

YOUTH MUNICIPAL CLIMATE ACTION

YMCA - Project 101192900 cofinanced by the European Union under the CERV programme (CERV-2024-CITIZENS-TOWN-NT)

MANUAL OF BEST PRACTICES 2025 – 2026



The Youth Municipal Climate Action (YMCA) project focuses on climate action and the active inclusion of young people in the political discourse surrounding climate change and municipal policies. The core aim was to create a safe space in which young people and political representatives could learn and then engage in fruitful discussions for the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. The project moderated between these two parties, providing local policymakers with the tools to understand young people's demands, while giving younger generations a safe space to express their needs and concerns, recognizing their right and ability to influence local, national, and European climate policies.

Six municipalities, or organizations acting on their behalf, are part of the partnership, representing five different countries:

- Municipality of Alba Iulia – Romania, as lead partner
- Associazione Amici Per Sandra (on behalf of Municipality of Castelnuovo del Garda) - Italy
- Association Motii Tara de Piatra (on behalf of Municipality of Zlatna) – Romania
- Municipality of Prague Kolovraty – Czech Republic
- Association Building Bridges (on behalf of Municipality of Soto del Real) – Spain
- Association Mano Europa (on behalf of Municipality of Kaišiadorys) – Lithuania



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They implemented a series of events—including workshops, seminars, exchanges of best practices, and roundtables—aimed at increasing citizens' engagement in democratic societies. Gender equality and non-discrimination served as the founding basis of all activities, ensuring a safe space for dialogue and exchange not only for youth but for all community members who wished to join.

The project engaged 1069 direct beneficiaries, reached 65,000 people through a robust communication campaign, and achieved a potential impact footprint of up to 240,000 people. Key outputs produced through the initiative include this manual of best practices on municipal policies and facilities tackling climate change, an online brochure for young people listing opportunities and information sources on the addressed topics, and a final YMCA Manifesto. This Manifesto contains common proposals and solutions for the climate crisis jointly drafted by political representatives and young activists, designed for presentation to the councils of partner municipalities and their respective regions.

More information on the project and its outputs can be found on YMCA website: <https://ymca-cerv.eu/>

Bridging grassroots engagement and municipal governance, this document serves as a comprehensive compendium of the best practices, insights, and proven methodologies cultivated by project partners during the implementation of local and international events across all participating nations.



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1. Opening event

1.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The YMCA project officially kicked off with its Opening Event and Environmental Action Forum, hosted by Associazione Amici per Sandra in Castelnuovo del Garda and Verona, Italy. This inaugural gathering brought together 59 participants, including municipal representatives, local stakeholders, climate activists, and youth delegations representing Italy, Romania, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania.

The primary objective of this launch was twofold. First, it established the operational and strategic roadmap for the YMCA network's future municipal interventions. Second, it aimed to immediately immerse youth and policymakers in a shared, practical environmental initiative. By combining administrative alignment with immediate field-based activism, the event set an egalitarian, action-oriented tone for the cross-border collaborations that followed.

1.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The initiative began by bridging the gap between local policy and international youth delegates. During the opening plenary, local authorities and hosting municipal representatives presented their ongoing territorial frameworks dedicated to natural resource preservation and youth civic engagement. This allowed international youth delegates and municipal stakeholders to engage in collaborative co-design sessions together. They mapped out future project milestones and established shared ownership of the project's overarching goals.

Moving away from traditional, passive academic presentations, the organizers adapted the agenda to prioritize dynamic engagement. They partnered with the national movement "Plastic Free"—an organization dedicated to fighting plastic pollution through targeted cleaning actions and school workshops—to conduct an interactive educational seminar. This session focused deeply on the systemic causes, risks, and remedies of plastic pollution, providing participants with concrete tools to recognize environmental degradation in their own communities.

To ground these policy discussions in reality, the theoretical workshop transitioned directly into an experiential field action: an urban clean-up in the historic city center of Verona. The action specifically targeted high-impact zones heavily affected by overtourism, allowing participants to witness firsthand how seasonal visitor surges strain municipal waste management infrastructure. During the clean-up, volunteers also interacted directly with Verona municipal representatives in charge of waste management. This created an immediate, valuable feedback loop between grassroots civic action and institutional management.



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In alignment with the core values of the CERV framework, the event also deliberately integrated a reflective session on gender equality and non-discrimination within the climate movement. Led by young activists, this module utilized personal narratives and first-hand testimonies from both female and male volunteers to discuss how gender-based discrimination and systemic biases manifest even within progressive environmental spaces. This open dialogue successfully raised participant sensitivity to intersectional barriers in climate activism.



1.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A key takeaway from this launch is the immense value of experiential learning over static workshops. The decision to substitute a standard indoor upcycling workshop with an expert-guided city clean-up dramatically increased participant engagement and retention. Combining a data-driven briefing with physical civic action proved to be the most effective mechanism for building deep environmental awareness.

Furthermore, partnering with established grassroots networks like Plastic Free injected specialized expertise and gave youth tangible role models for effective civic participation. This approach created a powerful peer-to-peer inspiration hub; by working shoulder-to-shoulder on local issues, international youth delegates actively gathered ideas and momentum to replicate similar clean-up campaigns in their home municipalities.

Finally, for future project designs, bringing municipal waste management officials directly into the field alongside volunteers is highly recommended. It demystifies local governance for young people and provides policymakers with a direct look at the enthusiasm and capabilities of the younger generation.



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2. Exchange of best practices in Italy

2.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The second initiative of the YMCA project shifted the focus toward direct knowledge exchange and mutual learning, once again hosted in Castelnuovo del Garda, Italy. This session engaged 62 participants—including municipal leaders, environmental stakeholders, and youth delegates from Italy, Romania, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania—in an exploration of sustainable municipal practices, biodiversity, and green technology.

The primary objective of this exchange was to expose participants to practical, scalable models of environmental conservation and sustainable development. Rather than hosting static indoor presentations, the itinerary linked three distinct sectors: public environmental defense, local community education, and industrial green innovation. This holistic approach demonstrated how local governance, grassroots participation, and corporate sustainability can effectively intersect to combat climate change.

2.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The learning exchange commenced with a site visit to the Centro Nazionale Biodiversità Carabinieri in Peri. This national biodiversity center, managed by the Italian state police, serves as a vital repository for collecting, studying, and conserving native forest seeds and plants from northern Italy to support reforestation efforts across Europe. The center's staff engaged the international delegation through a dynamic, experiential welcome activity where participants symbolically "became seeds" to experience the germination process firsthand. This immersive introduction led into a technical tour of seed quality control and conservation methodologies. The visit was so impactful that several young delegates with relevant academic backgrounds expressed immediate interest in applying for professional internships at the center, establishing an unexpected but highly valuable vocational pipeline for the project.

To translate these high-level biodiversity concepts into a localized community context, the initiative moved to a local kindergarten in the Sandrà area of Castelnuovo del Garda. Here, native shrubs previously donated by the Carabinieri Biodiversity Center were planted on the school grounds. This activity was structured as an intentional intergenerational dialogue. Youth delegates and young children worked shoulder-to-shoulder under the guidance of conservation experts, grounding abstract environmental protection concepts into a tangible, shared act of community care.



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To translate these high-level biodiversity concepts into a localized community context, the initiative moved to a local kindergarten in the Sandrà area of Castelnuovo del Garda. Here, native shrubs previously donated by the Carabinieri Biodiversity Center were planted on the school grounds. This activity was structured as an intentional intergenerational dialogue. Youth delegates and young children worked shoulder-to-shoulder under the guidance of conservation experts, grounding abstract environmental protection concepts into a tangible, shared act of community care.

The final segment transitioned from ecological conservation to industrial environmental technology through a guided visit to the local Air Liquide plant. After passing through standard industrial safety briefings, participants were guided by a plant engineer to examine large-scale carbon capture and processing systems. The technical overview detailed the chemical processes used to isolate atmospheric components and transform them into clean liquid oxygen and other sustainable substances. For the young delegates—especially those pursuing scientific disciplines—this offered a direct look at active carbon sequestration technologies and emerging careers within the green economy.

Following the factory tour, the company hosted a round-table workshop where the cross-border delegation analyzed European methodologies for energy efficiency and emissions reduction. During this session, youth participants actively pitched recommendations to municipal representatives on how to improve both environmental sustainability frameworks and civic communication channels back home.

2.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary insight from this mutual learning format is the value of utilizing a multi-sector itinerary to unpack complex climate concepts. Interlinking public conservation centers, civic educational spaces, and industrial facilities gives youth and policymakers a comprehensive view of how systemic climate action operates across society.

The integration of intergenerational activities also stood out as a highly effective practice. Bringing international youth into local early-childhood spaces for a symbolic tree-planting initiative did more than just improve a local green area. It stimulated critical thinking among the youth delegates, prompting them to design and suggest similar intergenerational planting campaigns tailored to their home municipalities.



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Additionally, bridging the gap between youth and specialized green institutions can uncover unexpected career pathways. Securing internship interest at a national conservation facility demonstrates that municipal climate projects are most effective when they actively connect young participants with concrete professional and educational advancements.

Finally, the industrial workshop model highlights the benefit of giving youth a direct platform to advise local policymakers. Allowing young people to evaluate industrial environmental solutions and then immediately co-design municipal communication strategies ensures that youth perspectives are directly integrated into local governance.



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3. Exchange of best practices in Czech Republic

3.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The third work package of the YMCA project advanced the network's capacity-building goals through a centralized mutual learning conference and an infrastructure review in the Czech Republic. Organized and hosted by the Municipality of Prague-Kolovraty, the initiative engaged 35 direct participants, including municipal executives, local teachers, environmental stakeholders, and student groups alongside cross-border project delegations from Spain, Italy, Lithuania, and Romania.

The primary strategic objective of this session was to establish an interactive workspace where youth-led environmental research could directly interface with formal municipal planning and renewable energy policy. Rather than relying on top-down administrative presentations, the format inverted traditional hierarchies by positioning local students as technical presenters who delivered data-driven climate insights to international policymakers. This approach coupled student microclimate and circular economy projects with a physical evaluation of public solar infrastructure, creating a reproducible model for municipalities seeking to anchor local governance within academic and youth-led climate actions.

3.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The operational itinerary commenced in the morning at the Community Centre "Na Půdě", situated within the historical Hostinec U Boudů facility in Prague-Kolovraty. Following a contextual overview of the Czech educational system and regional scholastic sustainability programs, local students took the floor to present two distinct grassroots initiatives.

Representatives from the Říčany Grammar School Eco Team first presented the methodology behind their school item-exchange events. They detailed the logistics of planning and executing community-wide resource swaps for apparel, books, and accessories, illustrating how simple peer-to-peer sharing networks dramatically lower waste accumulation, curb localized consumer expenditures, and mitigate the environmental pressures associated with fast fashion.

The secondary presentation from the Eco Team shifted to architectural and ecological planning, detailing ongoing and future interventions to lower energy and water consumption and adapt school grounds to climate realities through composting installations, enhanced biodiversity plots, and engineered shade structures.



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The technical scope deepened with a presentation by pupils from ZŠ Kolovraty, who delivered the findings of a multi-week microclimate mapping project executed across the municipality. The students deployed localized sensors to collect temperature and relative humidity metrics across multiple urban variables, systematically comparing data gathered from exposed asphalt surfaces, artificial shade structures, and areas beneath mature tree canopies. The resulting datasets offered proof of the exact cooling capacity of urban green infrastructure, establishing a clear link between mature public trees and the reduction of localized heat island effects during high-temperature periods.

These student presentations served as the empirical foundation for a structured roundtable discussion that followed. This session brought political representatives, civic stakeholders, and international partners together to cross-examine how community-level waste reduction and microclimate mapping interface with European Union climate directives and municipal public asset management. The cross-border dialogue focused extensively on energy conservation inside public facilities, the logistical and financial hurdles of fair access to renewable energy grids, and the localized application of circular economy principles.

The mid-day transition moved from theoretical and data planning to an engineering review through a guided site visit to the recently retrofitted Kolovraty Town Hall. This public facility served as a live case study of green infrastructure integration. Participants inspected the rooftop photovoltaic panel installations, where a regional energy specialist provided a technical briefing on the selection criteria for the hardware, structural integration parameters, and projected financial and carbon savings within the municipality's broader energy-management framework.

The afternoon and evening sessions shifted toward building long-term social cohesion and intergenerational partnerships. Delegates returned to the community center for several hours of unstructured dialogue with the youth presenters, which was followed by a cultural study tour of the capital city and a collaborative working dinner focused on consolidating these findings for the final project manual.

This approach yields dual benefits: it equips young people with practical scientific literacy while supplying local councils with clear environmental data to justify public budget investments in urban tree planting and green space engineering



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Furthermore, the integration of student-run item exchange events offers an excellent low-cost blueprint for regional waste management campaigns. Rather than attempting to alter youth consumption habits through top-down lecturing, municipalities should support student eco-teams in creating physical space for second-hand marketplaces. This structural support allows schools to model the circular economy organically, converting abstract green policies into a highly visible peer culture centered on resource preservation and responsible consumption.

The town hall rooftop photovoltaic installation also underscores a critical lesson in institutional leadership: public administrations must model the sustainable behaviors they demand from their citizens. Transforming a local government headquarters into a functioning renewable facility provides a visible community anchor for climate action. Pairing these infrastructure upgrades with expert-led site tours demystifies clean energy technology for the community, proving the economic and operational viability of green retrofits in public infrastructure.

Finally, the success of the conference format highlights the strategic benefit of structuring formal roundtables as equal spaces for intergenerational dialogue. Giving youth groups a dedicated seat at the table alongside mayors, energy experts, and international coordinators transforms young people from passive project recipients into recognized civic stakeholders. This validation bridges the traditional gap between youth perspective and institutional governance, generating a collaborative environment where shared European climate policies can be translated into practical, community-supported local actions.



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4. Environmental walking tour

4.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The fourth work package of the YMCA project introduced a multi-layered educational model that successfully interlinked cinematic storytelling, non-formal environmental education, and community asset mapping. Hosted by the Municipality of Prague–Kolovraty in the Czech Republic, this dual-date initiative engaged a broad audience totaling 306 participants. The international delegation brought together youth delegates and civic stakeholders from Spain, Italy, Lithuania, and Romania alongside a large assembly of local citizens and students. The strategic goal of this event was to establish a reproducible municipal framework that translates high-level global climate anxieties into immediate, localized civic actions. To achieve this, the itinerary was divided across two distinct focus days. The first phase targeted secondary students using documentary film screenings to provoke critical discussion on global socio-environmental challenges. The second phase decentralized into a town-wide community program designed to activate local public spaces through hands-on ecology workshops and multi-generational volunteering. This progressive approach ensured that theoretical knowledge built during film analysis directly fueled visible community stewardship and regional policy co-design.

4.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The first phase of the operational itinerary commenced on April 23, 2026, centering on cinematic media education tailored for the student population. Organizers partnered with the humanitarian organization *People in Need* to screen selected documentaries from the prestigious *One World* film festival. The cinematic curriculum deliberately explored the intersections of human rights, environmental crises, and technological evolution. Documentaries such as *A Free Daughter of Free Kyrgyzstan*, *In the Belly of AI*, *Cuba & Alaska*, and *Dangerous Games: Roblox and the Metaverse Exposed* were used to expose students to macro-level global challenges. Following each presentation, facilitators ran structured reflection workshops. In these sessions, students cross-examined the media themes, debated systemic risks, and successfully mapped how global climate and digital issues manifest inside their own municipal borders and daily routines.

The second phase, executed on April 25, transitioned into a practical, open-air community mobilization network deployed across multiple public venues in Prague–Kolovraty. Local schools, civic volunteer groups, youth organizations, and international delegates worked collaboratively across several targeted urban locations.



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To stimulate circular economy habits and restore local urban biodiversity, organizers ran a community plant swap alongside the physical engineering of a new public flower bed, teaching participants practical techniques for urban habitat management. Concurrently, a diverse array of creative hands-on workshops utilized natural materials, ceramics, sand art, and collaborative construction installations to engage children and families in ecological design. Early-childhood environmental mainstreaming was also showcased through a public exhibition of climate artwork created by the Kolovraty kindergarten students.

This public space activation was further amplified by specialized local civil protection and outdoor education networks. Volunteers upgraded an active outdoor classroom at the local forest kindergarten, while scout organizations set up interactive modules on their grounds demonstrating the principles of creating and maintaining a "living garden". Concurrently, the youth firefighting brigade led community safety workshops focused on protecting citizens, domestic animals, and regional forest ecosystems from climate-induced hazards. Public engagement extended to the Chadovo Sad community orchard, where participants engaged in a low-impact outdoor gathering to build social cohesion. The work package concluded with a structured focus group in the city center, gathering international partners, local association leaders, and youth activists. The group reviewed the outcomes of the Kolovraty interventions and translated these field insights into concrete, policy-oriented proposals. These draft resolutions were specifically designed to be integrated into the upcoming final YMCA Manifesto scheduled for compilation during the project's concluding summit in Romania.

4.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary best practice identified within this framework is the strategic use of film literacy as a gateway to environmental action. Standard climate data presentations can often induce eco-anxiety or fatigue among youth audiences. Utilizing high-caliber, narrative-driven documentaries from established human rights festivals provides an emotionally resonant baseline that sparks authentic interest. Following these screenings immediately with localized debriefs allows local governments to naturally transition young people from passive media consumers into active community planners.

Furthermore, the decentralized layout of the community day offers an excellent model for multi-stakeholder civic collaboration. Rather than trying to gather all citizens inside a single municipal hall, the local council successfully mapped and utilized existing civic nodes, including the forest kindergarten, scout fields, public orchards, and fire brigade facilities. This approach allows diverse local organizations to lead activities within their own spaces, ensuring that environmental messaging is integrated into preexisting community networks.



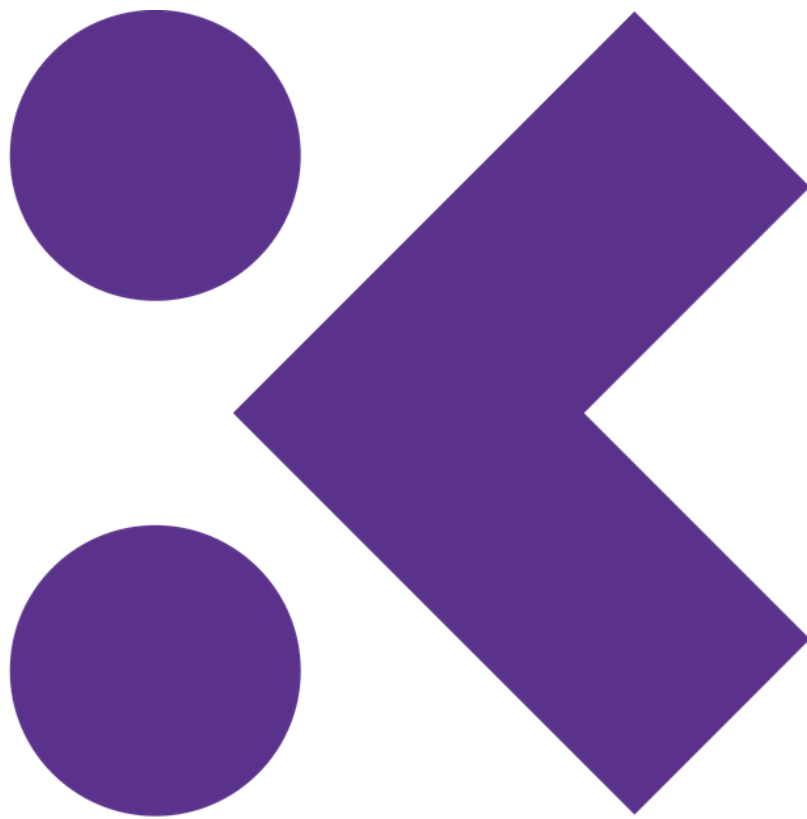
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The success of the plant swap and public garden engineering also underscores the value of asset-sharing economies in municipal designs. Providing a public space where citizens can exchange botanical resources costs very little administratively but delivers significant returns in terms of community building, social inclusion, and urban greening. This model proves that small-scale, accessible neighborhood interventions are highly effective at fostering long-term pride and stewardship over public land.

Finally, this work package highlights the importance of creating a direct link between local volunteerism and transnational policy advocacy. Ending a multi-generational community day with a formal youth and stakeholder focus group ensures that field observations are immediately structured into political ideas. Channeling these practical, localized insights directly into the drafting of the final YMCA Manifesto demonstrates how everyday neighborhood actions can play a functional role in shaping wider European climate policy.



Kolovraty



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5. Youth networks on climate change

5.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The fifth work package of the YMCA project focused on building resilient youth networks to address the climate crisis. Hosted by the Municipality of Alba Iulia in Romania, this initiative brought together 107 participants from Romania, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Spain, and Italy. The strategic approach prioritized a structured timeline beginning two months prior to the event, utilizing data collection to uncover baseline youth perceptions before gathering local and international delegates for collaborative action. By combining early-childhood educational partnerships, high school data debates, and specialist-led urban ecology sessions, the framework established a reproducible model for municipalities seeking to convert youthful anxiety into structured civic engagement.

5.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The operational framework began in March with the co-development of a digital survey designed alongside local youth organizations to gauge climate perceptions among regional students. Once validated by international project partners, the questionnaire was distributed broadly to gather a data foundation for subsequent workshops.

The physical itinerary on May 21, 2025, commenced at Kindergarten No. 16, an institution noted for integrating sustainability into its early childhood curriculum. To build a tangible connection between international partners and the local community, each national delegation brought native seeds representative of their home countries. Delegates planted these seeds alongside the children, translating abstract ecosystem concepts into a joint, multi-generational conversation about local conservation and environmental care.

The second phase moved into secondary education, utilizing the "Alexandru Domșa" Technological High School as a venue to collectively analyze the pre-distributed survey data. A sample of high school students reviewed the findings, which revealed significant insights regarding youth attitudes. While the students accurately identified greenhouse gases (26%), deforestation (24%), and industrial operations (21%) as principal climate drivers, a staggering 78% acknowledged that media rhetoric heavily manipulates public understanding of climate issues.



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Furthermore, a deep disconnect surfaced regarding institutional representation: 76% of surveyed youth felt their voices were either completely ignored or barely heard by local and national governments, and the vast majority expressed skepticism regarding the efficacy of current state-led environmental policies. Conversely, subsequent knowledge quizzes uncovered noticeable gaps in the students' fundamental climate literacy; only half of the respondents could identify carbon dioxide as the primary greenhouse gas, and few understood the practical steps required to fulfill the European Union's 2050 climate-neutrality objectives.

The afternoon session utilized the city's Dendrological Park to explore urban forestry and natural carbon sinks. Due to sudden inclement weather, organizers adapted the workshop into an indoor presentation led by a regional ecology specialist, utilizing audiovisual media to showcase the park's biodiversity. The expert explained the specific carbon absorption capacities of native regional flora and detailed how community-scale parks can be designed and replicated to mitigate localized urban heat island effects. As weather patterns cleared, the delegation transitioned into the park for a low-impact picnic composed entirely of locally sourced foods. This field lunch served as a practical case study to demonstrate how minimizing food transportation distribution loops immediately reduces community carbon expenditures.

The initiative concluded with a digital mobilization framework. Participants were trained to produce creative, narrative-driven media assets detailing the technical lessons learned throughout the day. By utilizing targeted, synchronized project hashtags, the delegates broadcasted localized climate actions directly to their digital networks, scaling the project's educational footprint to a broader online audience.



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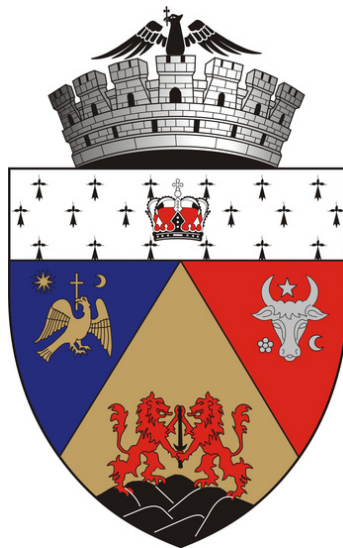
5.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary best practice derived from this initiative is the strategic use of hyper-local data collection to drive youth dialogue. Administering a climate perception survey before an international exchange gives organizers concrete metrics that immediately focus workshops on the community's actual needs. Rather than relying on generic environmental concepts, youth delegates were able to analyze real, localized statistics from their peers, which increased engagement.

The clear disparity between high youth anxiety and low environmental literacy underscores the critical need for actionable, workshop-based climate education. Municipalities cannot assume that because young people are worried about climate change, they understand the underlying science or regional policy frameworks. Bridging this gap requires transition away from static educational messaging and toward practical quizzes, specialist interaction, and direct exposure to regional green plans like the European Green Deal.

The high school data also highlighted a profound sense of institutional isolation among young people, with three-quarters feeling unheard by governing bodies. To counteract this, municipal projects should explicitly incorporate "simulation scenarios"—such as asking youth to define immediate actions as if they held the office of mayor or environment minister. This exercises executive thinking and allows local governments to extract highly practical, youth-driven policy solutions.

Finally, the adaptive format of the urban forestry workshop provides an excellent blueprint for logistical resilience. When environmental factors disrupt outdoor field studies, utilizing specialized local experts and media assets ensures that technical information can still be delivered effectively in an indoor setting. Following up an indoor session with a sustainable local food picnic further reinforces environmental stewardship in an approachable, community-centered way.



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6. Daffodils festival

6.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The sixth event of the YMCA project focused on local biodiversity protection and community-driven environmental advocacy. Hosted by Asociația de Dezvoltare Intercomunitară Moții, Țara de Piatră at the Negrileasa Daffodil Glade nature reserve in Alba County, Romania, this awareness-raising initiative brought together 179 participants. The delegation included a vast contingent of local youth and volunteers alongside international project representatives from the Czech Republic, Italy, Spain, and Lithuania.

The strategic core of this event was to utilize an existing, popular cultural gathering—the annual Daffodils Festival—as a high-visibility platform for immediate environmental action. Rather than conducting isolated academic workshops, the organizers embedded youth advocates directly into the festival landscape. This approach dual-targeted local tourists to mitigate immediate human ecological damage and systematically leveraged field insights to co-draft a tangible local policy action plan delivered straight to municipal decision-makers.

6.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The physical itinerary was executed within a highly sensitive ecological zone: a 5-hectare protected reserve established in 1995 to preserve the wild daffodil (*Narcissus stellaris*) and its surrounding mountain pasture ecosystems. The day opened with a field-based thematic workshop organized in tandem with local environmental protection associations. Here, experts briefed the youth delegation on the specific vulnerabilities of the reserve, detailing local biodiversity conservation methods and exploring ways to reduce anthropogenic interference—the disruptive footprint left by human activity. This session functioned as a transnational learning exchange, allowing international delegates to share proven conservation techniques utilized within their respective home countries.

Following the technical briefing, youth volunteers transitioned into immediate creative production. Working collectively, the participants designed and manufactured specialized educational brochures shaped like daffodil flowers. Equipped with these distinct materials, the youth spread across the festival grounds to engage directly with tourists and local citizens. Through persuasive peer-to-peer dialogue, they disseminated conservation data and actively discouraged visitors from picking the protected flora, transforming abstract preservation laws into an active community-enforced standard.



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The afternoon component bridged the gap between field activism and formal governance. During a shared outdoor lunch, organizers structured an interactive debriefing session. Local students, volunteers, and international delegates brainstormed solutions to the environmental pressures they observed firsthand during the festival. Every participating organization and initiative group proposed concrete measures to decrease human impact on the reserve. These insights were compiled into a structured local action plan containing explicit policy proposals to protect the regional ecosystem. To ensure this work achieved direct political utility, the document was digitized and formally delivered to the Zlatna Municipality. This delivery established a direct communication loop connecting youth voices with local public administrators and decision-makers.

6.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary best practice identified in this framework is the strategic alignment of climate awareness actions with established public festivals or cultural milestones. Attempting to draw large crowds to isolated environmental seminars is often difficult; however, embedding youth advocates directly into an existing influx of tourists maximizes the audience reach. This positioning places environmental protection messages exactly where and when human ecological pressure is highest. The production of custom, themed educational media—such as brochures cut into the shape of local flora—proved far more effective than generic corporate flyers. These creative materials served as visual conversation starters, breaking down initial barriers between youth volunteers and public tourists while leaving a memorable, behavior-altering impression.

Additionally, this event highlights the value of extracting immediate civic deliverables from field activities. A field trip or volunteer day should not end simply when participants go home. By structuring a mandatory debriefing directly after public outreach, municipalities can capture raw, unedited observations from youth while their field experience is fresh.

Finally, converting these field notes into a formalized, digitized action plan and submitting it directly to municipal councils—such as the Zlatna Municipality—demonstrates how grassroots volunteerism can step into structured policy advocacy. This model effectively transitions young people from passive observers of environmental degradation into active contributors to local territorial governance.



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7. Exchange of best practices in Lithuania

7.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The seventh event focused on strengthening cross-border cooperation and evaluating institutional environmental strategies through a peer-to-peer exchange. Hosted by Mano Europa in Lithuania, this mutual learning conference brought together 32 participants, comprising municipal administrators, regional policy experts, and international youth delegates representing Lithuania, Romania, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Spain.

The strategic focus of this event was to conduct a direct comparative analysis of urban sustainable infrastructure across two distinct administrative territories: the Kaišiadorys and Jonava District Municipalities. Rather than keeping participants in a single static conference room, the itinerary linked high-level municipal roundtable debates with direct field evaluations of industrial renewable installations, public transport systems, and civil educational spaces. This allowed the cross-border delegation to examine how local governments can systematically integrate circular economy principles, clean energy generation, and green public procurement directly into everyday urban planning and community life.

7.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The institutional exchange commenced in the Kaišiadorys District Municipality, where the international delegation met with the executive leadership and municipal administration. The operational core of this visit was an interactive roundtable discussion focused on innovative environmental protection practices and recent regional green developments. Local authorities presented their structural frameworks for modernizing waste management, deploying renewable energy grids, and transitioning to low-emission public transportation options.

To move from strategic concepts to practical demonstration, the municipality provided an experiential field test by transporting the delegates via the city's new fully electric bus fleet, demonstrating a scalable model for reducing urban carbon expenditures. This low-emission transport experience led into site inspections of two key municipal assets: a modern, high-throughput waste sorting facility and a localized solar panel park. These site visits offered international delegates a clear view of how municipal capital investments can be deployed to transition regional energy and waste infrastructure toward green models.



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The second phase of the exchange took place in the Jonava District Municipality, shifting the analytical focus to urban sustainability strategies and eco-conscious community spaces. The delegation engaged with departmental representatives to review the region's long-term sustainability plans, focusing heavily on public energy efficiency programs, infrastructure upgrades, and the systemic introduction of circular economy principles.

Following this administrative briefing, the delegates evaluated public institutions to observe how these macro-policies operate at a community scale. The team visited the Jeronimas Ralys Gymnasium and the Grigorijus Kanovičius Public Library, where administrators demonstrated how sustainable engineering and eco-conscious learning are blended into daily operations. The field inspection highlighted the integration of automated energy-saving building technologies, environmental curricula, and the implementation of sustainable catering practices within public school systems. This approach illustrated how green public procurement and building management can reinforce sustainability values across multiple generations.

7.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary best practice highlighted by this Baltic exchange is the value of utilizing "living labs" and practical demonstrations during institutional study visits. Transporting international delegates and youth leaders on the municipality's actual electric transit vehicles, and walking them through active solar parks, proves far more effective than reviewing static data spreadsheets. It allows visiting policymakers to evaluate the real-world operational challenges, cost benefits, and infrastructure requirements of clean energy and low-emission transit systems before replicating them in their home territories.

Furthermore, the Jonava framework offers an excellent model for embedding climate action into public infrastructure budgets. Sustainable urban development cannot be achieved solely through standalone environmental campaigns; it must be integrated directly into municipal facilities. By modernizing school buildings and public libraries with energy-saving technologies and circular catering models, local councils turn everyday civic spaces into functional tools for environmental education and carbon reduction.

Finally, this exchange demonstrates that cross-border town networking projects are most effective when they facilitate direct, unfiltered access to municipal administrators and regional executives. Creating structured platforms where international youth and visiting leaders can engage in dialogue with mayors, vice-mayors, and urban planners helps demystify public administration. This positioning allows local governments to exchange innovative practices and build lasting partnerships capable of driving coordinated climate action across Europe.



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8. World Environmental Week

8.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The eighth work package of the YMCA project focused on local youth mobilization and alignment with European green policies through a dedicated public event held during World Environmental Week. Organized by Mano Europa in Kaunas, Lithuania, the initiative engaged 64 local youth participants. The event was split across two key dates—September 18 and October 18, 2025—to maximize community outreach and sustain engagement over time.

The strategic framework of this work package was designed to equip young citizens with the necessary tools to navigate environmental issues and actively enter public, community, and political discourse. Rather than treating climate action as a distant bureaucratic concept, the organizers established a direct pathway connecting personal consumption habits with European-level civic advocacy. The itinerary blended hands-on circular economy exercises, direct mentoring from official climate diplomats, and interactive project co-design workshops aligned with European Union governance standards.

8.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The operational methodology began prior to the physical gathering by requiring all participants to select and bring a specific pre-owned item from home to be integrated into the session. The event opened with a technical sustainability quiz designed to address existing knowledge gaps and clarify the active role young people must assume in combating localized environmental degradation.

Following this educational baseline, the group transitioned into an item exchange forum. This activity went beyond a standard second-hand market by requiring participants to develop a personalized narrative explaining the value and history of their item. Trained volunteers facilitated the exchange, guiding the youth on how to accurately evaluate an object's long-term sustainability value. This structured dialogue successfully promoted practical habits around upcycling, repurposing, and recycling.

The next phase connected this localized awareness with professional climate advocacy through a multi-tiered panel discussion. The first panel featured regional environmental defenders and official European Climate Pact Ambassadors. These specialists provided explicit frameworks on how to influence municipal environmental policies and launch grassroots initiatives, such as school recycling programs and volunteer clean-up networks.



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A second panel featured representatives from the European Youth Team Lithuania—an independent network of young information disseminators focused on promoting EU sustainability policies to their peers. These young speakers detailed their experiences running environmental campaigns at the European level. They provided the audience with information on how to navigate EU youth grants and how to collaborate effectively with local municipal administrations to fund sustainability projects.

The event concluded with an interactive project design workshop. Participants were divided into small working groups, assigned specific environmental themes, and tasked with brainstorming high-impact climate campaigns. Using a simulated scenario where groups competed for a chance to present their concepts at the European level, the teams were forced to think critically about communication strategies, creative public engagement, and measurable indicators of local impact.

8.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A key best practice from this event is the use of storytelling to reinforce circular economy concepts. Simply holding a standard item exchange can sometimes feel impersonal or transactional; requiring participants to explicitly pitch the narrative value of an old item completely changes the dynamic. It fosters a deeper emotional connection to second-hand goods, helping youth re-evaluate consumer waste and view old items as valuable resources to be upcycled rather than discarded.

Furthermore, the integration of peer-to-peer climate ambassadors is highly effective for municipal youth engagement. Hearing about complex European policy frameworks, grant applications, and green transition strategies can feel overwhelming when delivered by older institutional figures. Utilizing young information disseminators like the European Youth Team helps translate dense European directives into relatable, actionable opportunities for local youth.

Finally, the success of the simulated project design competition offers an excellent methodology for future municipal workshops. Introducing a competitive element with a hypothetical high-level reward encourages young participants to move past vague environmental concepts. It pushes them to co-draft structured, strategic action plans focused on communication, creative problem-solving, and real-world execution metrics.



9. The Golden visit

9.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The Golden Visit focused on urban ecological transition, industrial heritage regeneration, and youth-led policy advocacy. Hosted by Asociația de Dezvoltare Intercomunitară Moșii, Țara de Piatră (MTDP) in the city of Zlatna, Romania, this specialized workshop engaged 55 direct participants. The international delegation brought together regional policy experts, local public administrators, entrepreneurs, and youth delegates from Spain, Italy, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Romania.

The strategic objective of this initiative, themed "Zlatna – Clean and Beautiful," was to analyze the structural transformation of an urban center transitioning from a heavily polluted, industrial monoculture into a sustainable ecosystem oriented toward culture and responsible tourism. Rather than treating ecological transition as an abstract concept, the itinerary used the host city as a living laboratory. This approach paired field site inspections of industrial brownfields with multi-stakeholder roundtables, providing a transferable blueprint for municipalities seeking to integrate youth into territorial planning and post-industrial restoration.

9.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The operational itinerary began with an analysis of regional socio-educational roots at the historical museum housed within the "Corneliu Medrea" High School, examining local heritage artifacts discovered during modern building renovations. This grounded perspective set the stage for a technical site evaluation of the former Ampellum Factory, historically one of Romania's most prominent centers for sulfide ore processing. Participants analyzed the legacy environmental damage caused by historical extraction methods—specifically copper, zinc, and lead processing—which historically released unmitigated toxic gases and solid wastes directly into the Ampoi River basin due to a lack of filtration infrastructure. This brownfield evaluation allowed the cross-border youth delegation to study ecological restoration challenges firsthand and witness how historical industrial liabilities can be systematically preserved as structural monuments of ecological heritage.

The delegation then conducted field evaluations of local public infrastructure, including the 15th-century Gothic architectural monument "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" and the Zlatna City Hall. The municipal headquarters, recently modernized utilizing European Union capital funds, served as the operational base for an extended administrative briefing.



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The executive leadership detailed Zlatna's long-term resource-extraction history spanning the Roman antiquity and medieval eras, focusing on how its geographic wealth in gold, silver, pyrite, and mercury shaped the town's historical economy.

Following the municipal briefing, organizers hosted a multi-stakeholder roundtable framework over a traditional local lunch. High school students, international delegates, local entrepreneurs, and political representatives engaged in a structured policy debate regarding recent public sustainability investments. The session reviewed concrete municipal projects, including:

- The ecological rehabilitation and soil remediation of former industrial brownfields.
- The expansion of urban green spaces and the engineering of integrated bicycle lanes.
- The systemic modernization of regional educational and cultural facilities using energy-efficient building standards.

The second session of the event focused on functional infrastructure adaptive reuse with a site visit to the Zlatna industrial chimney. Standing 220 meters tall on Magura Dudasului Hill, this massive communist-era industrial asset was originally built to disperse heavy toxic manufacturing emissions. Participants observed how the municipality repurposed this industrial relic into a modern asset by using it as a support structure for mobile telecommunication infrastructure and integrating the site into eco-tourism and hiking routes that overlook the Ampoi Valley. The event concluded with an intercultural community session featuring a performance by a local musical group, strengthening transnational networks and building shared European civic values among the youth delegates.

9.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary best practice demonstrated by this framework is the "Living Lesson" model of post-industrial urban transformation. For communities facing economic restructuring, showcasing the direct contrast between historical environmental degradation and modern sustainable planning helps reduce climate fatalism among youth. Walking young citizens through former industrial polluters like the Ampellum site helps clarify the physical realities of ecological restoration, making environmental remediation an approachable concept.

Furthermore, the Zlatna framework highlights how municipalities can successfully repurpose legacy industrial infrastructure for modern utility. Retaining massive industrial relics—such as the 220-meter emission chimney—and converting them into telecommunication nodes and eco-tourism trail markers fulfills a dual purpose. It lowers demolition costs, preserves local working-class history, and converts carbon-heavy historical structures into useful community assets.



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Additionally, this work package emphasizes the value of embedding youth consultation directly into local economic planning. Bringing high school students into direct discussion with public officials, entrepreneurs, and international peers over shared community forums helps lower traditional bureaucratic barriers. This environment encourages young people to evaluate green public investments, such as municipal bicycle networks and brownfield topsoil restoration, while giving public administrators direct access to youth perspectives on urban design.

Finally, the success of this workshop shows that pairing ecological education with regional cultural heritage is an effective tool for building European citizenship. Fusing technical environmental analysis with visits to historic architectural sites and cultural exchanges helps build a deeper sense of regional identity. This dual approach encourages young participants to view climate action not merely as a regulatory requirement, but as a vital contribution to protecting their shared community heritage.



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10. Building sustainable municipalities

10.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The tenth event of the YMCA project focused on strengthening youth civic voices and establishing structured dialogue between youth networks and public administrators. Organized by Mano Europa in Kaunas, Lithuania, the initiative was executed in direct collaboration with the Lithuanian School Students Union. The workshop engaged 25 youth delegates and student union leaders.

The strategic goal of this work package, titled "Building Sustainable Municipalities," was to move beyond generic youth focus groups and implement structured, open-government frameworks. By pairing high-level analytical debates on municipal transparency with an iterative, step-by-step urban design workshop, the event provided a clear framework for municipalities. This model demonstrates how local councils can systematically gather, refine, and integrate actionable youth recommendations into long-term municipal development plans.

10.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The operational itinerary opened with a review of the YMCA project's international milestone trajectory, mapping out completed cross-border initiatives and aligning the audience with upcoming project deliverables. Following this introduction, organizers launched a core analytical debate titled "Youth Voice in Local Decision-Making". Moderated alongside representatives from the Lithuanian School Students Union, the panel guided participants through a critical examination of four core pillars of municipal engagement:

- Institutional pathways allowing young citizens to enter formal public decision-making networks.
- The efficacy of existing civic communication channels designed to broadcast youth ideas and systemic needs.
- Identifying specific youth-related socio-environmental challenges that remain unaddressed or unheard by local municipal councils.
- Practical mechanisms required to apply open-government principles, specifically public transparency, multi-stakeholder inclusion, and data-driven administrative decisions.



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During this analytical mapping session, participants evaluated existing institutional mechanisms, identifying which tools successfully facilitate youth consultation and which create bureaucratic bottlenecks.

The second phase of the event translated these analytical critiques into direct civic design through a practical workshop titled "My Green Community 2030". Participants were divided into small working teams and guided through a rigorous, three-step project formulation methodology. First, teams identified a primary regional sustainability deficit directly impacting the youth population. Second, they co-designed realistic infrastructure solutions and drafted formalized recommendations targeted directly at municipal authorities. Third, the teams prepared technical pitches to defend their proposals before the assembly.

The working groups developed several targeted municipal interventions, including:

- **Public Transportation Modernization:** Addressing poor transit efficiency on the city's outskirts by detailing explicit route enhancements to improve youth mobility and accessibility.
- **Digitalization of Public Classrooms:** Combating excessive reliance on printed media by presenting transition frameworks toward digital school resources to lower paper consumption.
- **Institutional Food Waste Mitigation:** Restructuring school catering models to drastically reduce daily food waste while introducing healthy meal sourcing to support student well-being and climate resilience.

The initiative concluded with a cross-examination reflection session, followed by the digital capture and publication of the event's core findings across international network media channels to scale the project's educational impact.

10.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

The primary practice demonstrated by this workshop model is the integration of established regional student unions into the design of municipal climate programs. Collaborating with independent bodies like the Lithuanian School Students Union ensures that workshops avoid insular discussions. Instead, this partnership connects municipal networks with organized, pre-existing peer communication channels, guaranteeing that data collected from the workshops reflects the wider student population.

Furthermore, the "My Green Community 2030" three-step methodology offers a highly effective blueprint for municipal co-design. When asked to propose environmental solutions, youth groups can sometimes present broad, unfeasible concepts.



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Forcing participants to first isolate a specific problem, then design realistic infrastructural remedies, and finally deliver a structured presentation helps teach practical civic responsibility and produces actionable results for urban planners.

The primary practice demonstrated by this workshop model is the integration of established regional student unions into the design of municipal climate programs. Collaborating with independent bodies like the Lithuanian School Students Union ensures that workshops avoid insular discussions. Instead, this partnership connects municipal networks with organized, pre-existing peer communication channels, guaranteeing that data collected from the workshops reflects the wider student population.

Additionally, the specific focus areas raised by the students highlight that youth-driven climate concerns are often tied to daily public infrastructure. Rather than focusing on abstract international treaties, the delegates prioritized tangible local issues like transit route efficiency on city outskirts, classroom paper waste, and institutional food waste. Municipalities can learn from this by focusing youth consultation directly on the immediate, observable public services that young people interact with daily.

Finally, this work package highlights the importance of open-government principles in modern youth advocacy. To build trust with younger generations, local governments must move past tokenistic youth panels. Incorporating transparent, data-driven decision-making tools into youth forums empowers young citizens, helping them take ownership of local sustainability projects and view themselves as active stakeholders in municipal governance.



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11. Environmental hackathon I

11.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The eleventh work package of the YMCA project introduced an interactive, solutions-driven format designed to bridge the gap between youth perspectives and local infrastructure planning. Organized by Asociación Building Bridges (ABB) in partnership with the municipality of Soto del Real (Community of Madrid, Spain), "Environmental Hackathon I" brought together 37 participants. The delegation included local youth aged 15 to 25, community stakeholders, municipal administrators, and international project representatives from Romania, the Czech Republic, Italy, and Lithuania.

The strategic core of this initiative was to combine a comprehensive, multi-site environmental field study with a fast-paced, collaborative workshop. Instead of analyzing local climate policies from a purely theoretical standpoint, participants spent the morning assessing active local eco-innovations firsthand. This experiential baseline fed directly into an afternoon hackathon, where youth and civic leaders worked as equals to solve communication gaps and improve public accessibility.

11.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The operational itinerary began with a decentralized morning field study across Soto del Real's environmental ecosystem, with site leaders guiding the delegation through various civil and ecological initiatives. The site visits included the La Cabezuela Environmental Youth Area, the Municipal Botanical Garden, the local Eco-Escuela (Eco-School), and the recently opened Butterfly Garden.

The delegation also evaluated functional sustainability assets such as the municipal recycling point, the Community Allotment, and the Social Bike Project. At each location, technical briefs were delivered by the responsible municipal and community coordinators, ensuring that the youth and international partners understood the operational mechanics of each project before moving into the afternoon workshop.



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The afternoon hackathon took place in the auditorium of the Centro Cultural de Soto del Real. The session opened with structured technical presentations by stakeholders mapping out the complete catalog of environmental services already available within the municipality. This resource-mapping exercise revealed a critical systemic bottleneck: while the city offered an impressive array of green programs, the youth participants were completely unaware of their existence. Simultaneously, local project leaders admitted they faced ongoing challenges in communicating effectively with the younger demographic.

To address this challenge, facilitators initiated an organic collaborative "bucketing" exercise. Working together, youth delegates and stakeholders categorized the identified communication and engagement barriers into three core thematic areas: Interest, Communication, and Inclusivity. The third category, Inclusivity, emerged in response to observations by some young participants that certain activities presented hidden barriers related to physical and mental health conditions, highlighting the need to make community initiatives genuinely accessible to all.

Following this thematic categorization, participants split into mixed working groups pairing youth directly with local stakeholders. Each team co-designed concrete solutions, producing visual policy posters that outlined identified deficits, structural remedies, and actionable recommendations to optimize municipal outreach and accessibility. The day concluded with a community dinner, helping to solidify cross-sector networks and build momentum for subsequent regional climate interventions.

11.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary best practice from this hackathon methodology is the mandatory pairing of field visits with creative problem-solving workshops within the same day. Gathering youth to solve civic issues without first showing them existing local initiatives often results in unfeasible suggestions. Conversely, conducting field trips without an immediate creative workshop misses the opportunity to capture fresh insights. By linking the two, the municipality ensured that the youth co-designed solutions rooted in the real-world conditions of their local ecosystem.



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Furthermore, the resource surprise experienced by the students highlights a common challenge in municipal governance: the gap between program implementation and youth awareness. Municipalities often assume that low youth turnout stems from a lack of interest, whereas it frequently points to outdated communication channels. Local councils can address this by involving youth directly in audit sessions to co-author public communication strategies, ensuring promotional messaging matches youth communication habits.

The spontaneous emergence of inclusivity as a core hackathon pillar also offers a valuable lesson in intersectional climate planning. True sustainable development must be accessible to all citizens. When designing public botanical gardens, bike shares, or community allotments, municipal engineers and youth organizers must actively consult individuals with physical and mental health conditions to proactively eliminate hidden barriers to participation.

Finally, the success of this event demonstrates the value of mixed-generation work teams. Placing teenagers, municipal directors, and eco-specialists at the same design table breaks down traditional civic hierarchies. This collaborative approach validates the views of young participants, models active citizenship, and provides public administrators with highly creative, unedited insights directly from the generation that will inherit local climate policies.



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12. Environmental hackathon II

12.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The twelfth work package of the YMCA project represented the direct continuation and culmination of the collaborative processes initiated during the previous day's hackathon. Hosted by Asociación Building Bridges (ABB) in the municipality of Soto del Real (Community of Madrid, Spain), "Environmental Hackathon II" engaged 56 direct participants. To accommodate a larger assembly, the venue was scaled up to the Community Auditorium of Soto del Real. The session brought together local youth, international partners, and 12 direct stakeholders from various civic initiatives, alongside the regional executive leadership, including the Mayor of Soto del Real.

The strategic goal shifted from initial problem identification to actionable proposal co-design and formal municipal dialogue. By embedding the technical workshop within fluid, large-scale community activities, the methodology demonstrated how a municipality can seamlessly merge high-visibility public events with targeted youth policy formulation. This approach successfully moved participants from conceptual brainstorming to the delivery of a unified public service output.

12.2 Implemented Activities and Methodology

The morning itinerary was structured to finish evaluating the local environmental ecosystem by exploring municipal initiatives not covered during the initial field studies. The delegation conducted an on-site review of the Municipal Community Orchard, an organic cultivation initiative where residents manage individual allotment plots for personal sustainable food consumption with the backing of a local allotment association.

Simultaneously, the international project partners participated in "One Child, One Tree", an annual municipal reforestation initiative. This program brought local schoolchildren aged 10 to 12 directly from their classrooms into the field to plant trees. This activity served as a practical model of early-childhood civic mobilisation, demonstrating how a local council can involve its youngest citizens in physical environmental stewardship. The partnership was joined in the field by the Mayor of Soto del Real, ensuring a direct line of communication between grassroots youth actions and executive public offices.



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At midday, the Allotment Association hosted a communal, zero-waste vegetarian lunch for the cross-border delegates and volunteers. The meal featured a traditional paella prepared entirely with organic produce grown directly on-site by community members. This shared experience reinforced the project's focus on local food production, social cohesion, and short-supply-chain sustainability.

In the afternoon, the operational focus shifted to the Community Auditorium for the formal hackathon session. The mixed working groups pairing youth delegates with local stakeholders reconvened for an intensive 90-minute design block to consolidate, refine, and finalise their civic proposals. Each team developed a structured framework addressing two distinct focus areas. First, they designed modifications to existing environmental formats, diversifying activity schedules to accommodate the strict academic and extracurricular constraints faced by modern youth. Second, they engineered targeted communication and engagement strategies tailored specifically to youth media habits to optimise future municipal outreach.

During the presentation phase, rather than maintaining competing group proposals, the participants collectively decided to integrate their insights into a single, unified deliverable: a comprehensive *Communication and Engagement Guide*. This document was co-authored to serve as a practical support tool for the municipality's public outreach and association promotion programs. Public administrators formally recognised the strategic framework developed by the working group "Con Amor y Humor" as the most direct and actionable submission, as it structured the core needs identified across all groups into an immediate, implementable format. The event concluded with an international consortium meeting where project partners evaluated ongoing milestone management, synchronised upcoming cross-border phases, and captured professional media assets to support widespread policy dissemination.

12.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

A primary best practice derived from this hackathon framework is the value of embedding highly technical youth co-design workshops within broader, festive community days. Combining structured policy drafting with high-visibility public actions like the "One Child, One Tree" initiative prevents workshops from feeling clinical or disconnected from local culture. This approach grounds the youth delegates' perspective within active community life, building a sense of shared citizenship and validating their role as environmental stakeholders.



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Furthermore, the decision of the working groups to merge their individual concepts into a single, unified Communication and Engagement Guide provides an excellent model for participatory governance. In traditional competitive workshop formats, valuable ideas are often lost when a single winner is chosen. Facilitating a collaborative synthesis process allows public officials to capture the full spectrum of youth insights, generating an integrated policy tool that carries broad community ownership.

The specific focus areas targeted by the youth proposals also highlight a critical operational barrier: scheduling conflicts. Municipalities frequently mistake low youth participation for apathy, whereas the root cause is often rigid activity scheduling that conflicts with student routines. Local governments can address this by implementing flexible, diversified event formats designed around the real-world availability of their younger demographic.

Finally, the communal, allotment-sourced lunch highlights the strategic value of integrating local food systems into municipal networking events. Utilizing food produced directly within municipal community gardens provides a practical example of the circular economy in action. It demonstrates how local councils can use their own sustainable infrastructure to lower the carbon footprint of public events while strengthening relationships between international delegates and local grassroots associations.

13. Final event

13.1 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The final work package of the YMCA project served as the direct culmination and integration phase of the initiative's cross-border trajectory, hosted by the Alba Iulia Municipality, Romania, from May 14 to May 15, 2026. This milestone gathering engaged 60 direct participants (34 female and 26 male), bringing together regional policymakers, youth delegates, municipal administrators, and community stakeholders representing Romania, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania.

The strategic objective of this closing summit was threefold: to centralize the comprehensive institutional lessons learned throughout the 18-month project cycle, to evaluate active local green infrastructure as a transferable case study, and to drive the participatory co-design of the final YMCA Manifesto. The framework functioned as a dynamic knowledge-transfer hub, ensuring that grassroots youth insights were systematically converted into formalized local policy recommendations to be delivered straight to municipal councils across the entire transnational network.



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13.2 Event Overview and Strategic Approach

The operational itinerary for the primary session on May 14 was structured around three core pillars, successfully shifting participants from technical evaluation to civic action:

- **Best Practices Exchange and Data Analysis:** The cross-border delegation conducted field site inspections of modernized public infrastructure assets, including the Alba Iulia Olympic Swimming Pool—which serves as an active model for energy efficiency retrofits implemented via the EEA and Norway Grants Energy Programme in Romania—and the "Gheorghe Șincai" Multifunctional Center. Gathering at the Multifunctional Center, delegates and public executives analyzed the centralized data from a final questionnaire previously completed by partners to map network-wide impacts, isolate common sustainability bottlenecks, and evaluate long-term youth involvement methodologies.
- **Identification of European Opportunities:** Operating within peer working groups, participants conducted a collaborative review of external European youth initiatives and networks dedicated to environmental defense. This participatory mapping process was used to harvest raw data to establish the foundation of an online brochure, designed as an open-access database of European climate opportunities for young citizens.
- **Co-design of the YMCA Manifesto:** The core civic output of the summit materialized through an intensive brainstorming and writing workshop exclusively tailored for the youth delegates. The young participants consolidated their field experiences, technical knowledge, and municipal insights into the final YMCA Manifesto, **detailing explicit policy demands and actionable solutions for local public administrations.**
- **Urban Resilience Field Study:** The day concluded with an on-site technical tour of the "Alba Carolina" Vauban Citadel and Unirii Park, focusing on the adaptive reuse of historical public spaces, sustainable urban development, and the integration of smart public lighting infrastructure.

On May 15, the operational focus shifted to final internal management sessions, where consortium partners synchronized post-project dissemination actions, finalized graphic editing schedules for the official outputs (Manual, Brochure, and Manifesto), and concluded the international summit with a pre-departure network gathering.



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13.3 Proven Best Practices and Transferable Insights

- **Public Infrastructure as a Living Laboratory:** Utilizing functioning, municipally-managed green upgrades (such as the energy-efficient Olympic Pool) as educational assets provides youth with an empirical view of green capital investments. This approach bridges the gap between abstract green transition policies and visible municipal execution.
- **Transitioning from Protest to Policy Proposals:** The collaborative engineering of the YMCA Manifesto proves that local governments can successfully channel youth climate anxiety into structured policy inputs. Providing a validated platform empowers young citizens to co-author realistic, localized administrative demands.
- **Data-Driven Milestone Appraisals:** Administering a comprehensive closing survey to project partners ensures a rigorous self-evaluation of the network's structural performance. Capturing these final administrative lessons provides an empirical baseline to justify future cross-border partnerships and municipal youth strategies.
- **Integrating Heritage within Urban Resilience:** The technical evaluation of the Alba Carolina Citadel demonstrates that urban resilience does not depend solely on constructing new green developments. Local councils can achieve substantial carbon reductions and improve public safety by retrofitting historical architectural landmarks with automated, smart utility systems.



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THE RSVP METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE FOR YOUTH COMMUNICATION – Bridging Grassroots Engagement and Municipal Governance

Bridging grassroots engagement and municipal governance, this document serves as a comprehensive compendium of the best practices, insights, and proven methodologies cultivated by project partners. However, no local climate policy can achieve true long-term impact without a functioning communication bridge to those who will inherit these communities: the younger generation.

Recognizing that traditional institutional outreach often fails to resonate with youth, the YMCA project dedicated a specialized focus to communication and dissemination strategies. Driven by the highly valuable and innovative contribution of our partners from Soto del Real (Spain), this manual introduces a disruptive perspective derived directly from real-world youth interactions, moving completely away from sterile desk research or consultant-led literature. Through the structural, temporal, and inclusivity barriers mapped out during the Environmental Hackathons in Spain, this compendium now integrates a vital operational tool – The RSVP Framework (Relevance, Schedule, Visibility, Path in). This framework serves as an actionable support guide for any association, NGO, or municipal office across Europe seeking to transform rigid public announcements into authentic, inclusive, and highly engaging youth dialogues.

Where this document comes from?

This document is not the result of a desk research exercise. It was not written by consultants, nor drawn from existing literature on youth engagement. It comes from a room in Soto del Real where young people sat down, picked up a marker, and wrote (anonymously and without filters) the real reasons why they do not connect with the activities, campaigns, and calls to action that associations, NGOs, and the local municipality put in front of them every day.

The exercise took place during the Environmental Hackathon events held as part of the YMCA project (Youth Municipal Climate Action), a CERV-funded initiative coordinated by the Municipality of Alba Iulia (Romania) with the participation of Asociacion Building Bridges as the responsible partner for Spain. During the two hackathon sessions in Soto del Real, participants (young people aged 15 to 25) were asked to reflect on a deceptively simple question: why, despite the existence of so many initiatives designed for them, do those initiatives so rarely reach them?



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The methodology used was bucketing: each participant wrote down their reasons on individual post-it notes, anonymously, which were then grouped by recurrence and affinity into thematic clusters. What emerged was not a list of complaints. It was a structured diagnosis, offered in good faith by the very people these organizations are trying to serve.

The findings are organized here under three major themes. This document is intended as a practical contribution to the broader methodology guide being developed by the YMCA consortium, and it is addressed specifically to associations, NGOs, and local government offices that design and promote activities for young people.



1.The communication is not built for them

This was, by a significant margin, the most widely cited barrier. The young participants did not say they were unaware of local initiatives. Many of them had seen the posts, the flyers, the announcements. The problem was that nothing about the way those communications were designed invited them to stop, read, or act.

The pattern they described was consistent: a Canva template filled with text, dates, requirements, and logos, posted as a static image on Instagram or shared in a WhatsApp group, followed by a lengthy description in the caption that nobody reads. The visual does not create curiosity. The caption is not how young people consume content. The call to action, if there is one, is buried under information that was never requested.

This is not a minor aesthetic critique. It reflects a structural mismatch between how organizations think about communication and how young people actually navigate their feeds. In digital environments, attention is not given; it is earned, in under three seconds, through a visual or a hook that creates enough curiosity to warrant a tap or a scroll. When that hook is absent, the content disappears, regardless of how valuable the activity behind it might be.



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Several specific patterns came up repeatedly during the exercise:

- Overloaded visuals that try to communicate everything at once, and end up communicating nothing clearly.
- Static formats (single image posts, PDF flyers) that do not generate engagement or invite interaction.
- Captions written as full informational texts, assuming the reader will stop to read them, an assumption that is not supported by how young audiences actually behave online.
- A general absence of dynamic content (video, reels, stories, carousels) in formats that align with the actual consumption habits of the target audience.

The practical implication for organizations is clear: content designed for young people needs to follow the logic of the platforms they use, not the logic of a bulletin board. A well-designed reel or a short video that leads somewhere with a clear, low-friction CTA will consistently outperform a poster with twelve lines of text. The goal of the first piece of content is not to explain everything. It is to make someone curious enough to want to know more.

What young people are asking for is not simpler content. They are asking for content that respects how they actually read, watch, and decide.



2. "I don't have time" and "it doesn't speak to me"

The second cluster of responses came under a heading that initially seemed straightforward: young people saying they had no time, or no interest. On closer examination, neither of these statements meant what they appeared to mean.

On the time side, the issue is largely structural. A significant number of the activities promoted by local associations and the municipality are scheduled at times that directly overlap with school hours, after-school tutoring, sports training, or other regular commitments. This is not a matter of young people being lazy or disengaged; it is a scheduling problem. When the only available slot for a civic participation activity falls at the same time as a paid football class or a mandatory tutoring session, the outcome is predictable. The activity loses, every time.



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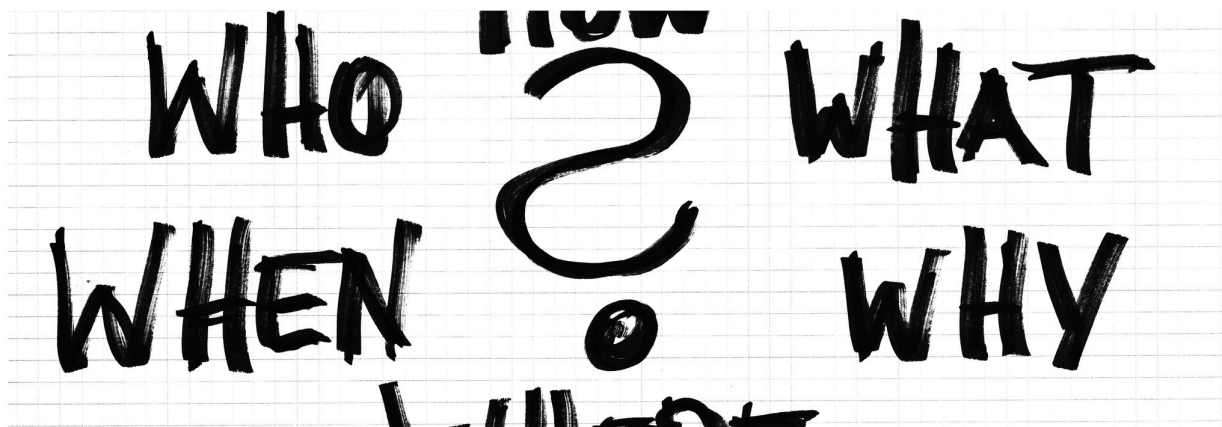
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The implication is that organizations need to map the actual time availability of young people before setting activity schedules, rather than assuming that afternoons or weekday evenings are universally free. This requires minimal effort: a short survey, a conversation with a local school, or simply asking the target group directly.

The interest dimension is more nuanced and arguably more important. Several participants noted that the way activities are communicated tends to frame participation as a civic obligation rather than a personal opportunity. The language often carries an implicit message of "you should care about this," which, when competing with activities that young people have actively chosen and that carry a clear personal benefit, tends not to land.

There is a significant difference between an activity that says "join us to help your community" and one that says "come learn something useful, meet people, and do something that matters." Both can refer to the same event. But the second speaks to the individual; the first speaks to an abstract duty. Young people, like most people, respond to the former. They also respond to activities that their peers are already doing, which points to the importance of social proof and peer-driven communication as tools that are systematically underused by local organizations.

Reaching young people is not only about visibility. It is about relevance: making clear, quickly and honestly, what is in it for them.



3. Not everyone fits the same mold

The third theme was the least frequently cited but generated some of the richest conversation during the hackathon sessions. It concerns inclusion, not in the abstract sense of the word, but in the very concrete sense of whether the activities being offered are accessible and comfortable for young people with different personal situations, conditions, or social profiles.



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What participants described was a pattern in which most activities implicitly assume a certain type of participant: someone comfortable being in a room with strangers, willing to speak in front of a group, able to engage proactively with people they do not know. For many young people, that profile simply does not fit. Participants mentioned specifically the case of a young person with autism-spectrum traits and another with anxiety, both of whom had been invited to activities that, by design, required exactly the kind of social performance that is most difficult for them. The invitation, however well-intentioned, created discomfort rather than belonging.

But what emerged from this conversation was not just a problem. It was also a set of practical solutions that the young participants generated themselves, which is worth noting. They identified several alternative participation roles that would allow a broader range of profiles to contribute meaningfully without requiring high-exposure or high-interaction participation:

- **Preparatory and logistical roles:** tasks that need to happen before or after an event, away from the public-facing dynamic, such as setting up, documenting, managing materials, editing photos or video.
- **Peer support roles:** identifying young people who are naturally comfortable in social settings and who can act as informal bridges for peers who are less so, not as monitors or organizers, but as friendly anchors.
- **Group-based participation:** the observation that within any peer group in Soto del Real, if one person finds an activity genuinely useful or interesting, it can pull others along, provided the activity is framed as something you can do with friends and not something you attend alone.

This last point is particularly relevant for organizations designing outreach strategies. Group-based participation does not require additional resources; it requires a shift in how activities are framed and promoted. An open invitation to "come with a friend" or "bring your group" is a low-cost intervention with potentially significant impact on participation rates, particularly among young people who would not come on their own.

Inclusion is not only about removing barriers for individuals. It is about designing activities that are genuinely built for the range of people you want to reach.



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4. Putting it together: a communication formula that addresses all three

Reading through the three themes above, it would be tempting to treat them as a checklist: fix the visual, adjust the schedule, add an inclusive role option. But that approach misses the point. The young people in Soto del Real were not describing three separate problems. They were describing three symptoms of the same underlying gap: communication that was designed around what organizations want to say, rather than around how their audience actually lives.

What follows is a simple communication framework that addresses all three gaps at once. It is not a magic formula, but it is a starting point that any association, NGO, or municipal office can adapt without significant resources or technical expertise.

The RSVP Framework: Relevance, Schedule, Visibility, and a Path in

R (Relevance): Lead with what the participant gets, not what the organization needs. Every piece of communication should answer, within the first three seconds, the question: "Why does this matter to me, specifically?" Not to the community, not to the planet. To this person, today.

S (Schedule): Before publishing any date or time, run it against a simple filter. Does this conflict with school hours? With common after-school commitments? If yes, it needs to move. If it cannot move, it needs a workaround: a recorded session, a flexible drop-in format, or a pre-event role that can be completed independently.

V (Visibility): The first piece of content is not the announcement. It is the hook. A short video, a question posted as a story, a countdown, a behind-the-scenes reel from a previous event. The goal is curiosity, not information. Information comes after the tap.

P (Path in): Make sure there is always more than one way to participate. Name the roles explicitly in the communication itself. "**Come to the event**" should never be the only option. "**Help us set it up**," "**document the day**," "**bring a friend and join as a group**" are all valid entry points that reach people the main invitation will miss.



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The following is a brief case study illustrating how this framework might look in practice. The organization and event are fictional, but the situation is not.

Case study: The Saturday Workshop that nobody came to (and what changed)

A local environmental association in a small municipality had been running a monthly sustainability workshop for two years. Attendance had plateaued at five or six regulars, all adults, despite a genuine effort to attract younger participants. They posted on Instagram every month: a designed image with the date, the location, a three-paragraph description of the content, and a registration link in the bio.

After running a short anonymous feedback exercise with local youth, they made four changes for the following month.

- First, they moved the session from Saturday morning (which competed with sports training for most of their target age group) to Sunday afternoon, after checking with three local high school students when they were actually free.
- Second, they replaced the announcement post with a short video filmed by one of their regular members, 22 years old, speaking directly to camera for 35 seconds: "Last month we figured out why the recycling bins in this town are basically useless. This month we're trying to fix it. If you want in, we have a spot." No logo. No event poster. A single CTA at the end: "DM us or bring a friend Saturday."
- Third, they explicitly listed three ways to participate in the caption: attend the session, help document it on video, or join the WhatsApp group if you want to contribute ideas but cannot make it in person.
- Fourth, they asked two participants from the previous session to share the video to their own stories, with no script, just as themselves.

Attendance the following month: nineteen people, eleven of them under 25. Four of them had come because a friend shared the video. Two had come specifically because they wanted to help with the documentation, not sit in the session.

No additional budget was used. What changed was the frame: from "**here is our event**" to "**here is a problem we are working on, and here are several ways you can be part of solving it.**"



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A note on method and use

The three themes described in this document (communication formats, time and relevance, and inclusion) are not exhaustive. They are the ones that emerged most consistently from a specific group of young people in a specific municipality. Other communities may generate different priorities. But the method itself, asking young people directly, anonymously, and without mediation, is one that we would encourage any organization to replicate before designing its next campaign or activity.

The most effective thing an organization can do before investing in a new communication strategy is to spend one hour with the people it is trying to reach, and ask them honestly why the last one did not work.

This document is offered as a contribution to the broader YMCA methodology guide, and as a practical resource for the associations, NGOs, and municipal offices working in Soto del Real and in similar communities across the YMCA partner countries.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY: Towards Participatory Municipal Governance

The YMCA Manual of Best Practices represents more than a mere summary of our activities; it is a roadmap for any public administration seeking to transform the climate crisis into an opportunity for democratic dialogue. Throughout the 18 months of this project, we have demonstrated that sustainable solutions emerge only when the experience of policymakers meets the vision and energy of youth.

The YMCA Legacy: Pillars for the Future

- **Institutionalizing Dialogue:** We have established a model for "Joint Climate Councils," proving that young people are not just beneficiaries but strategic partners in the decision-making process.
- **A New Paradigm in Communication:** Thanks to the innovative contribution of our partners from Soto del Real, this manual now offers the RSVP Framework, a practical tool that allows authorities to speak the language of the new generation. This approach eliminates bureaucratic barriers and transforms public announcements into authentic invitations to action.
- **Resilience through Education and Example:** From the regeneration of industrial sites in Zlatna to energy efficiency in Alba Iulia and electric mobility in Lithuania, we have created a network of "living laboratories" that will continue to inspire partner communities long after the European funding concludes.



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START
DOING

Final Message

The YMCA project concludes with a firm commitment from the partner municipalities to integrate the **YMCA Manifesto** into local development strategies. The sustainability of this endeavor lies in the hands of the young activists and local leaders who have learned to work together for a greener, safer, and more inclusive Europe.

We express our gratitude to all participants, experts, and citizens who contributed to the success of this network. The journey toward climate neutrality in 2050 begins with every decision made today, together.



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