

# Training Workshop for Youth Workers & Educators

## Foster Young Life in Rural Areas

(Part II: Hoher Meißner/Hesse, Germany), 13 - 21 July, 2024



After having spent over a week in the village of Gurro in Northern Italy, close to the Swiss border, to elaborate about the specific situation of young people in rural areas, a team of educational trainers from different countries met up in Central Germany, in the Hoher Meißner mountain area in Hesse. In this, we continued the discussion about problems, needs, but also best practices in terms of local infrastructure that allowed young people to thrive, to stay, or to return, respectively. In this regard, one of the key goals in this second activity of the Erasmus workshop was to explore the community spaces,

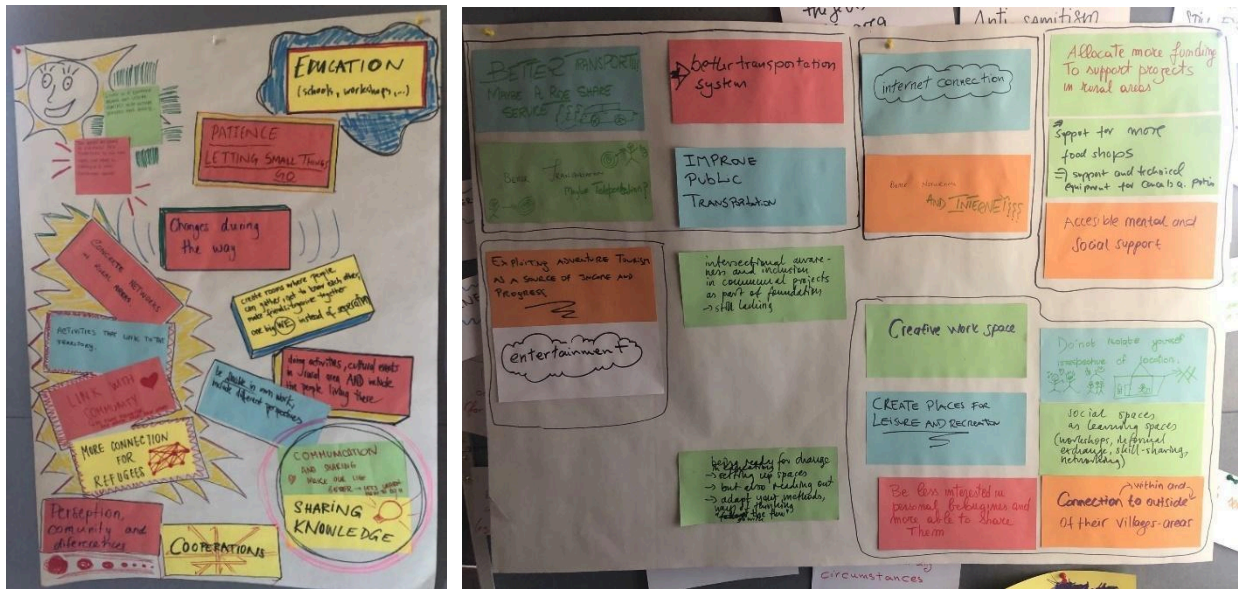
initiatives and organisations that allow especially young people to educate themselves, to get empowered through own ideas and projects and to find self-run social spaces that are able to counter the exodus of the young and the starvation of local socio-political and cultural infrastructure. Thus, we sought to understand the specific local context better (local transport, cultural/social offers, meeting space, little demand for empty houses, no successors for initiatives, projects, institutions...) and are were able to evaluate the structural problems and solutions to it.

We started off the activity with an exploration of the environment. By this, we also aimed of getting to know us better as individuals and within the group. Our hike to youth castle “Burg Ludwigstein” provided insides of another extensive long-term approach for the work on democratic values, participation and emancipatory self organisation of youth – connected to the historical youth movement and the history of the Meißner mountain. We tried to highlight an intersectional perspective by consciously reflecting on our own positionality, privileges, and socialisation to create discussion spaces where everyone can participate on equal terms. Thus, in the discussions and presentations, the diversity of young people in rural areas in terms of class, race, gender, abilities was thematized. The role of marginalized communities in the countryside, their exchange, organisation and struggle also played an important part and provided a critical perspective for the local contexts and infrastructures. Cutting edge questions for the visits of projects was centred around discourse of hegemony, dominant-normative narratives, inclusion, positionality and accessibility. This means that also our teaching methods and tools were centered around issues about “who speaks”, “who provides/receives”, “who is being asked”, and the importance of perspectives that are not represented, esp.

On the same page, the participants highlighted efforts of educational cross-generational projects in a synagogue, queer meeting spaces, community-based shops and communes that fulfill different tasks for their neighbours and villages to tackle the increasing individualisation and alienation and fostering ties and cooperation beyond the project. One example was the provision of social and exchange space in the village of Waldkappel that could be used by people of different generations to follow up on their own ideas, such as a movie-screening, co-working space,



or café. The fact that the existence of social infrastructure can mobilise and bring together people with their ideas and visions was pointed out. Having visited local projects that aim for similar visions, such as the communes of *Niederkaufungen*, *GAstwerke*, and *Fuchsmühle* or the local shop we aimed at putting the theoretical foundation from the workshops on socio-ecological transformation on the countryside into practice and seek for collaboration and inspiration for the participants' own projects and visions. The dialogue with local activists made it possible to draw comparisons between the current situation and possible scenarios for the future that can place local rural infrastructure within a larger vision of a sustainable transformation towards a just and equal society.



The participants drew many conclusions and found similarities and differences to the Gurro workshop: The youth workers identified many similarities in the situations of young people in the two remote areas in Germany and Italy. But many problems in Italy were already more advanced. We learned that education, jobs and career are strong push factors as well as missing infrastructure (e.g. for LGBTIQ+-youth) to leave their region. A visit in the local youth department showed the difficulties of youth inclusion. The key question here was the interplay between the personal responsibility of local stakeholders (what can we do ourselves?) and the political responsibility to provide and enable the necessary infrastructure and funding.

Finally, the educational trainers also shed some light on their own current social and educational practice which enabled them to get connected and exchange about future collaboration – a commitment that was re-emphasized during the post-workshop online meeting in October. In the evaluation people reflected on their role within the group, the programme points and their own learnings and findings. As was summarized in the evaluation part, throughout the week the participants discovered what can make life in rural areas worth living, how everyone can contribute to



breaking down social and economic barriers through participatory infrastructure and networks of solidarity, empowerment, and care and, thus, make rural areas more attractive and liveable for young people again. It is on us to take these the theory, methods and practical examples with us and apply the learnings in our own social, cultural and political education work.