

**Workshop: Foster Young Life in Rural Areas  
(Part I: Gurro/Northern Italy), 29 July – 9 August, 2023**



We were happy to spend 10 interesting days with participants from Italy, Austria, and Germany. We eased into the week by getting to know each other and our backgrounds and sharing our needs and wishes to create an **inclusive space for the week** to come. Playfully, we learned some phrases to interact in our respective mother tongues, we explored the soundscapes of the village whose inhabitants hosted us with open arms and enjoyed and explored the beautiful mountain landscape, e.g. traces of *spazza caminos* and former chestnut agriculture.

Diving into our surroundings also gave us the opportunity to share and compare our own backgrounds and experiences. Inviting elderly with their long-lasting experience in rural areas, we could **learn about the development of the small villages throughout the last 70 years**, the importance of labour migration for the population, how local infrastructures changed as more and more people moved away. In this, the method of oral history and listening exploration accompanied us, and turned out to be very effective.



The group had the chance to visit the local regional museum together with a local tour guide that related the agricultural and domestic objects to the. Here, we learned about the deep intersections of labour, gender, and migration in the history of the region that continue to affect the generations of today.

Having this in mind, on another day, we went out to talk to locals by applying a role-play method: turning into different characters, we wanted to know more about the needs and every-day realities of the heterogeneous population: what kind of social infrastructure they wish for, **what spaces do they actually use, what does the village need in order to stop the drain of young people?** Also, the touristic infrastructure outside the valley was examined by paying a visit to the small city of Cannobio at Lago Maggiore and by talking to inhabitants. After the actual seminar period, some remaining seminar participants had the chance to meet again with inhabitants of the valleys in the annual mountain festivity of *Amici di Gurro* association.



On another level, an online talk with political activists from Germany of migrant descent made clear that living in Germany and Italy as a refugee in the countryside can also be a place of isolation, disenfranchisement, and racism. To counter this, **self-organization and building of initiatives and coalitions with local partners** play a key role.

As a group, the participants got to know each other better on different outdoor activities, such as hiking trips to the nearby mountain peaks, in group exercises or at a film night in front of the seminar house. Reflection meetings in the mornings, evaluation and face-to-face rounds during the seminar looked to balance established hierarchies and power structures to create a learning environment of mutual trust and respect.

The second part of the workshop with focus on young life in rural areas will take place in the region of ‚Hoher Meißner‘ in Hesse in Central Germany, a region that is shaped by agriculture, but also by a rich history in youth movements and, for several decades, by communes that young people created to pursue an alternative life-style. **The workshop will take place from 13 - 21 July, 2024.**

