworthiness, respect for privacy, a welcoming atmosphere, acceptance, safety, clear rules and confidence that the rules will be followed.

Interaction in the community is made as smooth as possible by having a common code of conduct and by organising meetings to discuss issues together. Clear communication. Personally, I like the fact that the community has social media channels where everyone can participate in communication. It is also important that everyone has the right to draw their own boundaries and that they are respected; everyone takes responsibility for their own speech and behaviour.

A professional working with young people in the community should have compassion, caring, patience, understanding, communication skills and a willingness to listen, kindness, a sense of humour and reliability. It is important that the employee respects people's privacy. Of course, it is useful to know where to direct (to other services) the young person if necessary. It is also good if the employee has a general curiosity about other people's interests. It is also good if the employee has a general curiosity about other people's interests. And that she/he truly likes young people and is interested in their stories.

Mental health stigma can be reduced by taking a humorous approach and daring to laugh at funny things. Create the kind of atmosphere you would want everywhere else to have, and see people as whole, not as diagnoses. However, breaking stigma happens outside the (mental health) community, not inside the community, but hopefully people in the community will find the courage to break stigma outside the community too.

The shortcomings of the digital community compared to the face-to-face community is that when face-to-face contact is missing, so is the warmth. In face-to-face community humanity is easier to recognise and can curb, for example, arguments. And face-to-face encounters give you a tangible

sense that you are not alone. In a digital community, it can be easier to express yourself when you can express yourself in writing and anonymously, and you're not being watched when you speak. In a digital environment there is also a lack of urgency; when the encounter is not limited by time or place.

4.7 Case story from Il Grande Carro, Italy

How long have you been attending our activities?: About 6 months

Can you tell me about your life before coming to the Centre? I grew up in the suburbs of Catania and then moved to Rome. Because my father (who adopted me) was Sicilian. He had come to Rome to renovate buildings and then he met my mother and they both moved down south, to Sicily, and they came to get me from Romania. But then, since my grandfather (father's father) was a mess, he made a mess (he worked for "Cosa Nostra")...at some point we all had to move to Rome. I was in Sicily from 2000 to 2006... that is when I was 10 years old, because when they adopted me I was 4 years old... then I came to Rome when I was 10.

We knew each other in Rome because my mother's grandparents were in Rome... that is, my mother's grandparents are from Rome, even though my grandmother is of Neapolitan origin and my grandfather from Florence (Question: and are these grandparents alive...?), yes, but they are not well, grandfather has senile dementia....

...apart from that... then I had work experience here in Rome... inside the Palace Hotel, at the Hotel Imperiale, and then at Zuma's in Palazzo Fendi on Via del Corso in Rome.

I did five years of study in Secondigliano (Naples) at Voltaire Institute (VET); Kindergarten in Catania; primary school in Rome.

And how were you at school, how was it going. Well...I was never a great student...I didn't like it at all...but I got along well with the others....

Apart from that I had other experiences...I did 3 years of school at CIOFPS in Testaccio (Rome), but then since there is only the three years and they give you a kind of certificate....then mum said you have to do something to complete the diploma and also do another Course in that area....and have another title in that area...So I used to go back and forth for the Sommelier Course once a week coming from Naples....

I struggled a lot: it was tiring because I arrived by train and it took me an hour and a half and then the time it took me to get to the Course in Balduina , I did 1 and a half hours of the Course and then I went back to the station and took the train back to Naples... all that at a certain point...

I finished the Sommelier Course and I finished the Hotel School...so I got the title.

Then what happened? My father was ill and I had been meddling for a long time anyway... in Naples, from Sicily all the way to Rome... "forget about it"... we used to send kilos of cocaine from Sicily...

I made my mistakes and paid for them...then I got sick and started abusing drugs...it lasted for 3 years then they jailed me. I did 2 years in prison and almost 5 years in the community ... the community manager now tells me 'I don't want to see you any more' and I don't want to see you any more either ... sooner or later it will end, hopefully it will be understood that it was a youthful mistake and hopefully I will find a job and be able to get out....

What fundamental problems have you faced in your life? I would say the fundamental problems in my life...I would say it was the death of my father and drugs...those there

Did you use hard drugs? Cocaine... but I just snorted it, I've never shot up in my life and I don't even care... and then hashish and marihuana and alcohol, yes I did a mixture and then all together in the end you lost your mind...

What is your current life situation? What are your activities, who do you live with? My current life... I'm in the community and do a few things a week because they've realised I can't stay there any more so I don't do much.

This community is far from Rome, it must be 60 km from Castel Madama (Rome) It's a psychiatric clinic... it doesn't necessarily belong to people who have committed a crime... people who are out of their minds and who maybe have drug problems also come here.

But aren't you always there? I do a week 4 days and a week 2 days in Rome and I come to the Day Centre and stay with mum and my sister who is fixing up her house, but she's still with mum

Could you say what you have achieved by participating in the Day Centre's activities? I have found them: motivation, above all competent people who help me with the little problems I have.... so I get along with all the kids, I get along with the operators.... in my opinion it's already a lot for me in my opinion...

What kind of support do you feel you need? The kind of support and help for me would be a direction to a job....To freshen up my craft more than anything else brush up some of the hotel school stuff I did...I like the bar in particular...making coffee, lattes, cappuccinos.... I used to make such a great cappuccinos !!! There is a tik tok barista who makes artistic cappuccinos!

What is your relationship with other people? How do you feel in contact with others at the Centre? Very well... I get on very well with the other guys... then if one can have fun with other, having a laughs is good.

Is there anyone important you can particularly trust? (in the organisation, as a peer, friend, etc.)?
No for me they are the same....

One you think you can particularly trust? ...but not this one... because anyway, coming twice a week there is not enough to be friend ... an account is that maybe you increase my frequency a few days and there is more possibility to know and trust each other?

What does the term "inclusion" mean to you? You say being inside.... I feel quite included because normally, every Thursdays, I do the activity with you and then every Fridays I do the cooking workshop...

Do you feel part of a "community"/"a group"? Yes yes.... I feel part of a group

If yes, what kind of community/group (how would you define it)? A rehabilitation group at work. It's different from a group of friends. I think so because we are in an place of the Department of Health system...everyone has their own things on their mind in my opinion...but without going to see the problems of others...together we try to improve

What does 'being part of a community/group' mean to you? For me it is important to be part of this group because it means that I have almost reached the end of my journey with the community...so just coming home and presenting myself here at the centre is already something very important. I feel I belong to this group

What do you think creates a sense of belonging to a group/community? The fellowship between the members of the group... The fellowship is created by telling each other about work experiences, what we did before, what we did after...the various changes we have undergone in life

Do you think it's important to do an activity with a purpose or is it important just to be together? Just being together doing nothing doesn't help you...however, doing something gets us to a goal that is prescribed for each of us...

...For me it is important to recover technical skills

What are the characteristics of a 'good community'/'good group'? A good group... how can I put it, it's created slowly... and then as you go along it's obvious that it becomes a good group... In our group, the friendliness of F., or of D. that is, I get on very well with them.

And with the operators? ...with the operators as well... I can't stand the Castel Madama operators anymore. But it's different here... it's new... I haven't been here long so it's all fresh...

What are the aspects to be considered to make interaction between the community and the rest of society as simple/fluid as possible? To get the word out you say... I don't know about that... I can't give you an answer... Making posters, I don't know?

Let's take an example instead of you opening a business ... you open a bar ... how do you make it known? Well these days on Facebook, on Tik Tok, on Instagram ... people see and know then ... slowly it spreads and little by little people see and know

Do you have 'digital' friendships (e.g. other guys you play video games with)? Do you find that there are differences/similarities between "digital and physical friendships"? Since we're talking about facebook etc.. but do you for example play video games? ...I used to play when I was younger, now I don't, I had the playstation now it's just sitting there gathering dust in my room.

And instead of the friends you have with WA, with FB....you only hang out virtually? Yes...but on Facebook I only have people I know in person, I don't reach out to people I don't know...I prefer to have fewer friends whom I know in person, rather than many whom I don't know...

You know there are many guys like you who mostly have friendships that are virtual, that are only through those with whom they play the playstation for example and maybe never see each other in person, live in different cities.... what do you think of this type of friendship...is it different from friendship made in person? Of course...I find it quite creepy that you get to know people you don't even see...maybe I'm old fashioned...26 years old, but I was brought up with sound principles...do you understand?

In your opinion, what skills and personality traits do professionals working with young people need in order to work better? Motivating and knowing how to help the youngsters in any wrong steps they may take condoning. I'm joking, but, so far the operators are fine with me...but I can't take it anymore at Castel Madama....

In my opinion the operators must be competent at work, set a good example... I don't know because for me it's already fine the way you're going...

But we are not eternal... what should we teach those who will come after us? ... sound principles.....I don't know....I'm a little tired....

How can we ensure that new participants/activities can be involved without fear of stigmatisation?

...I didn't understand the question....I don't know...

"... a community can be a second family that helps and supports you",

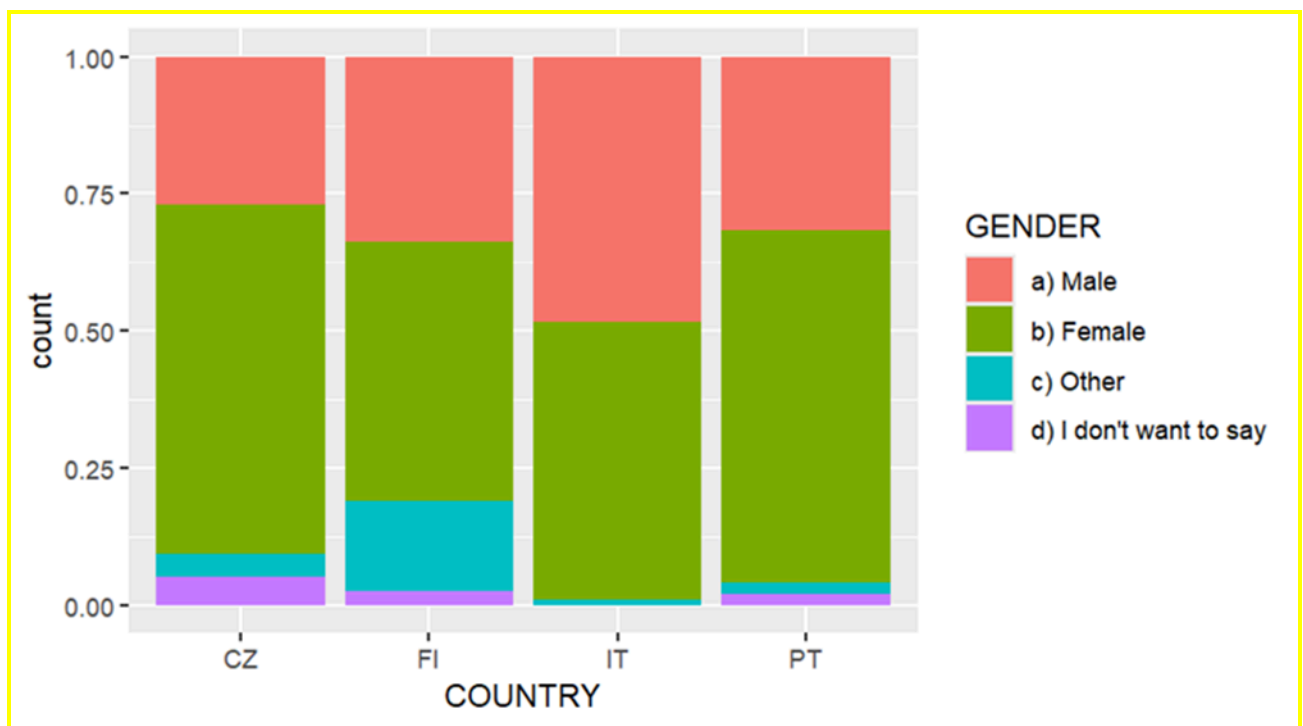
"Human beings, as social beings, need to live in a community to feel fulfilled. Without community and without any emotional support, we are much more prone to mental health problems, associated with loneliness"

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE MEANING OF "BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY"?

During the MPOW project, a survey was conducted from January 2024 to April 2024 among youth and professionals involved in youth-oriented activities and interventions. The survey collected 382 questionnaires from young people and 278 from professionals. The overall results can be found in the attached "Results of the Youth and Professionals Survey." Here it is relevant to emphasize aspects touched by the survey related to the concept of community expressed by the youth and the answers given by the professionals on what professional skills they themselves should improve and the type of services that should be developed to better respond to the changing needs of the youth.

As for boys, the research involved 134 boys and 217 girls; 25 indicated the gender "other" and 10 young people preferred not to say. Figure 1 shows the differences between Italy, Portugal, the Czech Republic and Finland:

Fig.1 – Distribution of young people per gender and country.



A significant percentage of the young people surveyed report a discontinuous school career, and their living conditions are shown in Table 1.

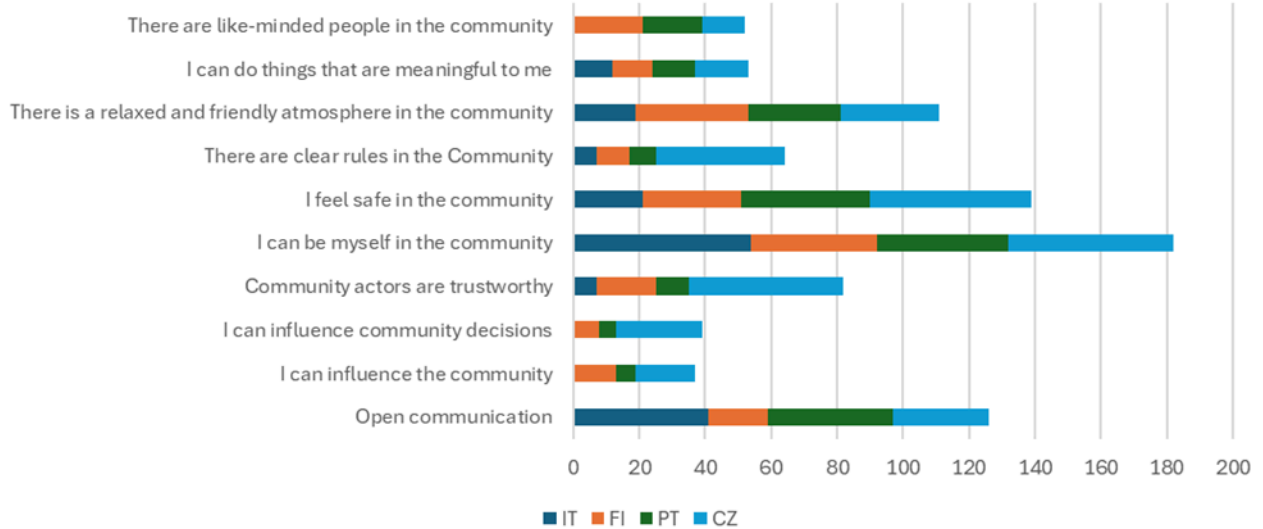
Table 1 – Young’s life condition per country.

Life condition	Country				
	CZ	FI	IT	PT	Total
I work full time	31	2	9	35	77
I work part-time	13	8	19	15	55
Studying or going to school	20	12	30	40	102
I am unemployed	8	34	19	5	66
I am on parental leave	9				9
I am on sick leave	2	9			11
I am undergoing rehabilitation	6	26	3		35
I am retired	1	9	1		11
Other	6	10	4		20
Total	96	110	85	95	387

Most of the respondents live with their parents, but if we analyze the condition for each country the picture changes substantially: in Finland 60.9% of the young people surveyed live alone and in the Czech Republic more than 1/3 live with a boyfriend/girlfriend/partner.

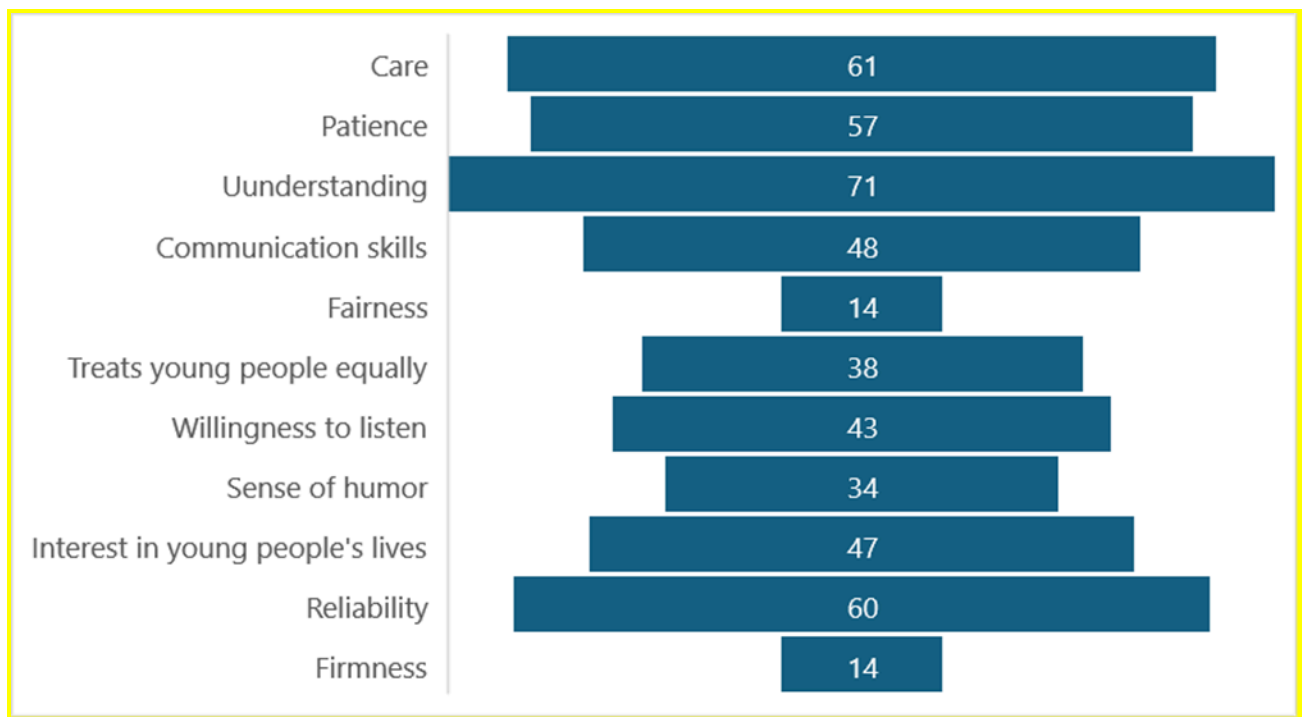
One section of the questionnaire focused on the sense of "community" among young people. As the figure below shows, most of them answered the question "What are the three most important characteristics of a community," highlighting the "feeling of being myself in the community" in all countries, and emphasizing the feeling of safety as a relevant aspect. The other characteristics are open communication and seeking a relaxed atmosphere.

The most important characteristics of a community



In addition, youth respondents were asked, "Think of professionals who work with young people, such as in hobbies, school, social work or health care. What qualities do you think are most important?"

The results, shown in the figure below, emphasize the importance of understanding, reliability, caring and patience.



During the survey, young people were encouraged to freely express the personal meaning of "belonging to a community."

The results appear consistent with findings from other phases of the "mPow" Project (e.g. case histories, video interviews, etc.).

In fact, the most recurring words confirm some determining factors in young people's experiences: such as feeling accepted and included, listened to and reassured with respect to their ideas, loneliness and individuality. Many emphasize the aspects of socializing, sharing, gathering, but also maintaining the ability to choose when and how to be with others (the right distance).

Recognition of a decisive role of the context/service to which the young person adheres in finding meaning in his or her daily life and feeling supported in times of difficulty appears in many responses.

In addition, reference to the transformative possibilities of belonging to a community appears to be constant: working together to make things better, being able to influence choices and decisions, feeling like a protagonist, actively contributing. In a more isolated, but still significant way, factors are mentioned that we could define as more referring to moods and emotional elements such as "happiness", "friendship", "intimacy".

There do not appear to be particularly significant differences in the different countries of the partnership.

For Finland, the responses that refer to the term "acceptance" seem to obtain a clear majority (around 30% of the responses refer to this specification) and a greater explicit reference to the role of peers.

For the Czech Republic, "inclusion" is the most frequently used term (around 20%), together with participation and solidarity.

Even for Portugal and Italy the meaning of community refers to the terms of "inclusion" and "acceptance", however the aspects of cooperative work and doing together seem to take on greater space.

Finally, some definitions that have been collected and are reported in full are emblematic:

"... a community can be a second family that helps and supports you",

"Human beings, as social beings, need to live in a community to feel fulfilled. Without community and without any emotional support, we are much more prone to mental health problems, associated with loneliness"

The other open questions in the questionnaire concern the compilation of the "other" field, in relation to some questions and in particular: the specification of which reasons led to the interruption of the school career, the specification of a possible "minority" to which the young feels he belongs, the specification of what the young person thinks he has achieved by being part of a community.

In general, the answers to this series of questions are not very consistent from a numerical point of view, but considering the specific focus of the project, they provide some inputs of great interest in terms of quality and content.

It was above all young Finns, who overall participated in a higher numerical manner in the entire survey, who provided the greatest number of open answers.

Of certain importance, for example, is to ascertain what the children reported regarding the reasons why their school career was interrupted (question 4.1.).

There are numerous answers with which the children underline factors of inadequacy on the part of the school system such as "because the school was not attractive", "I didn't learn anything", "it wasn't useful to me" or difficult relationships with teachers and with the other students.

Some mention phenomena of discrimination and isolation (e.g. I left school "because I didn't feel welcome there"), signs of a context that fails to represent and make people perceive a welcoming community.

But it is striking, however, the frequency of responses that testify to a sort of "internalization" of the cause of school failure by the children themselves such as, for example, "because I didn't have cognitive/mental resources", that is, the impossibility of benefiting from school in based on their mental health conditions which would be the basis of the interruption

There are no significant differences in this regard in the perception of young people in the different countries: among the respondents in Finland a vision seems to prevail in which it is the young people who feel inadequate for school and not vice versa, while in the other countries (including Italy) appears more precisely an explanation of inadequacy attributed to the school system which does not seem to provide adequate answers and is perceived as stimulating (es. "*the school was not attractive*"). However, as mentioned above, these are numerically small responses which perhaps reveal trends, but on the basis of which it is not possible to make definitive considerations.

Another topic of interest concerns young people's perception of belonging to a minority.

In this regard, there are many who refer to it as a "gender" minority, in some cases also specifying LGBTQ+, trans, homosexual, etc.

Also striking is the number of those who feel they belong to a minority by referring to a typology/diagnosis grouping (e.g. autism spectrum, Asperger's, ADHD, etc.). We believe that this testifies on the one hand to the significance that the specific disorder and suffering assumes in the person's life, but on the other hand also to the heaviness of the diagnostic system that leads the person to identify with their own "illness".

Less frequently, but important on a testimonial level, references appear to other issues such as migration, or the perception of belonging to a minority based on religious factors (Czech Republic).

Finally, the answers to what young people think they have achieved by feeling part of a community, in a fairly transversal way between the different countries (Finland, Italy, Czech Republic and Portugal), appear fully overlapping with what the young people themselves expressed in this regard of the definition of community.

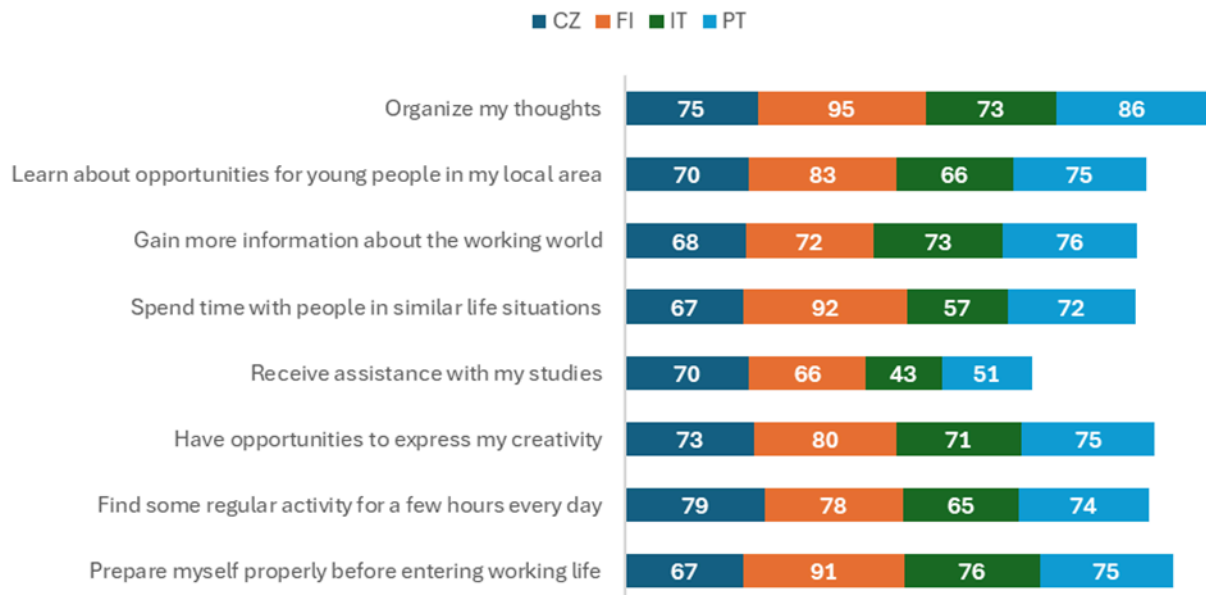
In fact, the key words that seem to return are above all those of acceptance and inclusion expressed in different ways. The analysis of the content of the answers, however, seems to bring out more clearly the support and protection functions that the community carries out: much more frequent are the terms of friendship, mutual support, the possibility of increasing self-esteem, cooperation and teamwork

Finally, the reference to community support in relation to the world of work deserves to be highlighted (found in particular among young Italians and Portuguese)

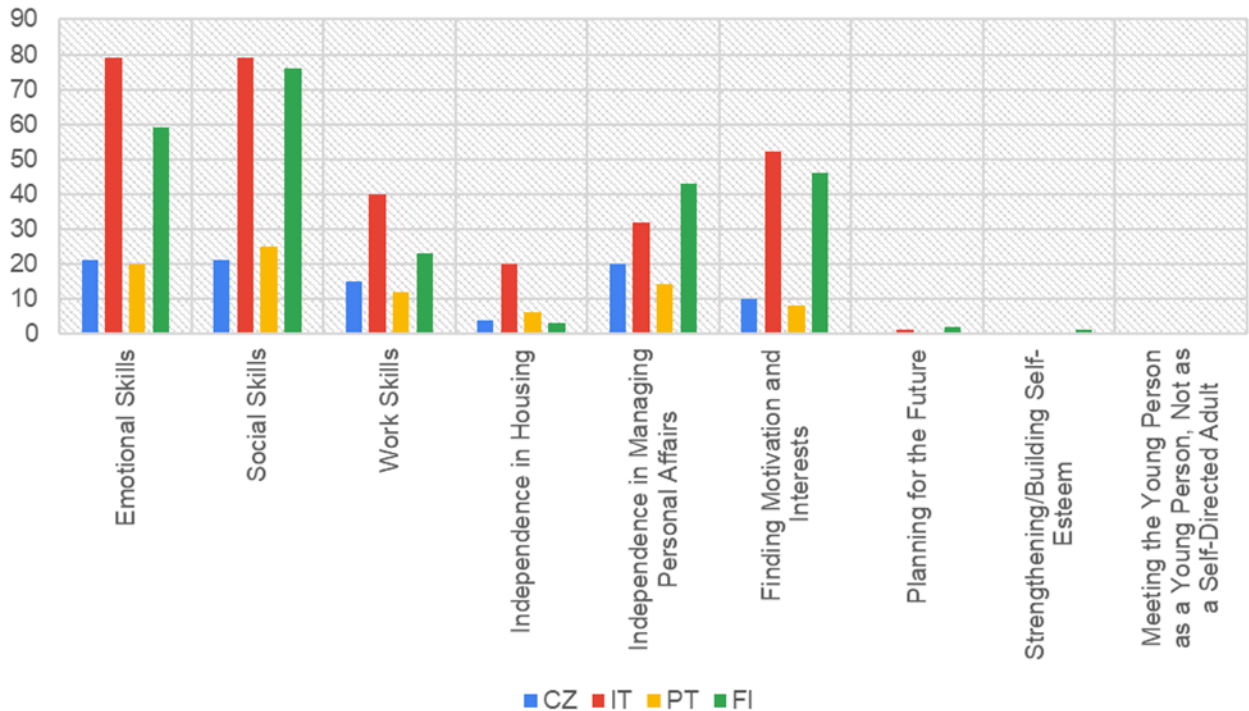
It is also important to report here some findings on what young people think about their future and whether these perspectives coincide with those of professionals (for complete information on the results of both surveys, which involved young people and professionals, see Appendix 1).

The young people reached by the survey provided a view of their future focused mainly on "organizing thoughts," which is likely to be related to decision making, preparing to achieve goals, or simply understanding complex issues more clearly.

When I think about my near future, I would like to



One of the questions in the practitioners' questionnaire invited respondents to express their opinion on what activities should be strengthened to decisively improve the conditions of youth distress/NEET. The figure below shows that there is strong agreement among practitioners in all 4 countries that emotional skills and social skills are the skills that should be used more to meet the needs of youth.



Finally, we think it is significant to report this last table describing the opinion of professionals regarding the adequacy of opportunities for young people in different spheres of life: cultural, sports, educational and health. And of the different countries to meet the needs of young people themselves

The "mPOW" Project allowed us to touch upon the structural differences that characterize policies and organizational arrangements between countries.

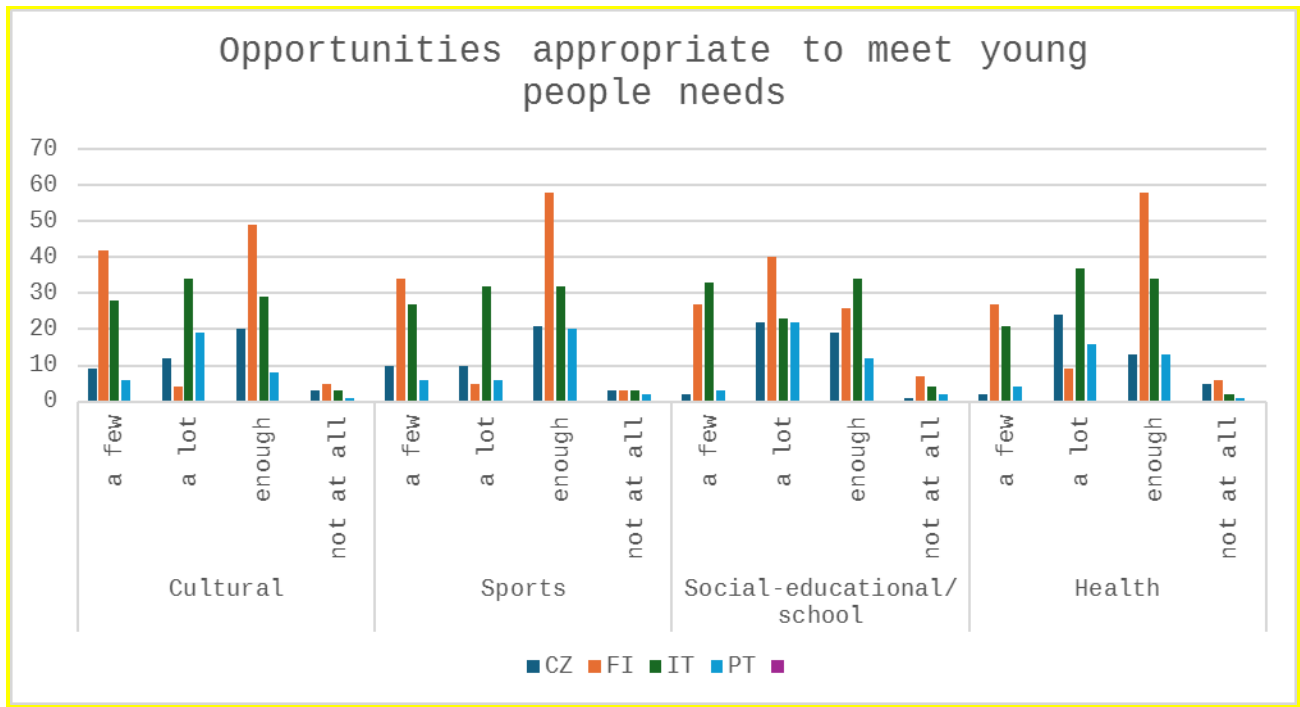
Indeed, different perceptions emerge from what was found by practitioners in different countries.

A certain homogeneity of judgment seems to be found only in regard to those who judge the opportunities on the education/schooling system side as "very adequate." This, however, appears to be the side where decidedly greater deficiencies are found on the part of Italy: only 6 percent rate them as very adequate compared to about twice as many by the Czech Republic and about three times as many (17 percent) by the Portuguese.

Very or somewhat good are considered by all (slightly less for Finland) to be the opportunities on the sports side, while with regard to opportunities on the cultural side the greatest dissatisfaction emerges from Finnish practitioners: in fact, about twice as many (12 percent) consider cultural resources inadequate or not at all.

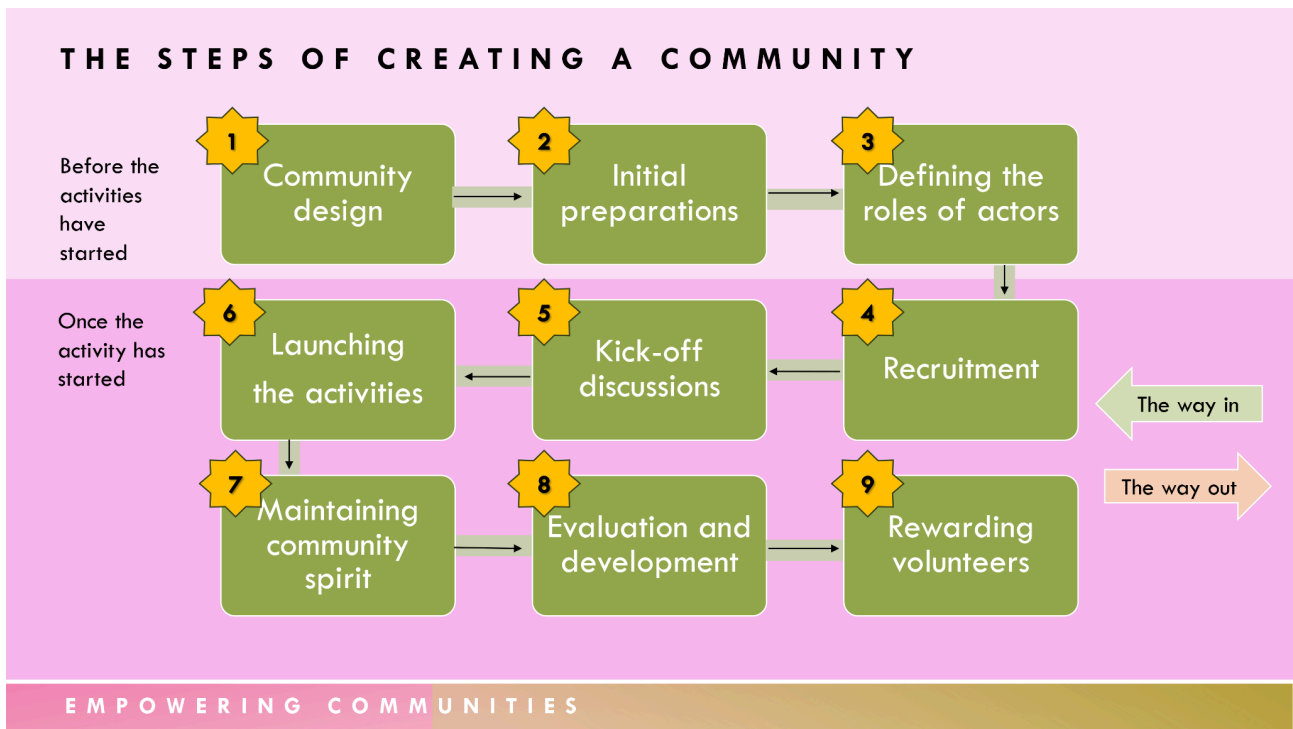
Some dispersion emerges from the data, but divergences between countries also appear regarding all other areas. Striking in particular are better judgments about sports and cultural opportunities by those in Portugal and about opportunities on the health side by the Czech Republic and Italy.

In general, a trend seems to emerge of higher demand from Finnish professionals for different types of resources (cultural, educational, sports, health). This may testify to a greater demand for services from young people, but also to a greater awareness of the relevance of the complexity of the factors involved with respect to the living conditions of young people.



5 HOW TO CREATE A COMMUNITY?

Initiating and sustaining the operation of an empowering community can be divided into nine different phases: 1) planning, 2) initial preparations, 3) defining roles of participants, 4) recruitment, 5) introductory discussions, 6) launching activities, 7) maintaining community spirit, 8) evaluation and development, and 9) rewarding volunteers.



5.1 Planning

- Why and for whom is the community being established?
- Community goals, mission, values
- Operating principles, financing

The establishment of a community begins with planning. Often, there may already be an idea of the purpose and target audience for the community. However, at this stage, it is good to consider more broadly the community's goals, mission, values, and operating principles.

For example, Culture House Virta states its purpose as follows: "Kulttuuripaja Virta's activities are aimed at individuals aged 18–35 with mental health challenges or otherwise challenging life situations. The activities provide participants with meaningful activities, social interaction, and a rhythm to daily life. The main goal of Kulttuuripaja's activities is to improve participants' well-being and social functioning."

"The foundation of Kulttuuripaja's activities lies in the Culture House model and social pedagogy. It is third-sector low-threshold activity based on voluntarism, asset-based approach, and guided, active peer support."

5.2 Initial Preparations

- Acquiring premises – consider accessibility
- Preparing marketing – where and how will the community be visible?
- Self-assessment of attitude

The community needs a space for its activities – even if it's a community functioning in nature, it usually has a specific activity area and perhaps a tool storage. Ideally, the community has its own space to make it personalized and supportive of its activities. When seeking a space, it's important to consider accessibility – both physical and psychological. Can the target group easily reach the location, e.g., by public transportation?

- a sufficiently large space for the entire community to gather
- accessibility: wheelchair-accessible facilities, stairs, signs of non-discrimination, unisex toilets, etc.

It's also advisable to start planning and preparing marketing, i.e., thinking about how the target audience will find the community. If the community is not online, it doesn't exist. Regarding social media channels, consider whether you want to reach the target audience directly or, for example, professionals working with the target group. Additionally, traditional printed marketing materials can be useful, such as brochures, posters, stickers, etc.

At this stage, it's also good to reflect on one's own attitude, i.e., how one approaches the establishment of the community. This can be tested with self-reflection materials produced by the

project, which also work well as a basis for discussions among those initiating the activities – and later as a reminder and basis for self-assessment.

5.3 Defining Roles

- Job descriptions
- Power: responsibilities and rights
- Time management

Communities have various roles, especially when some work is paid, and the rest is done on a voluntary basis. Initially, one can consider what tasks the community will have and who will be responsible for them, but more specific job titles can be developed later.

In an empowering community, individuals responsible for coordinating activities and acknowledging volunteers are needed. Typically, these individuals are employees, and their role in relation to volunteers and participants needs careful consideration.

How is power and responsibility distributed? In a community aimed at empowering young people, with the intention of giving them a strong role in decision-making, young people should have a significant role in all decisions made within the community.

It's also essential to consider how to define the amount of time volunteers dedicate to the community's activities. The best way to offer support is to allow each volunteer to determine how much voluntary work they want to undertake.

5.4 Marketing

- Marketing: collaboration networks, social media, shareable materials
- Inclusion through education

It's essential to inform as many people as possible about the existence of the community so that those for whom its activities are intended can find it. When targeting young people, it's important to market where young people are, such as on social media platforms. However, this requires the marketer to be familiar with these platforms. Sometimes, reaching the actual target audience is easier through intermediaries, such as professionals working with young people or parents.

Example: Marketing for the Culture House

The Culture House uses two social media channels: Instagram and Facebook. Instagram is intended to directly reach young people, while Facebook is more effective in reaching professionals from various fields. Additionally, for internal communication, the Culture House uses the Discord platform, which serves as the community's information and discussion platform. Furthermore, the Culture House has printed postcard-sized brochures that briefly explain what the Culture House is and how to get involved.

However, the most crucial communication channel is the email list of professionals working with young people. This email list is regularly used to communicate about activities. Before creating the email list, efforts were made to identify and contact all possible entities working with young people, culture, and mental health. Face-to-face meetings helped establish relationships, making electronic communication effective and functional.

A practical method to market activities, especially when the community is starting its operations, is to organize volunteer training and promote it through various channels. Through training, it's easy for new individuals to join the community, and especially in the beginning, the community needs participants and contributors. It is crucial that from the very beginning, the community offers various activities and opportunities for newcomers to participate and find their place in the community. This could include designing the community space, organizing welcome events, or hosting various pop-up workshops.

5.5 Introductory Discussions

- What is the procedure for joining?
- A positive encounter is a way to connect with the community
- Welcoming newcomers is important even at later stages!

Once the marketing for the establishment has begun, the next step is to welcome interested participants into the community. This phase typically continues as long as the community is active, meaning new participants are welcomed either continuously or at specific intervals. The initiation is a highly critical phase, as the first impression sets the tone for all future activities.

Every new acquaintance wants to feel accepted into the community they are interested in. The more vulnerable the background of a new acquaintance, the more reassurance they usually need that they are accepted into the community as themselves.

For this reason, having a clear way or path to join the community is essential. Initiation can be any activity understood as a social recognition and welcome to the community. It can be as mundane as sitting down together for a cup of coffee. Even if it's not explicitly stated, initiation is a mutual assessment moment of whether the person interested in the community is a good fit and whether the community is suitable for the newcomer.

Initiation also helps other community members clearly understand who belongs to the community. It signifies that this new acquaintance belongs to "us," meaning they accept the community's values and practices. One effective example of initiation is an introductory discussion held when a potential new member visits the community. The discussion covers the community's practices, values, and rules. The introductory discussion is an excellent opportunity to start building a trusting relationship, understand the newcomer's life situation and aspirations, both personally and regarding the community's activities.

Without a clear initiation, it may be challenging for the newcomer to know how or when they become part of the community. If they attend one of the community's events, are they already part of the community? However, they know that some people organized the event, and they weren't one of them. This is essential to consider, especially if the community's principles involve so-called low-threshold activities. Sometimes, some associations market that "everyone is welcome to join the activities." In practice, this is never true – those "welcome" are usually "those who accept the community's values and practices." On the other hand, too bureaucratic or unequal an arrangement may be off-putting, especially in youth communities.

In many youth groups, a common phenomenon is that participants feel they don't belong. Sadly, we might continue activities as if this phenomenon didn't exist. In such cases, the group becomes, at worst, a collection of individuals, each feeling lonely and convinced they don't belong. In such a scenario, it's challenging to speak of a community.

If done well, the introductory discussion can be a great start to building a trusting relationship and mutual understanding, providing a safe and interesting feeling that encourages the participant to join. It also clarifies what the community is about. The initial discussion can also reduce potential conflicts in the future, as it covers the community's essential principles from the beginning. If needed, contact information of future participants can be collected during this interaction for informing them about the community's activities.

On the other hand, a poor first impression may deter the newcomer from wanting to participate in the activities.

5.6 Initiating Activities

- Name and Rules
- Space Renovation, Procurement of Materials

- Atmosphere and Operating Methods

Activities are started with the resources available. In the beginning, it can be modest: individual workshops, meetings, events. The key is to involve those for whom the activities are intended in the planning and implementation—and especially to encourage volunteers to produce activities they personally enjoy and are passionate about. For example, if a volunteer loves animals, they can be encouraged to plan activities involving animals. An idea could be a "Pet Group" where a different pet visits each time. The owner can share some information about caring for the pet, and those interested can get to know the animal up close. Or in a dog-walking group, participants could take a dog for a walk—either with or without a dog. For those interested in music, a "Personal Soundtrack" group can be created where each member selects a song related to a specific theme (energy, autumn, sadness, best dance track, etc.), and these songs are listened to together during the group. Songs are not judged, but they can be discussed after listening.

From the start, the goal is to involve everyone interested in planning and implementing activities and deciding on communal matters. The community needs a name, and it's a good idea to have everyone interested suggest name ideas, which can later be voted on together. Similarly, everyone involved in the initial stages should participate in creating community rules—this could be part of the first volunteer training, for instance. Later on, these guidelines or rules can be reviewed together to see if any changes are needed. Various safe space guidelines could serve as a good foundation.

It's also a good idea to involve all potential participants in planning and decorating community spaces. However, in planning, it's essential to consider the community's future needs: perhaps a large table for gatherings, sofas, or other comfortable seating for informal stays, and participants can be invited to create their art on the walls. It's important that they feel from the start that they have a say in community matters and can take ownership of the space.

Volunteers—and certainly staff members too—benefit from planning sessions where the type of activity to be organized is discussed together. It has been found beneficial to set a specific time frame for all activities, including groups. This period is when the activity is planned, and during this

time, volunteer group leaders commit to guiding their groups. In Culture Houses, this cycle has been as short as five weeks, after which a new planning day is organized. A whole semester (approximately 5 months) is often too long for many; it's challenging to make plans, and commitment to the task may feel burdensome. Regular planning moments are also essential for keeping the activities current and fresh, providing structure to community operations. Planning moments are also excellent opportunities to review successes and possible areas for improvement, offer peer support, provide brainstorming assistance, and express gratitude to contributors.

Communicating about activities plays a crucial role right from the start. It's essential to remember to communicate both to participants interested in activities and to those target groups that could reach the desired audience—for example, professionals working with young people.

Without communication, no matter how good the activities are, if they are not known, people cannot seek them out. Multiple communication channels should be used; a good combination might include a website, one or more social media platforms (Instagram, Discord, Facebook, TikTok?), some printed marketing material (brochure, card, poster, etc.), perhaps an email list specifically for partners, and a notice board/wall in the community space where information about upcoming activities can be posted.

Initiating and running activities also involve many other support functions: procurement of materials, organizing and decorating the space according to the activities and participants. Additionally, from the beginning, recording activity statistics is necessary to later monitor the development of participant numbers and report it to potential funders. Participant surveys are crucial at all times but especially during the initiation of activities. Even if there is space and time for face-to-face feedback, not everyone can or wants to express their opinions personally. Quick online surveys can help with this.

In the early stages of activity, and even later, recruiting new participants, involving them, and engaging them in activities are essential. In engaging participants, inviting a new participant to various activities—groups, events, or for coffee—has proven effective.

5.7 Building of Community Spirit

The sense of community does not spontaneously arise or sustain itself; continuous efforts are required. I consider this the most important task of community leaders. A community can be likened to a campfire: first, groundwork is laid, wood is gathered, and kindling is prepared; the groundwork for the community is described above. Initiating community activities can be compared to lighting the campfire. Similar to keeping a fire alive by adding wood and tending to it occasionally, the sense of community is maintained through small actions.

The sense of community is nurtured and enhanced through various practices that align with the community's values and strengthen social bonds. Practices based on values include equal treatment, acknowledging and accepting each individual as they are, and collaborating with everyone. For example, in a community, an agreed-upon practice might be to greet every member upon entering and leaving. Focusing on hope, opportunities, and resources is also a deliberate choice. Community leaders can contribute to this by asking appropriate questions or guiding discussions in a positive direction. Open communication about community matters increases equality, participation, and demonstrates appreciation for all members. A community meeting is an opportunity for all interested members to discuss and decide on common issues.

Social bonds can be strengthened in various ways, where people get to know each other, find common interests, learn more about each other, and engage in activities together. In an ideal situation, community members remember each other's names. A concrete and easy way to maintain community spirit is to conduct a brief introduction round in all communal gatherings, where each participant can state their name and share their thoughts on the day's theme, for example.

As part of maintaining a communal atmosphere, resolving conflicts is also essential. The more open and safe the atmosphere within the community, the easier it is to address conflicts that arise. Having clear procedures for conflict resolution is advisable. The process could follow this pattern: 1) attempt to resolve the conflict independently, 2) inform the community leader about the conflict, 3) have a discussion between the parties involved and the community leader to find common ground, 4) if the parties cannot reach an agreement through discussion, the final decision can be made by the community leader or the community meeting. When aiming to maintain community spirit, the community's well-being may need to take precedence over individual interests in conflict situations.

An example of resolving a somewhat challenging conflict comes from a community aimed at young adults, where the practice has been to respect everyone's boundaries. In practice, this means no one can be touched without consent, and everyone has the right to request a change of topic in discussions if they feel unable to handle a particular issue. The situation became problematic when one community member wanted to define their boundaries in a way that would exclude another member from participating in group activities or other events, as the mere presence of the second member caused discomfort. However, the second member had not engaged in any behavior that could be considered harassment. A decision was made that prioritized the community principle of accepting everyone as they are and working with everyone, relegating the importance of respecting personal boundaries to a secondary position.

5.8 Evaluation and Development

It is advisable to periodically evaluate the activities of the community. Especially when establishing a community, the operating mindset is a culture of experimentation, where various activities are tested with a low threshold. The approach involves learning from whether a particular method

works or not and making necessary adjustments. On the other hand, a community can never become "finished," meaning there is always room for improvement.

Evaluation can be conducted by observing everyday activities, talking to community members, and through various surveys, assessments, and interviews. Areas to assess include what successes have been achieved, what participants have gained from the activities, and, of course, how the community could improve. When conducting interviews, it is advisable, whenever possible, to involve someone from outside the community, a neutral person, so that the interviewee can express their thoughts without feeling pressured by the interviewer's opinions.

5.9 Rewarding Volunteers

Volunteers play a crucial role in the operation of a community, and recognizing and rewarding their contributions should be considered in community activities. Acknowledging volunteers can be broadly categorized into continuous, everyday recognition, and occasional, more formal recognition. Everyday recognition includes thanking, encouraging, noticing positive things and actions, and vocalizing them. It is important that members of the community recognize positive aspects and actions in each other and communicate them openly. More formal recognition can come in the form of rewards, certificates, or celebrations. Although such formal acknowledgment may require time, effort, and resources, it typically occurs infrequently, once or twice a year. Therefore, everyday recognition is essential. A well-functioning community incorporates both ways of acknowledging the work of volunteers.

5.10 The way in, the way out

In a healthy community, there should be sufficient turnover among its members. If the same people remain in the community for too long, unwanted cliques may form, affecting the atmosphere and hindering new individuals from joining. The entry path, which is how one can

participate, should be well thought out and clearly communicated in the community's promotional materials. When someone new is interested in participating, they need information on whom to contact or if they can simply walk in. What happens when a new person joins? How are they introduced and integrated into the community?

Equally important is providing an exit path, allowing participants to be part of the community only for as long as they feel it contributes to their well-being and goals. This is often overlooked in communities focused on increasing participant or membership numbers, even if the activities are intended to support a specific life stage. The exit path should align with the community's purpose and target audience. For example, for NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth, a suitable exit path might involve a "supported transition," clear guidance towards other activities, such as education, employment-promoting activities, or work. The community could collectively decide if there is a point at which it's beneficial for individuals to move forward.

6 HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY SPIRIT AND HOW TO MAINTAIN IT?

MAINTAINING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The basic principles of belonging, which should be considered in every community.



CHARLES VOGL 2016



Community is a feeling of belonging together, which is centrally associated with feelings of trust, security, and meaningfulness. It is the feeling of belonging to a group where one is seen and heard. The sense of community can be consciously cultivated using the following seven principles.

6.1 Boundary

A community is a group of people united by something important to all of them. It can be a hobby, for example, a swimming club. People who are interested in swimming have primarily joined the club: swimmers and possibly their close ones. Thus, an interest in swimming is the boundary between the swimming club community and other people. Similarly, informal communities can form within a music genre - people who like the same kind of music and meet each other at artists' gigs around the country (or the world). This group of people is united by a love for a certain type of music.

On the other hand, the boundary may be defined by the past, as is often the case with different groups of friends: childhood friends or college buddies, with whom the bond was formed years or decades ago. It can be difficult for new people to join these groups.

Ideological organizations welcome people who are ready to commit to the organization's values. These can be political parties, environmental organizations, or even spiritual communities. Some associations state that "everyone is welcome" to their activities, but usually, even then, certain operating models are expected to be adopted within the association.

The boundary can be concrete or one that is not influenced by an individual's opinion. Such a boundary can be family, kin, or culture into which one is born, or the locality or neighborhood where one lives. Different minority groups can form communities, and in this case, the boundary lies either in belonging to the minority or at least wanting to defend the interests of that minority.

A clear boundary helps in forming a sense of community because then everyone in the community knows what unites this particular group of people. The more important the common issue is, the more willing people are to work for the community, for example, through volunteer work or other services. Some commercial entities may try to market their products or services as if to "their own tribe," but rarely do the customers of such companies feel any sense of community or belonging.

6.2 Initiation

Joining a community is a critical phase regarding how strongly a newcomer feels a sense of belonging. Initiation is an activity or a set of activities that, once completed, the newcomer knows they belong to the community – or by which the community welcomes the new arrival. A good initiation is an important binding force to the community. Greeting, friendly attention, equal treatment, and genuine interest towards the newcomer go a long way.

Low-threshold activities consciously aim to make it as easy as possible to get involved. This is important, for example, when the community seeks participants in challenging life situations, such as NEET youth. The fewer the efforts required to join the community, the more important becomes the spoken welcome and the community's receptive gestures so that the new participant can feel genuinely welcome in the community.

At the culture house, a new participant often goes through some kind of introductory discussion, where they are informed about the culture house activities and principles and get to know the newcomer a bit. After the discussion, the culture house facilities are toured, and the participants

present are introduced. Finally, the newcomer is welcomed, and it is ensured that they know when they can come and that they dare to come.

In contrast, it may be significantly more difficult to join some communities. For example, search dog activities have an aptitude test that assesses the cooperation and suitability of the dog and the person. After passing the aptitude test, a basic course begins, during which further selection may be made. After the basic course, newcomers have the opportunity to join as trial members. The path to becoming a full member of the community can take up to a year. This kind of initiation is justified when seeking strong and long-term commitment to an activity that also has precise rules.

6.3 Rituals

Rituals refer to community activities that have a certain meaning and are repeated in the same way year after year. Often such activities are part of the community's celebrations, but they can also be very mundane activities. An example of a ritual is the name round at the beginning of a group session to check who is present. Rituals also include greeting when entering and leaving the premises. Scouts have several rituals, such as greeting with the left hand, the circle of siblings at the end of a meeting or trip, starting the day with a flag-raising, or gathering around the campfire in the evening.

At the culture house, a celebration ritual has included, for example, the candle circle at the Christmas party, where each participant holds a candle, which is lit one by one from the candle of the person standing next to them. Various successes, such as getting a study place, have been celebrated together with cake and coffee. Sitting in a circle is also a kind of ritual that signifies that we are together in this moment and that everyone is equally important. Holding hands or hugging in suitable situations are powerful rituals that enhance the sense of belonging.

6.4 Premises

A community usually gathers in a specific premises, which is either for the community's own use or suitable for shared use. Even if the premises change, like a concert hall, the activities are usually similar to those in other comparable places. The essential thing is that the premises meet the community's functional needs. If the premises change or there is no physical premises, community

spirit can also be created with settings that relate to the community's activities and provide the sense of security and well-being that premises bring.

For the premises to feel like they belong to the community members, it is important that they can influence how the premises are shaped. The best case is when community members participate not only in the planning but also in the renovation or furnishing of the premises.

The comfort of the premises affects how people feel about it. The more comfortable the space, the more it empowers the participants. A comfortable and well-kept premises also shows respect for its users. The comfort of the premises is created by its functionality, cleanliness, and aesthetics. Comfort is influenced by elements such as colors, materials, furniture, and lighting. When planning premises for NEET youth, it is advisable to consider sensory sensitivities as much as possible, for example, with indirect lighting, acoustics, and color schemes. Accessibility, such as the absence of thresholds and sufficiently large toilet facilities, also indicates who the space is designed for. Psychological accessibility can be promoted by making the premises homely, providing opportunities to withdraw into private spaces, and having unisex toilets. Social interaction should be made easy when designing community premises. This can be promoted by having sufficient seating and table groups. Nature elements have been found to relax and speed up recovery, so plants, nature images, natural materials, and, of course, windows enhance the empowering effect of the premises.

6.5 Interaction

The better the members of a community know each other, the easier it is for them to feel a sense of belonging. Interaction occurs in both formal and informal situations. An example of a formal situation could be a community meeting that gathers at a specific time and discusses pre-agreed topics. Informal interaction happens when hanging out and perhaps over a cup of coffee. An intermediate form of this can be considered the interaction that occurs in group activities, which is generally free but usually related to the activity taking place in the group. Interaction in communities can occur both in face-to-face activities and in the digital world.

Interaction helps participants feel seen and understood. It also helps members understand the shared values within the community. It is worthwhile to support interaction and getting to know other participants in various ways. Besides speaking and listening, it is good to remember other

means of interaction, such as all kinds of activities, like group art activities (visual arts, music, drama), which deepen the level of interaction.

Central actors in the community should make it a habit to encourage, thank, and acknowledge participants—this helps maintain a positive atmosphere in the community's interactions.

6.6 Symbols

Symbols are powerful tools in community building because they quickly remind us of our values, identity, and commitment to the community. Using symbols is a way to make communities stronger. Symbols represent a set of ideas and values; in other words, they often represent many things simultaneously. They replace many words.

Symbols include signs, objects, clothing, gestures, and other non-verbal communication. A globally well-known symbol, for example, is the scout scarf—almost everyone can associate a person wearing a scarf with scouting. Almost all associations and communities have some kind of logo, which enhances the sense of belonging.

Ask yourself, what symbols does your community use? If the community does not have its own symbol, what elements should your community's symbol include?

6.7 Roles

A good community treats all participants equally. Despite this, there are different roles in communities depending on the tasks its members have. Different roles also offer the opportunity to grow within the community, as participation can lead to taking on more responsibility. For example, at the culture house, the most important roles are participants and peer leaders—the latter are often participants first, then go through peer leader training, and after that, take on new responsibilities by starting to lead their own group. The roles in the culture house can be divided into visitors, newcomers, participants, peer leaders, interns, and employees.

7 HOW TO TRAIN COMMUNITY ACTORS

7.1 Training for youth: "Me as valuable member of the community"

The framework of training:

Part 1: Getting to know each other, Introduction to the topic and personal interests

- Exercise: Name tags, introductions, picture cards
- Lecture/theory: Familiarization with key concepts
- Exercise: Identification of personal interests: list of joys
- Exercise: co-painting

Part 2: Community and Social interaction

- Energizer: "I am a tree..."
- Group discussions: Factors that promote a sense of belonging within a community
- Energizer: "Queue"

Part 3: What Can I Offer to the Community and identifying Personal Strengths

- Exercise: Strength spotting from video: Fight back Pekka Hyysalo
- Exercise: 100 strengths
- Exercise: How can I utilize my strengths within my community

Part 4: My Hopes for the Future

- Exercise: Dream Community (self-reflection cards)
- Exercise: where I am, where I'd like to be, what are the first steps
- Exercise/feedback: "hands on shoulders"
- Feedback on the training program

Training content in detail:

Part 1/4: Introduction to Each Other and the Topic

General Aim	Start grouping and creating a safe space. In addition, an orientation to the themes of the training.
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Specific Objectives	Getting to know other participants in the training, introducing key concepts in the training and identifying your own interests.
Participants Number	Suitable for groups of different sizes, optimum number of participants 10-20 people

<p>Activities and exercises Description</p>	<p>This section consists of several small activities, an exercise and a discussion.</p> <p>1) Making name tags:</p> <p>Cardboard and pens are provided on which everyone writes their name. The name tags are attached in a visible place on the participant's chest.</p> <p>2) Self-introduction using picture cards:</p> <p>A large number of picture cards are spread out on the table and it is up to the participants to choose a picture that empowers them. Everyone then takes a seat (chairs arranged in a circle) and takes turns to say their name, show their chosen card and explain why/how its image empowers them.</p> <p>However, before participants are allowed to introduce themselves and the card they have taken, it is a good idea to go through the important principles of the training. These include: respecting everyone for who they are, giving everyone space to say what they want to say, asking for breaks if they need to, and making all participation voluntary. If something doesn't feel right, you don't have to take part.</p> <p>The important thing is that everyone gets roughly equal time, and in turn the attention of the rest of the group.</p> <p>3) Defining key concepts:</p> <p>The trainer introduces the key concepts: empowerment, community and community spirit, and empowering community. These can also be discussed. It is important that everyone understands the terms in more or less the same way.</p> <p>4) Break</p> <p>It is important to ensure that there is an adequate break in the training to avoid overloading the participants. Where possible, drinks and snacks should be provided.</p> <p>5) The list of joys</p>
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	<p>Each participant lists on a piece of paper things that bring them joy (or are important to them), whether big or small, such as love or a favourite ice cream. The aim is to list as many things as possible that bring you joy. The trainer can make it a little easier to think about things, and after a while, he or she can say topics that could be used to think about objects of joy. These could be culture and art, nature and the environment, technology and science, tourism and internationalism, food and drink, social relationships, hobbies, media, sport and well-being, etc.</p> <p>Once the lists have been made, the trainer invites those who wish to do so to read out their list (or part of it) to others. Again, it is important that the reader is given respectful space and freedom to share what is important to them.</p> <p>6) Let's design our own community! Participants are divided into small groups of around four for the duration of the exercise. The task: Share your interests (List of joys) within your group. Find a topic that interests everyone in your group. Based on that, decide what kind of community you could establish! What is the purpose of your community?</p> <p>Supporting questions: Does your community focus on doing a certain activity or hobby? Does your community aim to influence a specific theme? Does your community advocate for a cause or na ideology? Do you want to help a certain group of people/animals/nature?</p>
<p>Time</p>	<p>This training part will take 2-2.5h, divided between the different activities as follows:</p> <p>Making name tags: 10min</p> <p>Self-introduction with picture cards: depending on the number of participants, 5min to choose a card, and then about 1 min per participant. So for a group of 10 people about 15 min, for a group of 20 people 25min.</p> <p>Definition of key concepts: 10-15 min</p> <p>Break: 10 min</p> <p>List of joys: 45 min</p> <p>Small group activity: Let's design our own community! 30 min</p>

<p>Debriefing & Conclusions</p>	<p>Let's end the morning session with a joint discussion on the kind of communities the different small groups have decided to create. The trainer explains that the afternoon will continue in the same small groups and explore in more detail what makes up a community.</p>
<p>Bibliography/ recommended materials for participants</p>	<p>Key concepts:</p> <p>Community is a group of people united by something important to them.</p> <p>Community spirit is the emotional bond within such a group.</p> <p>Empowerment means a growing sense of inner strength.</p> <p>Peer tutor is someone who has similar experiences and interests as those they mentor.</p> <p>Empowering community: The activities and atmosphere of an empowering community are such that they enable the participant's inner sense of strength to grow (i.e. empowerment).</p>
<p>Materials / Logistics</p>	<p>Supplies needed for this morning: cardboard, pens, markers, picture cards/pictures, paper (A4 or notebook), data projector</p>

Part 2/4: Community and Social interaction

<p>General Aim</p>	<p>Understand the importance of communities and why communities are particularly important for the well-being of NEET young people.</p>
<p>Specific Objectives</p>	<p>Learn about the seven principles of belonging and understand how to use them to build a sense of community. At the same time, interaction skills will be developed through a variety of exercises.</p>
<p>Participants Number</p>	<p>Suitable for groups of different sizes, optimum number of participants 10-20 people. Participants will be divided into small groups of around four for part of the time.</p>

Activities and exercises Description

This section will focus on small group work to introduce the principles of community. There will also be a variety of interaction exercises.

1) Energizer: "I am a tree..."

An improvisation exercise to create a snapshot of all participants. Standing in a ring, someone starts the task by going to the centre of the ring and assuming a pose. He or she also tells you what he or she is going to do; for example, he or she puts his or her hands in a circle around the head and says: "I am a tree". The exercise continues with each participant in turn coming up with a way to complete the picture, going to the centre of the ring, taking a pose and saying what they are pretending. For example, after the tree, the next person might come up next to the tree and say: "I am a bird sitting on a tree branch". This continues until everyone has had a chance to participate in a shared snapshot.

2) What is sense of community made of?

The trainer will briefly introduce the seven principles that make up the sense of community. After each presentation, the small groups are given a discussion task, which is then shared together. In this way, all seven points are taken forward. It is a good idea to take a break in between or at least take a break for an exercise.

The basic principles of belonging:

1) Boundary: The line between members and outsiders. A boundary can be concrete, such as age limit or a neighbourhood, or abstract, such as values.

- Group chat: What kind of boundary separates the members of your community from other people? What goals or values does your community have?

2) Initiation: Activities to welcome newcomers to the community. Newcomers will then know that they are participants of the community.

- Group chat: Start by sharing your experiences of how you've been received into various communities. Then, brainstorm together how you could warmly welcome a new members into your community.

3) Rituals: Things that have a special meaning for the participants and that are repeated in the same way from one year to the next.

- Group chat: Think about what kind of rituals would fit into your community. What kind of practice would strengthen the sense of community?

4) Premises: A place where the community gathers. The comfort of the space contributes to empowerment.

- Group chat: Imagine premises (place/space) that empowers. What would it be like?

5) Interaction: The better people know each other, the easier it is for them to feel a sense of belonging. Different ways of interacting deepen the bonds.

- Group chat: What kind of challenges can there be in social interaction? How could you solve them? Come up with 1 method to increase interaction!

6) Symbols: Powerful tools for community building, because they represent values and ideas.

- Group chat: What kinds of symbols of different communities or actors do you know? What kind of symbol would best represent your community?

7) Roles: A path to growth as we participate. For example, in Culture Houses, peer tutors are given more responsibility than other participants.

- Group chat: What kinds of different roles do you know exist in various communities? What kinds of roles could there be in your community?

3) Suitable interaction exercises:

- Form a queue: Form two (or more) teams of the same size and have them form a queue as quickly as possible according to the instructions (one thing at a time). However, the participants must not speak at any time. When the queue is complete, the team shouts "ready". The faster one wins.

Form a queue according to: height, hair colour, shoe size, number of siblings, favourite food (by initials)

	<p>- <u>Count to three</u>: Pair up. The pairs face each other, and start counting to three in turn. The first starts by saying "one", the second continues with "two" and the first with "three". Continue like this for a while. The instructor stops the counting and says that the counting will continue, but that saying "one" out loud will be replaced by clapping the hands of the participant in turn. So the counting goes hands together - two - three. Let's try counting like this. The instructor cuts off again, and now instead of the number two, fingers are snapped. So hands together - snapping fingers - three. Let's try counting like this. Finally, the word three is also replaced by clapping the pair's hands together in the middle, so there is no more speech at all.</p> <p>4) Co-painting</p> <p>On a large piece of paper, paint together a work called " The community of dreams". There is no talking during the process, but the work is painted either in silence or with music playing in the background. The guideline is to watch what others are doing and interact with what others are doing through your own painting. Finally, look at the painting together and talk about the ideas it evokes.</p>
<p>Time</p>	<p>This training part will take 2,5h-3h, divided between the different activities as follows:</p> <p>Energizer: "I am a tree...", 10min</p> <p>Informative sessions and discussions: Factors that promote a sense of belonging within a community, 90-120min</p> <p>Interaction exercise: Multiple options, single exercise 5-10min</p> <p>Art Exercise: Group painting, 30-40min</p>
<p>Debriefing & Conclusions</p>	<p>It is natural to end the first training day by looking at the picture of the collective painting and discussing it (what the community of dreams is like). The trainer can also tell the participants that the next day will focus more on their personal strengths as actors in the community. This will help participants to orientate themselves for the second day of training.</p>

Bibliography/ recommended materials for participants	The book: Art of community, Charles Vogl, 2006
Materials / Logistics	Supplies needed for this session: data projector, pens, paper (A4 or notebook), large shared paper, gouache or acrylic paints, brushes, water cups, water, a bluetooth speaker

Part 3/4: What Can I Offer to the Community? Identifying Personal Strengths

General Aim	The aim is for each participant to understand that everyone has something to contribute to the community and to strengthen their sense of self as an active participant.
Specific Objectives	Become more aware of your strengths of character and how to use them
Participants Number	Suitable for groups of different sizes, optimum number of participants 10-20 people. Participants will be divided into small groups of around four for part of the time.
Time	<p>This training part will take 2–2,5h, divided between the different activities as follows:</p> <p>Strength spotting from video: Fight back, 25 min</p> <p>Exercise: 100 strengths, 20 min</p> <p>Break: 10 min</p> <p>Energizer: "I like..." 10-15 min</p> <p>Exercise: How can I utilize my strengths within a community, 35 min</p> <p>Art exercise: Me as a member of the community, 30min</p>

Activities and exercises Description

In this section, we delve deeper into character strengths. Some of the work is independent, some is done in small groups.

1) Strength spotting from video

Let's start the training by watching a video, and the task is to spot the strengths of the main character in the video.

A very appropriate video is a 15-minute mini-documentary about Pekka Hyysalo, a Finn who used to be a professional freestyle skier but was so badly injured that doctors were sure he would never walk again. In the video, Pekka talks about his recovery, his fight back journey. The video is in English. The video can be found on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/78405837>

After watching the video, let's discuss together what strengths the main character had.

2) Exercise: 100 strengths

After the video, everyone is given a piece of paper on which 100 different character strengths are listed. The task is to go through the list twice: the first time, write down all the strengths you can find in yourself on a good day (at your best). The second time, the task is to choose 5 strengths of character that you have even on a bad day, and which best describe you. These are the core strengths of each person.

Once everyone has identified their 5 core strengths, the volunteers can take turns to say their strengths out loud to everyone. In a smaller group, they can go through each person's strengths in turn. It is important to give space to the person who is sharing their strengths.

3) Energizer: "I like..."

This exercise increases energy in the group. Participants form a ring, and one goes to the centre of the ring. The person in the middle says something they like - like "I like cats" - and everyone who agrees with the person in the middle changes places. The one in the middle tries to get a place in the ring, but someone is left without a place and stays in the middle. Then it's his turn to say what he likes, and the game continues. The instructor ends the game at the appropriate

	<p>moment, but it's good to make sure that everyone has had time to be in the middle at least once.</p> <p>4) Exercise: How can I utilize my strengths within a community</p> <p>Here you divide into small groups of about 4 people and sit around a table. Each participant is given 5 pieces of paper on which they each write one of their core strengths (1 strength/paper). The papers are placed on the table so that each strength is visible to the other group members.</p> <p>The participants will then take turns to argue the benefits of the different strengths. The question is: "What are the benefits of having a person with strength X in the community?" (e.g. What is the benefit of having a person in the community who is persistent?). No one justifies their own strengths, but those of the other participants. This is continued until all strengths have been explained.</p> <p>Finally, the participants can discuss together whether all the strengths were easy to explain and how they felt when others talked about the benefits of their own strengths in the community.</p> <p>5) Art exercise: Me as a member of the community</p> <p>Once everyone has considered their own strengths, a self-portrait can be created. The style is free: the task is to create a self-portrait that somehow shows one's own strengths. When the work is finished, it is cut out of the paper and attached to the community-themed painting made yesterday, at the spot where one would like to be in the ideal community. Finally, we will look at what kind of ideal community was formed when everyone's self-portraits from the training were added.</p>
<p>Debriefing & Conclusions</p>	<p>In the final discussion, you can reflect on how well you knew your own strengths before the training session started, and what you learned about yourself or your strengths in general during this session. There can be further discussion about the benefits and joys of having different personalities in the community.</p>

Bibliography/ recommended materials for participants	100 strenghts: https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/100-Character-Traits-Free-Printable-PDF-List-5679288
Materials / Logistics	Supplies needed for this session: data projector, 100-strength list, paper, scissors, pens, gouache or acrylic paints, brushes, water cups, water

Part 4/4: My hopes for the future

General Aim	The idea is to direct your thoughts towards what you want out of life. It is also a time to thank the other participants in the training.
Specific Objectives	The exercise involves reflecting on your current life situation, your desired future and the first steps towards your goals. Feedback is given to other participants.
Participants Number	Suitable for groups of different sizes, optimum number of participants 10-20 people. Participants will be divided into small groups of around four for part of the time.

Time	<p>This training part will take 1,5h–2h, divided between the different activities as follows:</p> <p>Energizer: If I were a city, 15-20 min</p> <p>Exercise: The tree of characters: Where I am, where I'd like to be, what are the first steps, 30 min</p> <p>Break: 10 min</p> <p>Energizer: My couple is my mirrow, 5 min</p> <p>Interaction exercise: Feedback to others, “Hands on shoulders”, 15 min</p> <p>Feedback: Feedback on the training program</p>
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**Activities
and
exercises
Description**

1) Energizer: If I were a city..., 15-20 min

In this exercise, participants start by walking around the training room. When the instructor says an animal, they form a group of the size of the animal's legs (e.g. an ant has six legs, so form a group of six). Once the group is formed, the instructor asks a question and everyone takes a turn to answer it. Questions can be e.g. if I were a city/colour/food/song/animal then which city would you be and why.

2) Exercise: The tree of characters

The trainer hands out a form with a picture of the character tree (the tree can also be projected on the wall with a data projector):

<https://www.mtkl.fi/uploads/2019/08/024146c9-3hahmopuu.pdf>

The first step is for each person to find the figure on the tree that represents their current life situation. Once everyone has found a suitable figure, the volunteers can share which one they chose and tell a little about what happens in the chosen figure. Again, it is important that everyone's contribution is respected through silence and listening.

Next, everyone looks for the figure on the tree that represents the future of their dreams. Again, volunteers can tell what they chose and what they think is happening in the picture.

In the last section, everyone reflects on what the first small steps from the present to the future would be. Again, the volunteers share their thoughts. The trainer has to be careful: at the same time, encourage each person to share their ideas, but especially in this last section, challenge them to break down the first step towards the future as small and concrete as possible. The first step must be so concrete that it can be started immediately.

At the end, the trainer should thank everyone for having the confidence to share what may be very sensitive information about themselves.

3) Energizer: The couple is in my mirror

Pair up. The pairs face each other, and act as "mirrors" for each other. Put on some music, one of the pairs starts to move and the other follows in the same way (like looking in a mirror). After some time, the roles are changed, so one of the pairs takes the role of "director", i.e. decides how to move. The movement and also the exchanges are done without talking. Finally, you can discuss how it felt to move in this way.

4) Interaction exercise: Feedback to others, "Hands on shoulders", 15 min

The group stands up, and starts walking around the room while the music plays. When the music stops, the instructor instructs the group to walk up to someone who fits the description and put a hand on their shoulder. Everyone runs to the person who fits and grabs him by the shoulder. Then the music resumes, the participants walk until the music stops and the instructor says the next description. This continues until all the points have been covered. The director can try to make sure that at least at some point a hand is placed on each person's shoulder.

Descriptions:

- someone with a nice smile
- someone who is friendly
- someone who has been fun
- someone you'd like to have coffee with
- someone with whom you have something in common
- someone with whom you had a nice conversation
- someone whose name you remember
- someone from whom you've learned something new
- someone you'd tell a secret to
- someone you'd like to see again

5) Feedback: Feedback on the training program

Finally, time is given for everyone to give anonymous feedback on the training. The feedback can be either on paper or online. You can ask exactly what you are interested in. Here are a few

	suggestions for feedback questions: 1) What did you learn? 2) What was the most important thing you learned from the training?, 3) What would you have done differently? 4) Free feedback
Debriefing & Conclusions	As this is the last part of the training, we will finally bring everyone together. The trainer can thank the group and say something encouraging to the participants. He then gives the floor to anyone (or everyone) who wants to speak, and asks them to say either a sentiment or something nice to the rest of the group.
Bibliography/ recommended materials for participants	The tree of characters: https://www.mtkl.fi/uploads/2019/08/024146c9-3hahmopuu.pdf https://www.facebook.com/elamansiivet/photos/a.1453797708213499/2941347182791870/?locale=de_DE&paipv=0&eav=AfbxrfqDVOCWnASDaPcN5F-BLWFD32aBOx0mkRI27tNYHq_ysjcNG-G-hw6feWnFdFE&_rdr
Materials / Logistics	Supplies needed for this session: data projector, Tree of figures, paper, pens, a bluetooth speaker

7.2 Training for professionals: “Empowerment as a Common Journey”

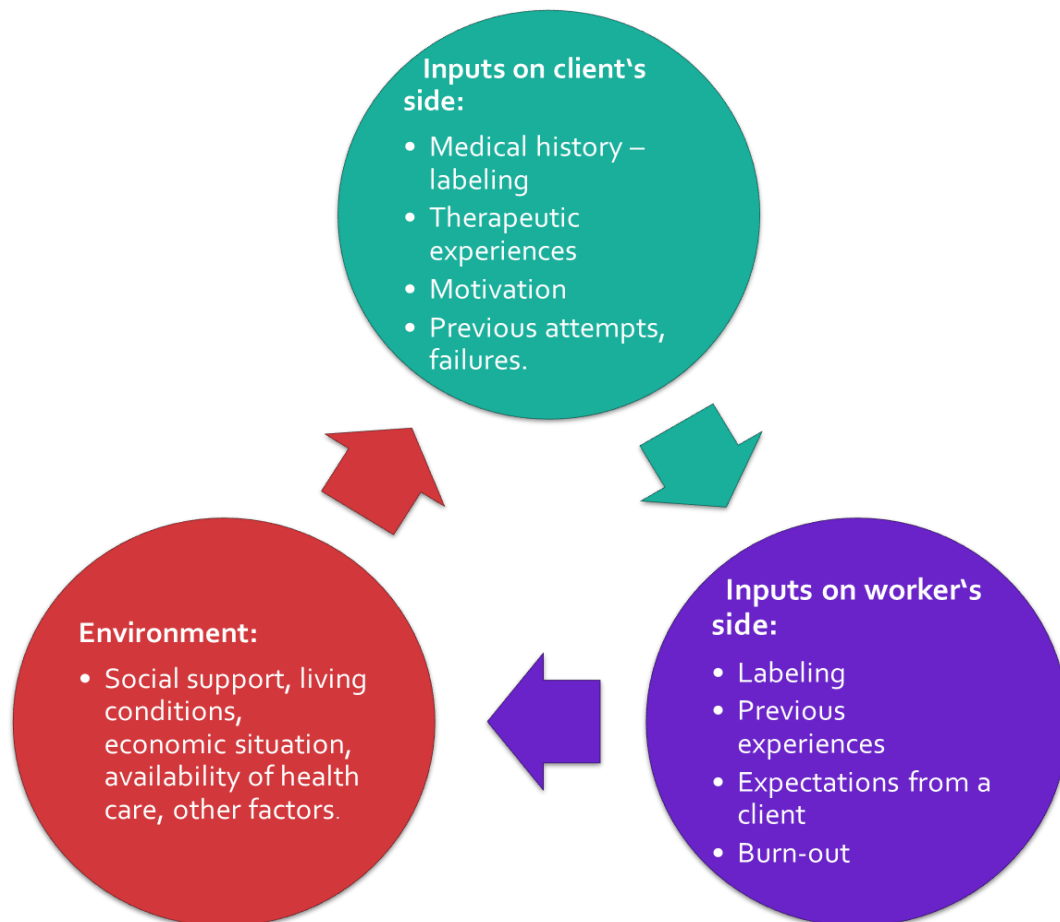
The framework of training

DAY 1:

Morning: Getting to know each other and how we understand empowerment

- Introduction of participants

- Online brainstorming and discussion about what the term empowerment means to us
- Theory of empowerment, therapeutic approaches (systemic and solution-oriented) + short video.
- Discussion in small groups about how we apply the principles of empowerment in work with clients.
- Model: Client, worker and system in interaction (client-worker relationship, environmental factors)
- Possible obstacles on the way to empowerment, e.g. labeling of the client.



Afternoon: Empowerment in the sense of shifting power

- Self-experience Activity: The Label Game
- Technique: Motivational interview theory
- Technique: Motivational interview in practise
- Closure of the day and topic

DAY 2:

Morning: Empowerment in the sense of building confidence

- Online brainstorming and discussion: What is the role of community in client’s way to empowerment?
- Defining role of community: validation, encouragement, feedback, advice, referrals, opportunities, resources, advocacy.
- The process of engaging the client in the community, identifying strengths, developing communication and relationship-building skills.
- Activity: Strength exploration worksheets
- Activity: Shield of group strengths

Afternoon: Empowerment in the sense of communication and shared decision-making

- Technique: Social skills training theory
- Technique: Social skills training in practise
- Useful links and resources, summary
- Feedback on the training programme

Training activities in detail:

Online brainstorming - after the introduction of members of the group.

General Aim	Introduction to the topic
Specific Objectives	Conceptualization, define the term empowerment within the group discussion.
Participants Number	All of participants
Time	5-10 min including connecting to the website etc.
Introduction & breaking exercises	This activity can be considered as an introduction to the topic and also as an “ice-breaker” type of activity. It can also serve as a way to gauge the mood/energy of the group in the morning or during the program.

<p>Activities Description</p>	<p>Participants log on to a web platform (e.g. mentimeter or other) via a QR code or link, which allows them to enter ideas on the topic. Together they will form a "cloud of words" or ideas corresponding to the topic being discussed. Everything is projected on the board by the lecturer at the same time so that all participants can see their own ideas and those of others. Together, this way they can better define the given topic or concept, and continue with a group discussion on the meaning.</p> <p>First you can ask a simple off-topic question, for example "How are you today"? Also, for the participants to get used to the environment of the web platform and learn how to enter ideas into it. Then you can start asking questions about the topic, e.g. "What does empowerment mean to you?", or "How do you apply the principles of empowerment in your work?".</p>
<p>Bibliography/ recommended materials for participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for creating group mind maps or brainstorming, you can use, for example, this web platform www.mentimeter.com.
<p>Materials/ Logistics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mobile phones or other devices with internet connection for participants. - computer for the lecturer. - projector and screen/smart board.

Labeling Activity - after defining the possible obstacles that the client may encounter on the path to empowerment and mentioning labeling as one of the possible obstacles.

<p>General Aim</p>	<p>To create awareness of how labels affect people, to understand self-fulfilling prophecies, and to grasp how self-esteem is built and how it could be destroyed.</p>
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Specific Objectives	In this self-experience activity, participants will experience how people can feel when someone labels them and how they can sometimes receive negative or positive reactions from those around them without knowing why.
Participants Number	Max. 15 participants - volunteers (others can be observers)
Time	30-45 min including explanation

Preparing the activity

- 1) Give each participant a strip of cardboard and a piece of masking tape. Have participants wrap cardboard strips around their heads and hold the spot where it fits comfortably. Next, tell them to pull it off and secure the spot with the tape. Now they should place the cardboard strips back on their heads. They should all look like they are wearing funny headbands.
- 2) Have participants arrange their chairs in a tight circle. They need to be close enough to read the labels on other participants' headbands.
- 3) Read the story (in activity description). Place labels on participants' headbands and give the group 10 min to discuss the situation you presented. First, observe. If the group is moving slowly, join in to get things going. You can start by looking at a person labeled "Natural Leader" and say something like, "We are looking to you to see what you think we should do."
- 4) After the group has had several minutes of discussion, break in and ask them to each state one idea on how to spend the money. Be sure that you and the rest of the group respond to each person based on his or her "label." After each person contributes, have them guess what their label is.

Suggested labels:

- Natural Leader
- Highly Intelligent
- Extremely Creative
- Wealthy
- From the Wrong Side of the Tracks
- Bossy
- Hyperactive
- Very Hostile or Angry
- Beauty Queen
- Invisible
- Used Car Salesman
- Everything I Say is Funny
- Pushover

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very Shy - Troublemaker - Not Too Bright
<p>Activities</p> <p>Description</p>	<p><u>Story and instructions for participants:</u></p> <p>You are all going to pretend that you are people who live in our little town of which I am the mayor. I have asked you here because we have been given a \$100,000 grant to improve our community. As the mayor, I need input on how to spend the money from many different citizens. So I need for you to each discuss how you believe the money should be spent and we will try to make a decision together.</p> <p>As we start doing this I will walk around the room and start placing “labels” on each of your headbands. It is important for everyone to understand that these labels are not my opinion of you. The labels have already been made and are turned over so I cannot see them. I will be placing the labels on you randomly. I don’t know which label you will get. You will not be able to see your label either. The labels will be ones that people often receive in life, so some of them may feel familiar to you.</p> <p>As we are discussing what to do with the money, you will want to give others in the group messages about their labels. Don’t tell them straight out what their labels are, just give them hints. For example, think about how someone might get treated if they are thought of by others as very intelligent. At the same time you will need to think about the messages others are sending you because you will also be trying to figure out what your label is.</p> <p><u>Discussion after the activity:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think this exercise was about and how does it relate to the topic? 2. How did it feel to be labeled? If you had a positive label, how did you feel about the exercise?

	<p>3. Did the way others were treating you change your behaviors? (For example, some people stop talking, some people talk more, etc.)</p> <p>4. How hard was it to find proof of each person's label?</p>
Debriefing & Conclusions	<p>Many participants report being deeply affected by this activity. This exercise can be a wonderful example of a self-fulfilling prophecy and how it can destroy a relationship. This exercise also leads to discussions about the importance of self esteem and how damaging labels can be.</p>
Materials/ Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -one strip of cardboard per participant that fits on the forehead - masking tape - premade labels (that fit on cardboard strips) – best to prepare before activity - dark coloured marker

Motivational Interview - after self-experience activity participants can try the motivational interviewing technique in the role of a counselor/social worker in order to strengthen the client's motivation to change.

General Aim	<p>Learn how to help people find the motivation to make a positive behavior change.</p>
Specific Objectives	<p>Participants will try to express empathy, develop discrepancy, roll with resistance and support self-efficacy in an interview with specific clients in model situations.</p>

<p>Participants Number</p>	<p>Groups of three participants - client, worker and observer.</p>
<p>Time</p>	<p>From 20 to 60 min due to options</p>
<p>Introduction</p>	<p>Motivational interviewing is an approach designed to help people find the motivation to make a positive behavior change. This approach is particularly effective for people who have mixed feelings about changing their behavior.</p> <p>It's possible to experience conflicting desires, such as wanting to change your behavior, but also thinking that you're not ready to change your behavior. The motivational interviewing approach holds that resolving this ambivalence can increase a person's motivation to change.</p>
<p>Activity Description</p>	<p>The participants will form groups of three people, where one will be the client, the second will be the consultant and the third will be the observer. The client chooses one of his topics, which is in a certain way dilemmatic, problematic for him. For example, it can be a question of whether to stop drinking ten coffees a day, start going to exercise or quit your job. For the purposes of this activity, it is easier if the participants in the client role choose simpler topics to solve. The time for the interview should be around 15-20 minutes, then 5 minutes for discussion and feedback. Then the participants in the group can switch roles. The activity can last from 15 to 60 minutes.</p>
<p>Debriefing & Conclusions</p>	<p>After this activity, it is advisable to leave a few minutes for possible questions and discussion. It is important to understand the role of the worker more as a guide, not as an active seeker of solutions for the client. The motivational interview technique should make the decision easier for the client and he should come to it himself, the counselor should not suggest a solution to him. A motivational interview as</p>

	such may not always immediately lead to a clear solution. Rather, it can help the client realize the advantages and disadvantages of a potential change in comparison to staying in the current state.
Bibliography/ recommended materials for participants	<p>Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2023). <i>Motivational interviewing: Helping people change</i>. Guilford press.</p> <p>Hohman, M. (2021). <i>Motivational interviewing in social work practice</i>. Guilford Publications.</p>
Materials / Logistics	<p>Useful worksheets available on www.therapistaid.com</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building Discrepancy - Stages of Change - Relapse Prevention Plan <p>A custom created table with four columns - two columns for the pros and cons of the current state, two columns for the pros and cons of making a change.</p>

Strength Exploration and Shield of Strengths - this self-experience activity builds on the previous discussion about the role of community in the client's journey to empowerment.

General Aim	<p>Defining your own strengths and their contribution. Identification of one's own strengths as a part of an empowerment journey – encouraging self-discovery and highlighting a person's strengths and abilities. This fosters a sense of self-worth and belief that they can overcome challenges.</p>
Specific Objectives	<p>Participants will have space to think about their own strengths and define what makes them easier to function in various areas of life (work, free time, family, etc.).</p>

Participants Number	<p>Any number of participants.</p>
Time	<p>30 minutes (-> 20 minutes to think and define your own strengths + 10 minutes to write in the strengths shield).</p>
Introduction	<p>Personal strengths are the skills and actions that a particular individual can do well. In working with the client, we focus on identifying his strengths, which can facilitate his involvement in community life and functioning in a group.</p>
Activities Description	<p>Hand out worksheets with a list of strengths to the participants and let them think. Ask them to choose one of their strengths and write it on a pre-drawn shield, which should symbolize the strength of the community with the strengths of all participants. Discuss which strengths can be helpful within community life.</p>
Debriefing & Conclusions	<p>When a person recognizes and uses their strengths, they tend to be happier and have higher self-esteem. For those who struggle to recognize their strengths, strength-spotting can be an effective counseling technique. Helping clients learn to recognize and use the strengths they already have can lead to improved wellbeing.</p>
Materials / Logistics	<p>Useful worksheets are available on www.therapistaid.com</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengths List - Strengths Use Plan <p>A pre-drawn shield as an image of the community, in which participants can gradually write down one of their strengths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - writing accessories

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a flipchart or blackboard where a sufficiently large image of the shield will be pre-drawn - markers for the flipchart
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Social Skills Training - at the end of the training for professionals, we come to the topic of communication and social skills training as a tool with which we as professionals can develop the necessary social skills in clients. Social skills will enable clients to function better in the community, but also outside the community in dealing with common daily situations.

General Aim	Presentation of social skills exercises as one of the techniques of working with the client in developing his skills and supporting independence in daily functioning.
Specific Objectives	The goal of the activity is to bring the participants closer to the possibility of direct training of social skills in the form of role playing. Some clients may lack proper social skills in order to be able to solve common daily situations.
Participants Number	All participants
Time	60 min
Introduction	Social skills training is a type of behavioral technique used to improve social skills in people with experience of mental illness (most often social anxiety). Social skills training can help people feel more comfortable and utilize their communication and interpersonal skills more effectively which can be useful in community living.

<p>Activities Description</p>	<p>Participants will solve various everyday (problematic) social situations in the form of role playing in front of the whole group.</p> <p>Examples of social situations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ask to join a group of friends to see a movie in the cinema. 2) Declining to take on extra work when your boss is asking you to do it because you already have different plans. 3) Returning a meal in a restaurant because you found a hair in it. 4) Your friend has lent you a book that can no longer be found anywhere. Unfortunately, you forgot it on the bus, and it got lost. <p>After solving the situation (it shouldn't take more than 5-8 minutes), the group can discuss which social skills the actors needed and applied here, whether the situation was solved correctly or if it could have been solved differently.</p>
<p>Bibliography/ recommended materials for participants</p>	<p>Glick, B., & Gibbs, J. C. (2010). <i>Aggression replacement training: A comprehensive intervention for aggressive youth</i>. Research Press.</p> <p>Kelly, A. (2018). <i>Social skills: Developing effective interpersonal communication</i>. Routledge.</p> <p>Michelson, L., Sugai, D. P., Wood, R. P., & Kazdin, A. E. (2013). <i>Social skills assessment and training with children: An empirically based handbook</i>. Springer Science & Business Media.</p>

8 ANNEXES/MORE DETAILED INFORMATION

8.1 Self-reflection questions

The result is a tool that allows professionals who work with young people to test how well they know empowerment and how well their current work is aligned with empowerment.

The self-reflection cards focus on the following 4 topics:

- A) Interaction
- B) Community
- C) Empowerment
- D) Self-development

For each topic we have collected 20 keywords and 20 questions.

A) Interaction

Keywords

Collaboration, Communication, Connection, Contact, Conversation, Cooperation, Dialogue, Engagement, Exchange, Influence, Interactional, Interpersonal, Mediation, Networking, Participation, Relationship, Reciprocity, Response, Socializing, Synergy

Questions

1. How can we foster positive interactions among young people in our community?
2. What role does social interaction play in overcoming economic challenges in our community?
3. How can we improve communication and interaction between local authorities and the youth?
4. What are the barriers to interaction among different social groups within our community?
5. How can community events enhance interaction among young people facing economic difficulties?
6. In what ways can mentorship programs improve interactions and support for young individuals?
7. How does peer interaction influence the social development of young people in our community?
8. What impact do social media interactions have on the well-being of economically disadvantaged youth?
9. How can we encourage more face-to-face interactions in a digitally dominant world?
10. What community resources can be leveraged to facilitate better interactions among young people?
11. How do interactions with local businesses and organizations benefit youth in our community?
12. What strategies can be implemented to promote positive social interactions in schools?
13. How can we measure the effectiveness of programs designed to improve community interaction?
14. What role do family interactions play in the economic and social well-being of young people?

15. How can we address negative interactions, such as bullying or discrimination, within our community?
16. What types of recreational activities can enhance social interaction among youth?
17. How can local government policies support better interaction and integration of young people?
18. What impact does cultural diversity have on interactions within our community?
19. How can volunteer opportunities improve interaction and engagement among young people?
20. What are the long-term benefits of improved social interaction for young people facing economic and social obstacles?

B) Community

Keywords

Belonging, Collaboration, Cohesion, Connectivity, Culture, Development, Diversity, Group, Empowerment, Engagement, Identity, Inclusion, Neighborhood, Network, Participation, Society, Solidarity, Support, Sustainability, Unity

Questions

1. How can we strengthen the sense of community among young people facing economic challenges?
2. What community resources are most needed by young people in our area?
3. How can local businesses contribute to the development of our youth community?
4. What role do community centers play in supporting young people with social obstacles?
5. How can we promote greater community involvement among young people?
6. What are the most effective ways to address social isolation in our community?
7. How can we ensure that all young people feel included in community activities?
8. What community initiatives have successfully improved economic conditions for young people?
9. How can we encourage young people to take leadership roles within the community?
10. What impact do after-school programs have on the community's youth?
11. How can the local government support the needs of young people in our community?
12. What are the main social obstacles faced by young people in our community?
13. How can we create more job opportunities for young people in our community?
14. What role do sports and recreational activities play in community building?
15. How can we better integrate services such as education and healthcare for young people?
16. What are the benefits of having a diverse community for young people?
17. How can we measure the success of community programs aimed at helping young people?
18. What can be done to improve the safety and security of our community for young people?
19. How do cultural events and festivals contribute to a stronger community?
20. What strategies can we implement to reduce economic disparities within our community?

C) Empowerment

Keywords

Autonomy, Capability, Capacity-building, Confidence, Enablement, Independence, Growth, Influence, Initiative, Leadership, Liberation, Motivation, Opportunity, Resources, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem, Self-determination, Strength, Skill development, Support

Questions

1. How can we empower young people in our community to overcome economic challenges?
2. What programs can be implemented to enhance the empowerment of youth in our community?
3. How does education contribute to the empowerment of young individuals facing social obstacles?
4. What role do mentors play in the empowerment of young people in our community?
5. How can we measure the empowerment of young people in our local community?
6. What are the key barriers to empowerment for economically disadvantaged youth?
7. How can we empower young people to take active roles in community decision-making?
8. What initiatives can help increase the self-esteem and confidence of young people in our community?
9. How can local businesses contribute to the empowerment of young people facing economic difficulties?
10. What role do youth-led organizations play in the empowerment of their peers?
11. How can we ensure that empowerment programs are inclusive of all young people in our community?
12. What are the most effective ways to empower young people to pursue higher education and career opportunities?
13. How can technology be used to empower young people in our community?
14. What impact does community involvement have on the empowerment of young individuals?
15. How can we support the empowerment of young people through sports and recreational activities?
16. What strategies can be implemented to empower young people to advocate for their rights?
17. How can family support contribute to the empowerment of young people facing social obstacles?
18. What role does financial literacy play in the empowerment of economically disadvantaged youth?
19. How can creative arts and cultural programs empower young people in our community?
20. What policies can local governments enact to support the empowerment of young people facing economic and social challenges?

D) Self-development

Keywords

Adaptability, Coaching, Discipline, Education, Focus, Goals, Growth, Habits, Improvement, Learning, Knowledge, Mentorship, Mindset, Motivation, Resilience, Training, Personal, Potential, Mindfulness, Self-care

Questions

1. How can self-development initiatives help young people overcome economic and social obstacles in our community?
2. What resources are essential for the self-development of youth facing financial difficulties?
3. How can we integrate self-development programs into local schools and community centers?
4. What role do mentors play in the self-development of young people in our community?
5. How can we encourage a mindset of self-development among economically disadvantaged youth?
6. What are the most effective self-development techniques for young people dealing with social challenges?
7. How can local businesses support self-development efforts for young people in our community?
8. What impact does financial literacy have on the self-development of young individuals?
9. How can technology and online resources facilitate self-development for youth in our community?
10. What strategies can we implement to foster self-development through extracurricular activities?
11. How can we measure the progress of self-development in young people facing economic obstacles?
12. What role does self-care play in the self-development of young people dealing with social issues?
13. How can peer support groups contribute to the self-development of young people in our community?
14. What are the barriers to self-development for young people from low-income families?
15. How can creative arts and cultural programs enhance self-development for youth facing social challenges?
16. How can self-development programs address the specific needs of young people with disabilities?
17. What role does mental health support play in the self-development of economically disadvantaged youth?
18. How can we incorporate self-development principles into youth leadership programs?

19. What community partnerships are essential for promoting self-development among young people?
20. How can we create a sustainable model for self-development initiatives in our community?

7.1.1 How to use the cards

The cards can be used in several ways.

Their main function is to provide food for thought, to allow the user to analyze a specific context by focusing on a defined aspect.

They can be used to encourage personal reflection or for group work. In detail:

- **Self-reflection:** In a group, the facilitator could put the different cards on the floor and then ask everyone to pick a card. Each participant has 10 minutes to reflect on the key word or question they chose, writing their thoughts in a notebook;
- **Brainstorming:** In a group, the facilitator chooses 1 keyword or question to start a brainstorming session, involving different participants to take part in the conversation; the facilitator asks everyone to silently and individually brainstorm their ideas about the specific keyword/question asked. Participants will write their ideas on sticky notes (one idea per sticky note). Once done:
 - In case of a big group (20+), participants can gather in small groups (3 or 5 participants) and share within them their thoughts (10 minutes) before joining the whole group and sharing some results;
 - In case of a small group (up to 10), participants can go and stick their note on a flipchart paper/board, to make it easier for everyone to see.
- **Discussion in pairs:** In a group, the facilitator could put the different cards on the floor and then ask everyone to pick a card. Then the facilitator makes pairs and each pair has 10 minutes to go for a walk and talk. Each couple will walk and talk about the question they chose, sharing the answer with their own pair.

7.2 Results of the surveys (Claudia)

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