

Strengthening the role of youth work in contesting dynamics of shrinking cities



TOOLKIT

Youth work in/for
the shrinking cities

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Introduction

A great deal has been written about the causes and impacts of shrinkage, as well as about policies and planning strategies. Nevertheless, the state of knowledge in a cross-national perspective is rather poor since studies have focused more on large cities with empirical evidence ignoring the contextual influence on local dynamics (Wolff, Wiechmann; 2017). A shrinking city is one that has experienced population loss, employment decline and social issues as symptoms of a structural crisis (Martinez-Fernandez; 2012). This shows how complex the shrinkage process is and thus requires a more detailed explanation of push factors. The idea that there is no future prospect for them in their place of residence seems to be the crucial push factor for people to leave their home.

This project has focused on building new strategies of social inclusion and civic engagement for youth residing in Europe's "shrinking cities" and is a result of a collaboration between eight partner organizations from four EU countries: Documenta and Croatian Youth Network from Croatia, EJBW and Culture Goes Europe from Germany, YouthCoop and UMAR from Portugal as well as Asociacion Caminos and ColPolSoc - Andalucia from Spain.

In the planning process, the partner organizations conducted a preliminary research and provided information about shrinking cities and their relation to the youth in their countries. There has been a unanimous conclusion that the socio-economic problems cause the cities to shrink which in turn has enormous effects mainly on the youth. On the other hand, there is a great number of young people who believe that they can make a difference and change things for the better. For this, the youth needs access to the commonly accepted tools and improved practices that can be used in their own social and cultural contexts.

Therefore, youth work should provide a bridge that strengthens young people at a personal level but also promotes public action as well as learning about translating key values of youth work into reality. Moreover, engagement in the wide variety of personal and social development activities will help young people to develop the knowledge and the skills that are needed in the labour market, given the fact that 3.5 million young people are unemployed in the EU (Eurostat, 2018).

The organizations embraced the idea of conducting proper research as well as mapping that would ensure a better understanding of the similarities and differences between various problems while at the same time providing methods for learning how to deal with critical socio-economic dynamics at different local settings across the EU. It was also deemed important to investigate examples of successful youth work, to identify and document their innovativeness and then disseminate the results with a wider outreach.



Project aims and objectives

This project aims at contributing to creating new strategies of social inclusion and civic engagement for the youth residing in Europe's "shrinking cities".

The objectives of the project are:

- To expand knowledge on the "shrinking cities" phenomenon in the selected European countries with an emphasis on successful youth work practices contesting the unfavourable social, economic and political dynamics they face;
- To create, test and disseminate a high-quality set of tools for youth workers from shrinking cities based on the mapping and analysis of best practices in selected countries.

Additionally, the project will provide an opportunity for youth workers, volunteers and the organizations' staff to learn, explore, reflect, and develop the tools that will help them to improve their work.

What is a shrinking city?

The term "shrinkage" can often be used as synonymous with the term "reduction" or as a way to describe objects that are getting smaller in size or amount. In the last few decades, the term has gotten increasingly associated with social and spatial changes. The phenomenon of shrinking can be observed in many European regions. It predominantly affects rural areas across the continent as well as an increasing number of cities.

Most experts on the topic of shrinking cities agree that a shrinking city loses its population over a period of time either due to emigration or by a natural decrease in the demographics thus leaving the remaining inhabitants of the city with gloomier future prospects. The term is predominantly associated with cities that are affected by one or more post-industrialization processes, including: deindustrialization, spatial polarization, and suburbanization or even a full end to the growth process. All of these can be seen as wider effects of post-socialist transition, globalization and non-linearization, or a combination thereof.

Why do cities shrink?

Shrinkage is not a single process in itself but rather a combination of three larger developments, i.e. economic, demographic and structural changes that affect cities in a very time-and place-specific manner leading to population loss. The three major causes of urban shrinkage with respect to the case studies conducted as part of the Shrinking Cities Project are: economic decline, job-related migration, suburbanization, a change in the settlement system and demographic change.

These elements are influenced by other intervening factors such as the political system and its impact on different levels, the shape of the urban regeneration policies, the physical structure of the city as well as the environmental and cultural factors. Given the fact that urban shrinkage depends on the local, national and global processes, each shrinking process is unique in its own context and dynamics.

How to measure shrinking?

There are different ways to measure the shrinkage with the aim of showing the process in the form of maps. A major methodological issue is the choice of a proper spatial unit on which an analysis of shrinking cities can be based.

1. **Use the smallest unit available** in the countries (municipalities) for describing cities. This enables to define 'cities' by an independent research approach which is not related to the single definitions of a national city (administrative, functional, morphological, etc.). Definitions of a national city mostly refer to administrative units which are determined by a certain population.
2. **A threshold (e.g. population)** is needed in order to distinguish cities from rural areas. It has been shown that a threshold of 5,000 inhabitants is the most common mark for this purpose. However, territorial changes are a significant problem when it comes to the statistical data delivery, even for official European statistics.

3. In order to compare case studies in different countries, it is seen as **ideal to collect data within a 5-year rhythm**. Since shrinkage shows a non-linear evolution, it is important to consider the development of shrinkage over time for any analysis (ideally with several intervals). However, the observation periods of available data from all the countries need to be the same for a proper analysis. A compromise between the availability of data and theoretical considerations has shown that analysing the period starting in 1990 would be most beneficial for the expected results.

What is the impact of shrinkage?

The main impact of shrinkage is that a reduced size of the population leads to a decline in the demand for housing, land, water, public transport, schools and other elements of infrastructure. Cities have to deal with cuts in housing and infrastructure. At the same time, the social and demographic composition of the urban population changes leading to ageing, 'brain drain', (relatively) higher rates of immigrants etc., thus creating new demands and challenges.

- **Example 1: Housing vacancies in many cities.** Housing is the sector that is most visibly affected by population losses. Falling rents and dwindling prices, cuts in real estate investments along with an already existing oversupply lead to vacancies, a decline in the expenditure on maintenance, a devaluation and dilapidation of the existing sites and, in some cases, even to an intensified perforation of the urban fabric.
- **Example 2: Brownfields.** Urban population losses often go hand in hand with a crisis in, or even a collapse of, established industries. This is reflected in the expansion of brownfields, i.e. areas and sites that were traditionally used for industrial production, housing and other functions but subsequently became vacant.

Often, these “brownfields” contribute to a physical appearance of decay and reinforce a negative image of the affected areas.

- **Example 3: Cuts in social infrastructures.** Shrinkage does not only lead to a reduction in the population size but in most cases, it is accompanied by a selective out-migration from younger households and hence a change in the age structures. For cities, this leads to two major challenges: a decrease in the number of children causes pressure to downsize, close and adjust existing schools, nurseries, kindergartens and other child-related elements of infrastructure and at the same time ageing leads to a growing demand for medical and personal care services for the elderly.

Did you know?

The German city of Leipzig faced a housing shortage for more than four decades following the end of WWII. At the end of the 1990s however, vacancies appeared all over the city due to out-migration, demographic change and an ongoing building and renovation boom, supported by tax-incentives in the aftermath of the German reunification. In order to stabilize the housing market, Leipzig made use

of regional restructuring programs fostering the demolition of flats. Since 1997, around 12,000 flats have been demolished. An urban development plan (STEP) brought together the strategic planning of different spheres like housing, social infrastructure and urban planning. It aimed at steering demolition activities into strategic areas and preventing spontaneous fragmentation.

Incentives have been installed to maintain the vacant housing stock and reuse it for other purposes. Interim use agreements between the municipality, owners and users brought vacant lots back into use and counteracted further dilapidation and degradation.

- **FURTHER READING:**

[Shrink Smart - the governance of shrinkage within the European context.](#)

What is youth work?

Youth Work consists of activities targeted at young people in which they voluntarily participate and are designed to support their personal and social development through non-formal and informal learning.

It is based on the following three guiding principles:

1. Young people choose to participate.
2. Young people and youth workers are partners in the learning process.
3. It happens where young people are.

It encompasses social, cultural, educational, political and sport-related activities. It is carried out with, by, and for young people in order to promote development opportunities by supporting young people to reach their highest potential and encouraging personal development, autonomy, initiative and participation in society.

What does a youth worker do?

Youth Workers are people who work in direct contact with young people by carrying out activities designed to support their personal and social development.

They are professionals who participate in the design, organization, development, and evaluation of projects, programs and activities with and for young people, through non-formal education methodologies thus facilitating and promoting citizenship, participation, autonomy, inclusion and personal, social and cultural development.

The profession has been recognized in the Council of Europe's [conclusions](#) on Youth Work and highlighted in a 2014 [study](#).

Essential principles of youth work

A report from the Expert Group on Youth Work Quality System in the EU Member States refers to the principles for the implementation of youth work activities and projects. To be successful and appealing, Youth Work should:

1. Be perceived as appealing and as bringing added value or joy to life.
2. Respond to the needs, interests and experiences of young people as perceived by themselves.
3. Be actively inclusive; reach out to all groups of young people and welcome them.
4. Be based on young people's voluntary and active participation, engagement and sense of responsibility.
5. Have a holistic perspective and regard young people as capable individuals.
6. Enhance young people's rights, personal and social development and their autonomy.
7. Be designed, delivered and evaluated together with young people.
8. Be based on non-formal learning.
9. Have a clear learning perspective and design its activities in accordance with clear learning objectives that are relevant to the young participants.



How to distinguish it from other areas?

Youth Work focuses on developing young people and their personal, social, and cultural dimensions to promote connections between peers by using tools and activities based on leisure.

Young people have a fundamental role as partners and co-creators in planning, implementing, and evaluating the programs and activities aimed at them. They have an active role and are not just beneficiaries of youth work.

For example, an activity organized by young people, but not focused on young people or aimed at them, may not be considered as youth work.

Generally, it is distinguished by the pursuit of the guiding principles, especially when it comes to the personal, social, and cultural development of young people by intention and not merely by consequence. There are good examples of youth work in other areas, however, it is essential to recognize the differences, despite the focus being on the same target audience.

Some examples

■ In terms of sports

When it comes to sports, “activities purely based on improving the performance and excellence of a given sport are not considered youth work by sector representatives.” The difference is usually in the hierarchy of objectives and performance.

■ In terms of leisure

Leisure activities may describe the period in which they occur and not be directly related to the objectives. They refer to activities with a primary focus on fun and not on the personal, social and cultural development of young people. However, this type of activity can be used as a tool to strengthen the bond of young people with their peers and the activities.

■ In terms of space

A place for young people to enjoy but which does not have a clear way of supporting personal development or non-formal learning may not be considered a place where youth work occurs.

■ In terms of social work

Youth work can also include similar goals, such as prevention and social inclusion. However, if it does not aim at the personal and social development of young people or if the activities are not optional, it must be considered as social work where the intervention is carried out based on non-formal educational methods. The social service will design and implement preventive and interventional solutions that may also include youth work.

Youth work provides education, usually outside the school context. It is guided by professional youth technicians, volunteers, young leaders, civil servants or members of non-governmental organizations through funding programs and support systems.

Where is youth work performed?

The most common places and ways in which youth work occurs:

- Youth clubs or centres
- Projects and initiatives with and for young people
- Informal youth groups
- Youth volunteering
- Youth camps
- Information for young people
- Youth organizations or youth nature organizations
- Youth movements

Depending on the country and recognition at local, regional and national levels, youth work may be carried out in other entities and locations, namely schools, community spaces, churches, libraries, etc. This approach's effectiveness has given rise to an increasing number of organizations such as those working on youth justice and health improvement in order to develop an approach to youth work and enable young people who might otherwise be alienated from support to obtain the services they need.

■ FURTHER READING:

[Quality Youth Work – A common framework for the further development of youth work – Report from the Expert Group on Youth Work Quality System in the EU Member States](#)

[Youth Work - European Commission](#)

Collection of good practices of youth work in shrinking cities

Introduction

The shrinkage of cities is not a new or unique phenomenon. In the past, localities have always experienced population losses for a multitude of reasons. In modern European literature, urban shrinkage is often understood as a local manifestation of the interplay of one or more economic, spatial, demographic and/or political forces. In this project, the toolkit will show citizen participation methods based on best practice cases with a significant approach towards youth work in shrinking cities from four countries: Croatia, Spain, Portugal and Germany.

The collection of best practices presented in this toolkit highlights the tactics and strategies of youth work that allow young people, as well as citizens in general, to participate in their cities, while also sparking greater interest through inclusive local actions or youth work related projects.

During the process of establishing and comprising the best practices, the aim was to understand the background and genesis of the youth-works projects, so that we can assess the push and pull factors as well as the external factors behind it. It was also important to understand the impact it/they had on the youth that did the projects. Lastly, the aim was to understand how the local stakeholders perceived the projects and its adaptation into youth policy because we wanted to see if there was any effect on elements such as financing, policy changes and general awareness about projects.

The team identified three central selection criteria that should be taken into consideration when selecting the empirical study cases: (1) the case study should reference the shrinking phenomenon, directly or indirectly; (2) the case study should address the needs of young people; and (3) the case study can be implemented in different contexts of localities.

Selection process

Finding Common Ground

During the project team meeting in Weimar, the team ascertained the definitions and parameters of the research project more closely. As the countries included in this project vary in size, geographical position, population size, economy and many other factors, the team had to take all of these into account while deciding on a common definition when it comes to the questions such as: what is youth, what is youth work, what is a city, what is shrinkage, what is a shrinking city and what do we understand under the term "contesting dynamics of a shrinking city."

The partners agreed that there are two ways to understand good practice of youth work in contesting the dynamic of shrinking cities. First, there is youth work which explicitly addresses the causes and/or consequences of shrinkage in a particular community by building resilience against these. Secondly, there is also youth work which implicitly addresses the shrinkage of a city by focusing on programs that are trying to address the problems in the local context without originally connecting it to the phenomenon of shrinkage.

It was important to understand the background and genesis of youth-work projects, so that the push and pull factors as well as the external factors behind any given project could be assessed. Then it was important to understand the impact shrinkage had on young people involved in youth work. Lastly, the aim was to understand how the local stakeholders perceived the projects and its adaptation into youth policy because the project partners wanted to determine whether there was any influence on elements such as financing, policy changes and general awareness about projects.

When it comes to the selection of empirical examples, the team identified three central selection criteria that should be taken into consideration:

1. The program or project is decisive in the selection of cases. The program or project should address the phenomena of shrinkage, either explicitly or implicitly.
2. The designed programs or projects (pertaining to youth work) should address the needs of young people as the main target group;
3. The practice should be replicable.

Mapping Methodology

The methodology of mapping, as well as the research design, were also discussed and agreed upon during the project meeting in Weimar. Bearing in mind the available resources and the time frame, the team agreed that each partner would focus on one shrinking city in its country and choose one or two empirical cases of youth work projects/programs from this city.

The research instrument that has been utilized and developed in the pursuit of this goal, as well as the research objectives and the quest for the solution to problems and research questions have been included in this section. The research had been influenced by critical and constructivist paradigms and thus a qualitative case study approach was adopted.

Desk research on shrinking cities and youth work projects was equally important because it was necessary to have enough secondary data. Another main tool in the research consisted of semi-structured interviews, the team also agreed on three groups of interviewees – youth workers, direct beneficiaries/youngsters, representatives of local municipalities and other stakeholders.

Each partner country was involved in the project research and TOOLKIT development in their case study by conducting interviews, gathering information and investigating the process of shrinkage by mapping the best practices of youth work that tackle the issue of shrinking cities. The process was based on a methodological approach that became the common approach among the project partners;

- Develop mapping approach and research
- Toolkit for the shrinking cities

Finding Local Best-Practices

In Croatia, we focused on examples of Karlovac and Sisak, two relatively similar cities regarding their population, geographical position and causes of shrinking in the last decades. Considering the local best-practices of youth-work, we decided to take a better look at the youth club SKWHAT in Sisak and civil-society organisation Carpe Diem from Karlovac, which is implementing the Job club for youth project.

In Spain, we focused on Granada and Cadiz. Among the examples of youth-work in Granada, we selected ALFA, an organisation that works with young people in a neglected city-neighbourhood, and Crossover, an association that focuses on promoting the cultural world of manga through specialised events. The practice of youth-work in the coastal city Cadiz is presented through the practice of youth-work organisations Alendoy and Cardijin.

In Portugal, the cities that have been studied are Covilha and Sao Pedro do Sul. In Covilha we focused on the Idearia project, run by Coolabora, while in Sao Pedro do Sul the emphasis was on the Acolher project, run by the association Fragas Aveloso.

In the case of Germany, we focused on the cases of youth-work in Altenburg and Saalfeld, two shrinking cities in the federal state Thuringia. The toolkit is presenting the initiative Werkhaus in Saalfeld and the project Stadtmensch in Altenburg.

What did we learn?

During this project, the team recognized some of the best examples of youth work projects and programs in shrinking cities in four countries. This was not always an easy task, but the aforementioned cases provide excellent examples. They led the team to the following conclusions:

- For the most part, the analysed projects and programs responded to the consequences of shrinkage in their respective communities. As it is visible from our analysis, most of the reasons behind shrinkage have had their roots 20 or more years ago, so it was not possible for the projects to directly address those original causes. It is also worth noting that most of these projects thoroughly and innovatively respond to the current challenges that these cities face.
- Most of the people the team interviewed did not connect their work with the notion of a shrinking city, but, as stated above, to one or several effects that shrinkage produced. From today's perspective and bearing in mind that these are mostly youth-led projects, this is not surprising.

- The best practices of youth work do not implicitly affect the demographic developments, but rather build up capacities and create opportunities for young people by facing issues such as high unemployment rates, aging populations, vacancies and dilapidated physical conditions of buildings and infrastructure, etc.
- The local context is of utmost importance. As the analysis shows, there are considerable differences between the various local contexts, even in the same country. Therefore, before making your strategy, it is always important to make the necessary assessments. Here are some of the steps that the team recommends:

The strategy recommendations include: identifying the challenges and action planning, understanding the setting, the roles and responsibilities, the collaboration and partnerships, building a sound policy basis, developing financial mechanisms and identifying the right options for implementation.

The process recommendations include: identifying the context, setting the objectives, building a consensus around the desired option, laying out actions to be taken and preparing an action plan.



Best practices of youth-work in shrinking cities

Spain

Shrinking in the National Context

Although urban growth is still common in Europe, there have been certain periods and regions in which a decline in urban life has been observed in demographic, economic, social and environmental terms. In Spain, the cities affected by shrinking, are mostly in the north of the country and are mainly industrial cities such as Avilés (Asturias), Sestao (Biscay), Basauri (Biscay), Portugalete (Biscay), Langreo (Asturias), Bilbao (Biscay). However, in other cases, the decrease is related to suburbanization processes towards centres around the main city. This is caused mainly by the rising cost of housing and results in a move of the young population to neighbouring municipalities.

The cities that suffer from this process are: Salamanca, Cádiz, Sevilla, Granada (Sánchez Moral, Méndez, Prada Trigos, 2012). In Spain 90% of the territory is rural and the administration has been developing projects in these municipalities for over 30 years.

They are aware of the risk of depopulation in these areas and therefore develop policies to improve the living conditions of young people. However, it can be noted that at the national level there seems to be no theoretical or practical reflection on the problem of “urban shrinkage” and as a result the administration does not adopt measures addressing this issue in its entirety. Faced with the loss of population (often wrongly considered to be temporary), they choose to continue promoting urban growth with the hope of recovering the economic and demographic development. Consequently, social, economic, cultural and demographic decline is often even promoted. (Griñó, 2014).

Most of the measures adopted by public administrations in cities aimed at combating youth unemployment, social exclusion and marginality, seek to tackle these problems in a concrete way but not holistically (by not considering all the aspects that entail “urban shrinkage”), and therefore, cannot be considered as effective responses.

In the autonomous community of Andalusia in the south of Spain, which was the focus of the research, certain differences exist to the typical cases listed earlier, as unlike the northern cities, the main cause for shrinkage seems to be more a gradual suburbanisation of the local population rather than deindustrialization and moving from city centres to surrounding areas. The two most notable municipalities that have also been looked at in this regard were the cities of Granada and Cadiz.

Granada

The city of Granada, in the eastern part of Andalusia, has a population of 232,208 inhabitants according to the official figures of the municipal register published by the INE in 2018, which represents 25.46% of this province and 2.77% of the Andalusian population. While census data indicates only a net loss of 562 from 2017 to 2018 in the entire municipality of Granada, there have been several shifts in population and demographic makeup among the districts, with the Norte district losing 8,135 inhabitants, many in the age range of 18-25. There is no single cause for the 'shrinkage', rather, we could speak of a multi-causal process. One of the possible causes has its origin in the high unemployment rate that the Andalusian community, and especially the provinces of Granada and Cádiz suffer.

While during the first quarter of 2019 the unemployment rate was 14.70% in Spain, Andalusia reached 21.08%. This number was surpassed in the provinces of Granada and Cádiz with 21.67% and 26.80% respectively, it was notably high among the young population. In the case of Granada, the unemployment rate for the population between the ages of 16 and 19 years is 54.24%, while it is 36.87% in young people between the ages of 20 and 24. This

causes issues when in between costs for living and housing and a lack of employment, life for many younger people can become unsustainable.

On the other hand, this decrease in population in the city of Granada seems to be in line with the increase of inhabitants in its metropolitan area. Over the course of the last few years, a considerable number of people that used to live in the city have established themselves in the area of La Vega de Granada. The increase in housing prices has forced many people to consider changing their residence to towns that surround the capital.

Granada has a good public transport system and young people prefer to live outside of the city and travel to work daily. Likewise, some parts of the population prefer to live in small towns near the city where a larger house with a garden or a cottage is more affordable and offers the possibility of enjoying a cleaner environment (Montosa, 2003). Some of the municipalities that people are choosing to move to are Churriana de la Vega, Armilla, Huétor Vega or Monachil.

As a consequence, the mortality rate in Granada has increased, as the residents who choose to stay in the city usually belong to older age groups, which leads to an ageing population and a higher

number of deaths. Natural growth in Granada has been negative with a net loss of almost 300 people from 2017 to 2018.

Meanwhile, young people who move outside of the city take their family with them and new births are registered in the municipality where they move to, contributing to the birth rate decline. In addition, the departure of migrant families that tend to be bigger affects the depopulation, as they prefer to live in nearby municipalities where housing is more affordable. (Ramiro, 2012).

ALFA

Almanjáyar en Familia (ALFA) is an organization in the city of Granada that intends to promote social and cultural education in Almanjáyar. This neighbourhood has traditionally been considered an impoverished district of the city.

The organization was created as a response to the work carried out by the priest Jesús Otero. He had started a social education and intervention project with socially vulnerable minors in 2004. His goal was to improve the residents' quality of life by empowering them through the development of their own personal skills. They aim at a peaceful and co-operative coexistence so that they can live in a steadier and more productive environment while they acquire the necessary tools and skills to move forward.

Juan Carlos Carrión González, president of this organization, stresses that it is necessary to pay attention to social reality, respond to it, and offer young people what they cannot have: space with computers, inclusion in the parish community, encouragement, etc.

In short, "Paper planes" seeks to develop the critical thought capabilities of these kids, prepare them for adult life, improve their

self-esteem, promote their social skills and train them in decision-making.

In this way, they also expect to improve the neighbourhood's reputation which has always been associated with marginalization and delinquency and thus re-establish its dignity and appeal and reinvigorate Granada's urban activity.

The methodology in ALFA is based on everyone's compromise: employees, volunteers, and users. The first lesson that they teach young people is giving and receiving, as opposed to only requesting. They achieve active involvement of young people in healthy activities by calling upon their own motivation. This is their way of offering activities that are different from the ones that they usually get in their neighbourhood.

The workshops that they organise are requested by young people, a simple way to guarantee their attendance and interest. Without them, there's no project. Their goal is to make them understand that they are the protagonists of their lives and their community.

ALFA users are usually youngsters with a high rate of school dropouts. Independent problem solving is at the centre of ALFA's attention, so

they can develop skills as a result of their own needs. They need to go from an "I can't" mentality to "I need to learn how to do it", as they do in workshops for their development in digital competences.

One of their initiatives with the most impact is their female football team. Through such a healthy activity, they have faced gender stereotypes, promoting teamwork, conflict resolution, or the need for commitment in order to achieve social progress. However, studies come first, and the coaches who support the team do not hesitate to dedicate training time to catch up with homework or to solve questions if they notice that users are struggling with their grades.

This organisation also qualifies their own trainers, mainly citizens in the neighbourhood that want to be actively involved in the activities. Since they belong there, their presence helps to promote their project and get in contact with new users, thus involving the community even more.

One of their major initiatives is called **Aviones de papel** (Paper Planes). It is a project aimed at children between the ages of 14 and 18 that aims at empowering young people, trying to enable them to make their own decisions on issues that have an impact on their

lives. In return, there has to be a commitment, such as helping at home or doing well in school.

According to Elisa Castillo Moreno and Carmen Espigares González, educators who work in the project, the culture of effort and learning to achieve the goals they set for themselves in life is promoted. In short, Aviones de papel seeks to develop the critical thinking of children, prepare them for adult life, improve their self-esteem, promote their social skills, and train their decision-making skills.

The project currently has no funding; educators have been working voluntarily since January 2019. Elisa is from the neighbourhood and has been with ALFA since she was 12 years old (with some interruptions), she is an instructor in her free time and currently she is studying to become a teacher. She is a positive role model for the children of the association, as she is from the neighbourhood and is doing higher studies.

She says that the project began a few years ago, but “was aborted for a time due to lack of commitment of some young people”, she also stated that it has been an important step for them to realize that “without commitment there is no project” and “there is no failure; every problem that occurs is an opportunity to grow”.

What ALFA users value the most is the fact that this organization offers a space for them to communicate and express themselves freely with everyone helping each other. This can lead to cooperation in other aspects in their lives, reducing confrontation, increasing dialogue, and improving living conditions locally. This type of project gives them the opportunity to do things they feel confident in, means to achieve their dreams (studies, a place to have a good time where they feel safe, friendship). This way, they can also distance themselves from the dangers in their environment: drugs, violence, weapons, etc.

The group of children that make up the program “Paper Planes” hold a meeting every Friday and every three weeks they have a workshop.

Cristian, Alpha and Aimara (they are 15 years old), as participants of the program feel that they are listened to and their opinions are considered. They are even the ones who make requests for the workshops they want to carry out. They emphasize that in ALFA everything is voluntary, and they offer them the training that young people request. They have the feeling that everyone collaborates, and everyone can go at their own pace without feeling pressure of



any kind. They are in charge of writing emails, writing the program of activities, etc.

This type of project gives them the opportunity to do things they are proud of, and it is a means to achieve their dreams (studies, a place to have a good time, friends). These activities help establish a more stable environment for the young people and they are moving away from the risks of their environment, such as drugs, violence, weapons, etc.

Crossover

Crossover is an organization from Granada dedicated to planning and promoting themed events related to 'nerd' culture, such as comics, videogames, cinema, Asian culture, manga, anime... Activities that attract the public's interest increasingly. It was created in 2008 from a union of several organizations that existed previously.

In the beginning, this organization was developed by teenage volunteers who got involved along with the members in planning events. According to them, one of Granada's main strengths is its intense culture, so these spaces help the creation and developing of new artistic and/or business projects. Through promotion of nerd culture, Crossover offers the possibility to connect with the young population, who usually cannot identify themselves with the local folklore. This creates new possibilities for social gathering through leisure.

In the last few years, **their event “FICZONE”** has become a meeting point for artists, illustrators, designers, cultural and entertainment entrepreneurs, cartoonists, publishers, board games creators...

They are experts in a complex social and business environment, very hard to carry out in the city. This way, they can join efforts and develop possible projects in Granada that would have been impossible otherwise. Moreover, FICZONE produces an increase in rental accommodation, as both participants and attendees stay in the city for the duration of the event. This has a positive impact on the Granadan economy.

José Antonio Gutiérrez, deputy director of the Department of Youth, has worked for 30 years as a youth technician in the city of Granada, before becoming deputy director of the youth area 3 years ago. He states that he knows ALFA because the facilitators of the North area usually request workshops and he knows CROSSOVER as they finance the first prize for the comics’ contest. He is not sure whether these associations can contribute to the problem of depopulation.

When asked why the Department is not involved in these projects, he replies that “many associations do not ask for help and prefer to develop their activities without interference from the administration”.

He was also asked whether the City Council works in a top-down manner, that is, the ideas arise from the Department and the collaborators carry them out, he answers that it is the opposite, the proposals come from associations or from young people. He states that several associations claimed the creation of the Youth Council, which is an agency responsible for representing young people in the municipality, taking the needs and suggestions to public entities.

Cadiz

In 1996 the city of Cádiz had a total population of 145,595 inhabitants, a figure that had fallen to 116,027 inhabitants by 2019 according to INE data. According to data from the INE (National Statistics Institute), the number of deaths has been increasing and now exceeds the number of births. As a result, the city of Cádiz now has an ageing population. Additionally, housing is very expensive, it has no land to build and the inhabitants choose to move their residence to nearby towns such as San Fernando or Puerto Real.

There are many factors that have contributed to the population decrease, including the industrial decline in the city, which led to the closure of stores and shops. However, in the 1960s and early 1970s, there was rapid increase in every type of store in Cádiz thanks mainly to three mainstays: the shipyard, the tobacco factory and aviation construction which boosted the Cádiz economy. These companies provided employment for approximately 9,000 workers. For years the industry had led to the creation of many direct and indirect jobs through auxiliary companies that sprung up to complement this activity.

However, the collapse of industry as a creator of employment and wealth has resulted in a crisis situation in both labour and economic terms. The Aviation Construction left the city at the start of the twenty-first century and CAMPSA and the tobacco factory also closed, while the naval factory remained but experienced difficulties. Today everything has disappeared and only the Naval Repairs Dock in Cádiz City remains with a staff consisting of a mere 125 employees.

Cádiz is the province with the highest unemployment rate in Spain. According to INE data for the third quarter of 2019, employment by production sectors had the following distribution: the services sector dominates, since it employs 67.6% of the working population. It is followed by industry, with 9.5%, and construction with 6.2% and agriculture comes last with 3.4% of those employed.

According to Manuel Arcila, Professor of Regional Geographic Analysis at the University of Cádiz, another major cause of the loss in population is the lack of space in Cádiz and a shortage in housing. This forces those who reside in Cádiz to move to other locations in the bay, such as San Fernando or Puerto Real.

The lack of space for development and housing, combined with a lack of economic opportunities practically forces the natives of Cádiz to emigrate in search of better working and living conditions.

Additionally, the sectors of the population that mainly emigrate are the young aged between 15 and 39 who are better trained and qualified, and immigrants who arrived in search of better work opportunities often are forced to leave because of the lack of jobs.

Asociación Alendoy

It is a non-profit association that develops its activities with a clear intention to promote educational opportunities to all those groups that for one reason or another, experience situations of social exclusion or find difficulties of adaptation to traditional educational structures.

The non-profit Alendoy association came into being in 1999 with the aim of bringing about transformational change through social participation, developing projects to achieve equality and social justice. The association has developed its activities with the clear intention of promoting educational opportunities among all the most vulnerable groups in society such as: children, the young, women and the disabled.

This association is located in Cádiz capital in the La Paz neighbourhood, a place with a high unemployment rate, crime and drugs, and few leisure opportunities for young people. For that reason, the association began by creating a toy library for children and young people. Later, it saw that there were other needs such as unemployment, the need for young people to acquire social skills, and the need for social inclusion. The association has tried to ensure

that the young people manage their own leisure activities supported by an educator.

The Asociación Alendoy follows an educational and relationship model that is based on creating a closer emotional bond between people. It provides lessons for young people who have completed ESO (compulsory secondary school education) and who need help with organising themselves: courses, job searches, addressing their needs, etc. Employees of Alendoy coordinate the Youth Sign-Up Program where they work with the young immigrants and young native Spaniards who have been in protection centres but have had to leave upon turning 18.

In many cases, they lack sufficient maturity to deal with their problems. The association helps them as much as possible and has set up emergency funds to find these young people a place to sleep as well as providing other ways of assistance.

The association helps foreigners arrange the paperwork needed to legalise their status in Spain. They also serve as mentors or educators and accompany them to doctors, canteens, and shelters. They also act as intermediaries contacting businessmen in the area, keeping them informed and helping these young people take

up internships in their companies. In some cases, this leads to a job offer.

One of the main problems encountered by members of the association is that children who come from troubled families often lack social skills which jeopardizes their chances of employment. Considering that the programs developed by the association have an internship at companies for which many young people lack social skills, association aims to develop these skills prior to their taking on internships, thus improving their employment opportunities. The youngsters also learn about values such as: solidarity, friendship, respect, empathy, honesty, willpower etc.

The association tries to ensure that they continue their formation and have a reference to go when they need it, they have a follow-up by the association and thus ensures that they have more opportunities in the city of Cádiz and are thus able to remain there.

In 2017 Alendoy initiated **the Youth Sign-up Program** in the CAIXA Social Works Program after identifying a series of training needs in the professional resumes and educational backgrounds of young people under 30 in their work area. Thus, different training schemes were offered to fill the gaps in professional resumes once a market

study had been carried out, and in accordance with the needs of companies in the area. The purpose of these training schemes is to lead to more young people joining the labour force in the future.

The training schemes consist of three parts:

1. Work on personal and professional skills
2. Technical training undertaken by professionals from different work areas.
3. Work experience.

During 2018 priority was given to young people who were part of the child protection scheme, although the basis for the program remained unchanged.

In addition to this Program (Youth Sign-Up), currently the association is developing the **“Incorpora”** program of social integration that promotes the employment of people facing or at risk of social exclusion. It is a social work program by “La Caixa” which is aimed at young people between the ages of 18 and 30.

Asociación Cardijn

The Cardijn association owes its name to Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967), a Belgian priest who worked for social commitment on behalf of Catholic Church in the early twentieth century. He founded the Christian Working Youth in 1925, a movement that spread throughout more than sixty countries in the world.

The Cardijn Association, with headquarters in Trille St. (Cádiz), is a non-profit organization established on December 20, 1993. It is national in scope and since its creation has worked with young people from lower-class neighbourhoods. In 1994 it introduced the migratory flow into the scope of its work.

The association carries out leisure activities, pre-employment training workshop for young people at risk of social exclusion, training orientation service for people between 16 and 25 years old, preparation of Compulsory Secondary Education for free, “Sports Training School and Practice”, actions of emancipation, among other things. Additionally, they are transversally galvanizing actions aimed at new information and communication technologies. The association works in three sectors or areas: immigration, employment and youth.

They are inspired by solidarity and their aim is to help people with problems and difficulties as well as those disregarded by society. Cardijn is a religious entity, part of the Secretariat of Migration and the Church. Their mission is to help people as Jesus of Nazareth did. They help those who are highly vulnerable: migrants, the unemployed, young people from broken families, from difficult neighbourhoods and workers. The focus is mostly on the following Cádiz neighbourhoods: Cerro del Moro, Guillén Moreno, La Paz, Loreto and Puntales.

While not directly addressing the matter of shrinkage, services offered include several activities which assist to improve the situation:

1. Employment-based social intervention with young people from neighbourhoods which need transformation
2. Complete support for workforce integration and the employment prospects of young people at risk of social exclusion
3. Social Action with young people and the Youth Information Centre

They begin with youth leisure activities and leisure work experience, this is the starting point to make contact with young people from broken families and, in some cases, young people under legal orders. They try to gain the youngsters' confidence through structured leisure activities such as: sports, culture, carnival, painting, tournaments, indoor soccer tournaments, theatrical activities, urban culture: rap, break, field trips and fishing contests.

Young people talk to us about their problems and worries and we are able to base our intervention on this information. As Antonio Guerrero, responsible for the youth program in the Cardijn Association where he has worked for 12 years co-ordinating and managing programs related to young people, states: "Once we know their

needs, and have assessed their potential, we work to help them join the workforce through socio-labour tasks.”

Juan José Gómez Ruiz, a Youth Worker working for the city of Cádiz, when asked about the projects and programs offered by associations such as Alendoy and Cardijn, stated that the municipal administration usually collaborates a great deal with these groups founded by professionals and shares many of their concerns, initiatives and interests in the situation of the youth in general. Juan José confirms that the youth unemployment rate in Cádiz is one of the highest in Spain and as Cádiz has an aging population with fewer young people and fewer leisure options during the weekends, especially for those who are non-drinkers, he states that “these associations always have a positive impact as they provide young people with more opportunities to join the workforce”.

Germany

Shrinking in the National Context

The recent development in Eastern Germany is a case in point to show an ‘advanced’ or even ‘extreme’ stage of shrinkage and its impact on urban development, housing markets and usage of infrastructures.

Shrinkage is pushed by three reasons: Firstly, by a sharp decrease in birth rates after the political changes in 1990 that caused Eastern Germany to have the lowest-low birth rates in Europe (0.77 children per woman in 1995; INKAR, 2003). Secondly, most of Eastern German cities have been facing dramatic losses of inhabitants due to job-driven out-migration to the western part of the country. And a third reason is the wide-spread suburbanisation during the 1990s.

(Haase & Nuissl, 2006; Couch et al., 2005).



The political change after 1989 led to a rapid deindustrialization and breakdown in employment and, as a result, a mass out-migration towards West Germany bringing about a dramatic acceleration of population losses.

The main reasons for the recent population losses were the job-related out-migration to West Germany (starting right after 1990), a state-sponsored and thus artificially initiated suburbanisation (that had its peak from the early mid-1990s until 1997), and demographic ageing (decrease in birth rates - a continuous process). The main reason behind the out-migration was the loss of jobs due to deindustrialization (loss of tens of thousands of jobs in the industrial sector in the early 1990s).

Thuringia is one of the regions where the shrinking phenomenon can be observed. Geographically, Thuringia is situated adjacent to Lower Saxony, Hesse and Bavaria with the result that many Thuringians go to work in these western federal states or have already worked and/or lived there in the past. This means that in Thuringia many people have experience with and knowledge of migrants when it comes to inside migration as well as migration to West Germany.

Except for the city chain of Jena, Weimar and Erfurt, the Free State of Thuringia is shrinking and ageing drastically, albeit at a very uneven regional level, as in most of the federal states. Since 1989, around 500,000 people have left Thuringia.

Coupled with a myriad of shrinkage causes, the region started to receive the influx of immigrants and refugees starting from 2015. The question of shrinkage is however still relevant in the region especially when it comes to addressing the issue of integration, participation and welcome culture.

We have chosen two cities and two case studies in Thuringia that can represent the best practices of youth work in the context of shrinking cities, Saalfeld (25,000 inhabitants) and Altenburg (33,000 inhabitants).

Saalfeld

Saalfeld shows the demographic change due to population migration losses coming from the trend to move to locations closer to the centre. The development of the population and age structure in the district of Saalfeld follows the general trend of a population decrease and an ageing demography, where the average age of inhabitants is 48.3 years old. In the period between 1998 and 2015, the population in the district decreased by about 19%, and in the city of Saalfeld it was by about 17%.

Additionally, the spatial and social issues in Saalfeld, especially the Beulwitz neighbourhood, are due to the marginalisation. There have been several factors influencing the current situation. It is a former barracks (Bauwerk) area, it has always been stigmatised because in GDR times the Soviet army was stationed there, a large wall was surrounding it and no one could come to this area. After the political shift, social housing was erected in the barracks area, which in turn led to stigmatisation.

Furthermore, the asylum accommodation for refugees was developed and located in the neighbourhood. Redevelopment measures in the inner-city area have pushed up the prices in the housing mar-

ket with some residents not being able to pay anymore, which means they also need to relocate to such areas.

Bauwerk - Beulwitzer Straße

In Saalfeld, one example of practice initiated by the Social and Youth Department of the city is presented. The Social and Youth Department is part of the structure of the Saalfeld city municipality. The office is called the Office for Youth, Work, Sport and Social Affairs and it has a special form. In 1995 the department took over the youth work by agreement from the district of Saalfeld-Rudolstadt. The whole aim of its program is to “help for education” which is supposed to represent the interests of young people vis-à-vis the state and society, apart from education and by offering leisure time activities, help and counselling.

The residential area of the Beulwitzer Strasse, which contains the upgrading process of the district and the integration into the urban space, has been part of the Social City Program since 2017. In the Beulwitz neighbourhood, locals and refugees have over the years built a so-called factory building where everyone is welcome. The planning and construction of the building is done as a participatory



community process: the best way for people to embrace a project.

The **"Zwischenraum zum Ankommen"** (Intermediary open space) in Beulwitzer Straße combines current dynamics and burning topics of urban development. It deals with the integration of refugees, the activation of brownfields, participation, new work and the common good for the neighbourhood. Unlike typical urban planning, the focus is not on the plan drawn up by experts but on the development of a long-term idea for the site from a useful practice together with the citizens and especially in giving young people more active roles.

The current Urban Development Concept 2010 will be revised, and a vision developed with regard to future opportunities. The potential and commitment of the people living there are taken seriously and integrated into the process of revaluation.

"Werkhaus was actually initiated by the inhabitants themselves. They were eager to do something and had already taken part in our participatory projects. We held several workshops, where the residents told us what they really needed. We were looking for a sustainable solution for the people, where they would have the opportunity to co-create. This was after we realised that the people want to hold onto their quarter – but that they want changes, make it more beautiful".

Hanka Giller, Soziales und Jugend der Stadt

This project is fundamental as the best practice not only in the city but also in the neighbourhood, since the Beulwitz project is part of "Soziale Stadt" and since IBA is accompanying the process, things are moving forward. For example, the Bertelsmann Foundation and IBA have been very important partners.



Following this, the city of Saalfeld and the Bildungszentrum Saalfeld conducted an experimental development with the IBA Thüringen and other partners on the grounds of the former Bauwerk. Based on the participation in the “Zukunftsstadt” 2015 and 2016 competition, the two ideas workshops in the spring of 2017 and the two-week summer workshop in 2017 were important milestones on the way to a liveable district with a special atmosphere.

The ideas workshop and study are intended to build on this, to incorporate the demands and wishes of the residents and to develop new perspectives for the future.

The ideas workshop was divided over the two and a half days in five stages:

- Stage 1: Construction and craft action
- Stage 2: Identify and mark the favourite and conflicting
- Stage 3: Determining and suburbs of the desired uses
- Stage 4: Defining and marking the new areas of use
- Stage 5: Staking a three-dimensional building.

Many young people, after this workshop, have taken an active role in the realization of many local programs , for example as moderators for “Jungen - Moderatorausbildung”, where they moderated the process of training for youth participation in the community for their peers. Another example is the involvement of young people in the “Freisitz” event and other activities such as “Mutmacher, where young people can do several activities such as hiking, summer holiday programs and healthy living.

Youth work is seen as a bridge towards connecting young people, their parents and the community, with the focus on the social space, a network perspective and comprehensiveness. When it comes to planning there is sometimes “chaos management”. It is flexible and demand orientated.



Hanka Giller, *Soziales und Jugend der Stadt*, believed that Youth work alone is not enough:

"I would not let it be in the realm of youth work alone for such a long time. We already started in the 1990s with participatory work, always in the realm of youth work – and at that time, community work was already included in youth work. With hindsight, I would speak up on the situation in the neighbourhood. I have learned that it is essential to make this clear on the political level. We mentioned this again and again in the context of youth work and in social work, but it was like a vicious circle."

Altenburg

Altenburg experienced a massive population decline in the 25 years from 1989 to 2013 from over 51,000 to almost 33,000 inhabitants. According to the Statistical Office Thuringia in the period 2000-2010, 1364 new inhabitants moved to the city, while at the same time 1292 inhabitants left the city. Within this period, refugee immigration still does not play a significant role, however this all changed in 2015. The development of Altenburg has been very dynamic in the recent years.

Anyone who visits the city every few years will be amazed at the many structural changes. Notable developments are particularly evident in residential construction and in trade and services. The city centre has benefited from this significantly.

However, the opportunity for young people in Altenburg is difficult because it is very limited. The challenge for young people is that a sports class or a music school are quite expensive. There is an opportunity to get some money from the government, but it is not enough to cover the whole year of studies. In the city we have a lot of things to do and a lot of creative projects but I think our kind of students are not that confident that they would be brave enough to go there and say "I would like to join your group or your club".

Stadtmenschen Project, Farbküche

Farbküche is a community organisation in Altenburg that provides spaces for creating opportunities for young people and aims at making the city more appealing. Susann Seifert, the managing director of the organisation, has been working in Farbküche since 2005 while at the same time working full-time in the city administration of Altenburg.

The project of “**Stadtmensch**” was a further development concerning the issue of the shrinking city, developed by Farbküche in cooperation with the *Schloss- und Kulturbetrieb Residenzschloss Altenburg*, the *Wandel-Werte-Wege gUG* and the *Förderverein Zukunftswerkstatt Paul-Gustavus-Haus eV*. Through the competition “New Model of Neighbourhood Development”, the project received 600,000 euros as support from the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesinnenministerium) over the period of three years. During the process of initial development, the project was also supported by the mentoring of Platform e.V and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

The project “Stadtmensch” takes on the challenges of a shrinking city and makes urban society the central actor of change. Citizens are called upon to intervene in the city centre of Altenburg in places of their choice and to make this experience more dynamic. Public space, as a shared space, should be explicitly explored, well thought-out and structured against the background of a variety of current social, technological and media changes. In the light of these challenges, for some years now attention has increasingly shifted towards civil society actors who network and create added value for the community through their projects in various fields of urban development.

The pilot quarter proposes an innovative approach in the sense of taking up the high societal significance of a welfare-oriented urban development. The testing of new instruments promises important contributions to the current discussion. This affects the district-wide infrastructure offer (e.g. through the creation of innovative educational offers, new neighbourliness aids or the conversion of green areas), the city production for people from all social groups, innovative models of well-oriented building land and real estate development or the strengthening of the building culture in the quarter by innovative and lasting design and new one's town planning accents.

According to the Susann Seifert, the Managing director of Farbküche:

“After 6 pm the market is empty and that’s when the young people come here, because they do not know where else to go, since everything is closed down by 6 or 7 pm (also youth clubs). You notice that there is a lack of youth facilities for mental and personality development. The youth here is disadvantaged in relation to today’s Zeitgeist. That is why we are pleased that we have many young people in our project and that we can promote their opportunities. We are active in the artistic field, i.e. we try to give them exhibitions or to sell their art. The money is then spent again on other technology that they can continue to photograph or share their knowledge through self-organized workshops. For example, they are looking for a place in the city centre where they can organize a self-governing Youth Café.”

The actors of the initiatives strengthen together with the contribution of their time, their expertise, their network, their infrastructure and their intrinsic motivation. They form the Stadtmensch network and are drivers of district development. The establishment of a lively network of all relevant actors in the city of Altenburg is the focus of this project pillar.

Out of the network, a recognised advocacy group is to grow, which as a mouthpiece outwardly improves the visibility of the city and the interests of the actors towards politics, administration and other decision-makers and framework donors. Internally, it should work towards a co-operative solidarity with one another and find ways and resources to support each other in the best possible way.

With the help of regular meetings, discussion groups and future workshops for the development of new joint projects, the identification basis for all that are involved is developed. The network also organises the Stadtmensch festival, which makes commitment visible and provides a platform for exchange, activities and new ideas. This festival gives visitors the opportunity to experience the variety of engagement across the city and to see their city through different eyes.

In addition, the network commits to cultivate the culture of appreciation of the city honours award, with which the commitment to the welfare of the community in Altenburg should be strengthened and the dialogue should be promoted. An outstanding result of this commitment is not necessarily in the foreground, but above all the process of engagement should be extraordinary.

For example, by small impulses surprising innovations by acting autonomously beyond the usual institutional structures or by acting in a particularly courageous and risk-averse manner. Since consideration of the process nature of the commitment is in the foreground, the award ceremony itself will follow a dynamic approach. The actors of the initiative will be engaged with the winner of the award in the dialogue, how they can best support his concerns from the network.

Stadtmensch project is for everybody but especially for young people. They tell their parents and peers what's going on. The "fever" of Stadtmensch is spreading around. The young people are bringing their parents and friends to different events. A lot of our students are going to Farbküche in their free time where they do creative work.

The good thing about Stadtmensch is that they are quite widespread around the town, it is possible to find parts of their actions everywhere and it is intended for every generation.

In the case of Altenburg, Stadtmensch has initiated an organic civic network and has transferred the control to others now. It is not just about empowering individual people, but also empowering [and building] structures that can then empower broader parts of

Altenburg. What we as SKB can do and did provide is PR and the resources that come with being part of the public administration of a city. Youth work in general helps young people to develop skills and competences in many areas; but it also helps them to strengthen their networks, to change their behaviour and to build positive relationships.

When it comes to youth work in a shrinking city, its practices offer the chance for contact, exchange and engagement among young people and across generations. At the same time, it is of value in its own right. And in addition to the outcomes, the processes of youth work also have a positive effect, and accordingly merit recognition.

Youth work continues to evolve, currently strongly influenced by the economic crisis, which has put young people higher on the agenda for policymakers and has increased the demand for youth work activities.

The emphasis has been put on improving young people's chances and on giving them better opportunities in the labour market and in education. The sphere of objectives has widened to include assisting them as they face more complex transitions in a world of high youth unemployment and inactivity. As a result, the decline of some

of the more traditional structures and activities has been matched by new objectives and innovative forms and approaches that reach out to young people.

Youth work is now seen as catering for their well-being and supporting those who are socially excluded — often through open youth work and street work. In this respect, youth work is increasingly seen as a way of filling the gap for services once traditionally provided by the mainstream.

Portugal

The shrinkage phenomenon in the national context

The number of residents in Portugal hasn't changed significantly since the 1960s (Valente Rosa, M.J. and Chitas, Paulo, 2010). In 2017, the country had 10,291,027 inhabitants (INE estimates), maintaining the negative demographic trend registered since 2010. Portugal is an asymmetric country, with the coastline offering more employment opportunities, access to health and education, leisure as well as better soil and climate conditions. In terms of education, and consequently skilled labour, productivity rates, and weak economic competitiveness, Portugal is very much lagging behind compared to other European countries. A high inequality regarding income distribution also affects the country. Portugal is one of the EU member countries with the highest Gini Index (an indicator of income inequality).

It is also one of the EU countries with the highest rate of poverty and social exclusion (according to the Human Development Reports of the UNDP).

The cities in Portugal are very disparate when it comes to the population size varying between the 663,000 inhabitants of Lisbon and 1,900 of Sabugal (INE, 2018). The growing number of cities with a population decrease is the manifestation of a global process which concentrates all the financial, information and communication networks in some cities, attracting private investment and qualified human resources (Martinez Fernandez et al., 2013, cit. by Barreira, A.P., Panagopoulos, T., Guimarães, M.H. (2015).

The non-attractiveness of the primary sector activities, mainly located inland, associated with lower quality and quantity of public services and goods created a migration process from the countryside to the coast. Only the elderly return or remain in the more impoverished peripheral regions (Lang, T., 2005).

The municipalities' central policy to overcome this problem has been by granting subsidies to stimulate the birth rate and social benefits for the allocation of families.

In some cases, municipalities charge lower tax rates to permanent inhabitants. In general, these policies do not produce any significant results in the fight against the phenomenon of shrinking. The issue of the inversion of the age pyramid is also crucial. With a smaller population and fewer taxpayers, municipalities also have fewer income sources, which prevents them from having a better infrastructure, in turn making them even less attractive to future inhabitants.

Maintaining schools is a good example (Castro et al., 2012, cit by Barreira et al. 2015, op. cit), even as the number of young people is declining. Lack of investment in schools highlights the decline process since families with school-age children tend to look for other municipalities with better schools.



Covilhã

Since the 1950s, there has been a continuous population decrease as a result of several economic, political and social factors, such as the traditional productive structure, the low incomes of workers in the agricultural sector, low expectations of employment in industry and services, or the poor accessibility and the lack of an integrated management and development model, to name only a few.

The loss of population due to emigration and the rural exodus has resulted in ageing and depopulation. The most visible consequences are the loss of demographic vitality, increased social burdens and functional dependence on urban areas. (Panagopoulos, T. and Barreira, A.P., s/d).

The city's harsh climate and topography characteristics also contribute to its lack of attractiveness. Despite its increasingly prestigious university and all the incentives to young people, less than 30% of the local students plan on staying in the city after completing their studies (Vicente, 2017).

The Idearia project

CoolLabora, the coordinator of the Idearia project, is a social intervention co-operative created in 2008. Its mission is to contribute to the development of people, organizations, and territory through innovative strategies of promoting equal opportunities, civic participation, education and training, as well as social inclusion (Lopes A. et al., 2005).

The objective of IDEARIA was to promote social change and innovation by trying to find answers to young people's difficulties at the beginning of their professional careers. The project aimed at developing skills that are important for youth employability and their personal growth: communication, teamwork, self-knowledge.

It focused on developing the so-called *soft skills*: in training for self-employment, in the design of networks of local organizations and in the animation of communication spaces between young people and other organizations.



The project had two programs with an average duration of seven months each. Each young person could choose the labs and activities they found the most interesting, without any obligation to participate for the whole duration. Three laboratories were proposed, as well as a youth assembly.

1. **The Creative Lab** had three independent workshops: theatre, photography/video, and plastic expression. Through mastering the artistic language, people could deepen their self-knowledge and understand how they could participate in civic engagement. Co-creation festivals were also held in this laboratory to foster a space where young people could develop ideas and cooperate in creating innovative business solutions.
2. **The Entrepreneurial Lab** was intended primarily for young people interested in creating the outlines of their future job or structuring a potential business plan. At the end of each block, each participant presented their business idea, the concept behind it and their business plan to a jury. It had two editions, both with a training itinerary consisting of three blocks with a total duration of 64 hours, distributed as follows: 1) From Idea to Business Proposal (18h); 2) Market Research, Value Proposition and Business

Concept (18h); 3) Financing, Support and Incentive System, Legal Aspects, and Business Plan (28h).

3. **The Experimentation Lab** has focused on creating opportunities and environments conducive to testing ideas and networking among young people. It included: (i) a mentoring program for young people interested in pursuing the business project; (ii) conducting micro-stages of observation in youth-chosen companies or non-governmental organizations; (iii) a physical space for work and various activities that allowed them to test ideas.
4. **Youth Assembly** - IDEARIA created a space for brainstorming on topics such as employment, work, and entrepreneurship, with an aim of promoting self-training and self-awareness of young people.



Finally, there was also the creation of the Territorial Network for Youth Employment. This network is a space for interinstitutional communication, exchange of knowledge and experiences. It coordinates action strategies among entities that intervene in promoting youth employment. The network continues to work with many partners in the local community.

Regarding the community, employers and potential business partners, young people feel that it was essential for them to build networks, establish new contacts and learn about new projects. Everyone benefits from the feedback they received in better understand if their projects were viable to make financial and investment plans. What the beneficiaries found most important was the “ability to create and co-create because we weren’t alone; all was done in a group.” (Noélia Rodriguez). “In general, [the project] created networks” (Catarina); it created “a little community within the community” (Inês) in which there is cooperation instead of competition. The carrying out of the project was made possible due to the cooperation between the partners.

“We could not have made this journey without the partnership between Coolabora, Teatro das Beiras, The City Council, and the University. Coolabora is an intervention co-operative with a strong focus on innovation. It uses participatory methodologies and the construction of solidarity responses. Teatro das Beiras has a recognized role in artistic creation and experience in developing participatory theatre workshops and brought a breath of creativity. The City Council had a relevant role in implementing policies for young people’s settlement and providing the physical space. The University of Beira Interior coordinated the entrepreneurial laboratory, with the Management Department’s involvement and took over creative workshops through the internships and the Faculty of Arts and Letters.”

Graça Rojão, project coordinator (in Rojão G and Silvestre, A., 2006)



São Pedro do Sul

São Pedro do Sul is a municipality in the North Center of Portugal, with an area of 348.69 km². In 1960, the municipality had 24,263 residents, in 2011 only 16,851, and the estimates for 2017 are that the number has gone down to 15,685. In the same period the median age of the population had increased significantly.

São Pedro do Sul is a very rural region without significant industrial investment due to the lack of raw materials, accessibility and interest for the industrial sector. In the absence of financial and technical support to adapt to the EC's new guidelines, agricultural production in the region declined. The lack of investment in tourism and environmental means that young people have no opportunities. This is of course also reflected in the demographic pyramid, showing fewer births and an increasing life expectancy.

The unemployment rate among young people aged 15-24 was 21.5% in 2011, 14.3% for women, and 8.6% for men (INE, 2018). Women are thus considered an important target group.

The Acolher project

The Association Fragas-Aveloso - for Environmental, Scientific, Community, and Cultural Interaction was created in 2013 in the municipality of S. Pedro do Sul. The association works in the fields of Environment and Science, Culture, Economics and Ecology, Feminism and Memory, and Animal Rights. All the members involved in the design of the project "**Acolher**" are researchers in different areas. It was their combined knowledge that resulted in the creation of this project.

The project Acolher sought to create conditions for social inclusion and new skills for innovative activities developed by youths in a situation of vulnerability or unemployment.

This project aimed at promoting an intergenerational dialogue between young people and women in the villages through the prism of acquiring new skills and raising awareness that ecosystems can maintain their natural functions and coexist with leisure, cultural and organized activities. It gave significant contributions to the local economy, enhancing the sustainable development of the region.

“This project was held to bring awareness to the local youth (...) of the importance of the environmental and cultural heritage in their region (...) and to help them in their quest for new opportunities. The idea behind the project was to redirect the thousands of tourists the city receives each year to Ethical and Responsible Tourism (TER) through the formation of young tourism monitors who would have new and better understanding of their territory. (...) Besides, the project also intended to engage young people, women, and older people living in the region, thus creating networks within the local communities”.

Luís Ribeiro, trainer and Fragas’s vice-president

Note: TER has as a principle the organization and participative management of its activities by the local communities, the primary beneficiaries of the initiatives. It implies the valorisation of the environment and the historical and cultural heritage, as well as stimulating practices of participatory democracy.

The project followed a pedagogical strategy inspired by Paulo Freire’s Popular Education. It was considered as an innovative boost to creating the new activity “Guide-mediator of ethical and responsible tourism” for unemployed young people.

The project had three components:

Component 1

- 1.1. Thematic training actions - TER concepts and experiences and inherent topics (food sovereignty, fair trade, community self-management, gender balance, municipal ecological network and impacts, ecosystems);
- 1.2. Training actions for the development of economic activities: budgeting, logistics, etc.

Component 2

- 2.1. Participatory rural diagnosis of the region: problems and potentialities, identification of women participants and member houses;
- 2.2. Cycles of dialogue and training of women participants;
- 2.3. Preparation of the TER Charter, a document that explains its values and practices;

Component 3

- 3.1. Creation of inter-village networks for young mediators and host houses;
- 3.2. Dissemination of itineraries and typification of visits - the creation of a brochure and a site, interviews, reports in the media, and links to other national and international networks;
- 3.3. Pilot experiment to host evaluators.

For many young people, who are unemployed or without prospects, the project was helpful in giving them responsibilities and new skills as part of a great learning and personal growth period. Intergenerational encounters allowed everyone to learn with one another, and the discussion of ideas and concepts on how to improve the current situation in the community helped develop critical thinking. All the interviewed beneficiaries referred to a greater awareness of the ecosystem and greater responsibility they felt for the planet after the training.

Many felt more involved in the community and realized that they had a new purpose in life and a chance to change things in the area. As for advice to change seekers, they believe the changes have to start in the community. They consider it essential to listen to experts' ideas, but especially to the thoughts of those who live in the communities: people must be empowered, be part of the process, and have decision-making power.

Projects must be innovative, calling on young people to participate while not having an overly theoretical component. It drives young people away, as they want more practical experiences. Decision-makers and community actors, on the other hand, believe the projects should have a longer duration or have more editions to integrate more young people. During the project, the local economy was also invigorated because there was a link between local production and cultural dynamics.

The project had an unexpected result: former participants and the current tourism mediators created the **Co-operative of Tourist Animation "AcolheRural,"** with a project aimed at guided tours. The

purpose of this co-operative was to: “develop forms of sustainability for TER mediators, who would welcome the visitors in the villages and to create future jobs in the co-operative for its management and organization, through the activities of dissemination of diversified village tourism programs” (external evaluation by Nunes, 2016, p.14).

The coordination spoke of the good relations built with the public institutions (city council, parish councils, schools), which understood the importance of this project for the region. They also spoke about establishing a network with other local organizations that were instrumental in transmitting the knowledge about traditional crafts with the help of the people in neighbouring villages who educated the young people on the way life was in the villages when there were more people living in them.

Croatia

Shrinking in the national context

The period of socialist modernization in Croatia from 1945 to 1990 was marked by a continuous deceleration of the population growth. In the same period about 40 % of the total population moved from rural areas to urban industrial centres. The international migration to Western European countries, primarily to West Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s, additionally contributed to the depopulation of rural areas. The largest number of inhabitants in Croatia was recorded in the 1991 census, when Croatia had 4.78 million inhabitants, after which the number began to decline significantly.

The violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the Croatian War of Independence in the first half of the 1990s had a severe impact on the long-term migration and demographic trends. Many forcibly displaced persons most notably the ethnic Serbs from areas affected by the war left permanently.

The considerable demographic loss was to some extent compensated by the settlement of forcibly displaced ethnic Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the depopulated regions, however this has not had a sustainable impact on the long-term negative demographic trends in the war affected regions and beyond.

In line with the decades-long trend of a decline in the number of live births (95,560 live births in 1950; 50,182 in 1995), the natural population increase in Croatia became negative in the mid-1990s, and the negative trend has only intensified over the last 25 years. According to the Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2018 only 36,945 children were born in Croatia, whereas the number of deaths was significantly higher; 52,706. The average age of the population in 2018 was 43,4 years. Due to the negative natural increase and the negative migration balance, the total population of Croatia decreased by more than 5% between 2010 and 2020.

In the same period as many as ten urban settlements in continental Croatia lost more than 20% of their population, with the infamous case of the small town Glina, which lost as much as 33% of its population in ten years.

Demographic data and future projections indicate a notable shrinkage of cities and entire regions, especially in the remote parts of continental Croatia. According to current projections, Croatia will lose 8% of its population in the period from 2020 to 2030, with strong regional differences.

While Zagreb as the capital city expects a slight increase in the population size, some regions are expected to lose more than 20% of its inhabitants within the next ten years.

Karlovac

The city of Karlovac is located in the central part of Croatia. It represents an important road and railway hub between the northern part of Croatia and the Adriatic coast. Karlovac is the administrative centre of Karlovac County. In 2020 the population of Karlovac numbered around 50,000 inhabitants. During the three decades of the shrinking trend which started in the early 1990s, Karlovac lost around 35 % of its population.

In addition to the outbreak of war in 1991, the post-communist transformation in Karlovac was affected by the high unemployment rate due to the closure of several factories in the former industrial stronghold. After a slow population decrease in the first decade of the 21st century, the negative demographic trends intensified in the period after Croatia joined the European Union in July 2013.

During 2018, 393 children were born in the Karlovac area, while 742 people died. Due to the severe depopulation of the surrounding rural areas, the traditional pattern of immigration to Karlovac from the nearby villages has nowadays become insufficient to override the negative demographic trends in the city and municipality.

Several new industrial plants contribute to the moderate re-industrialization of the city. The proximity of Zagreb (50 km) compensates for the lack of jobs in Karlovac and boosts the daily inter-city migrations. The future high-speed railroad between Zagreb, Karlovac and Rijeka should be opened by 2030, which will considerably shorten the traveling time between Karlovac and the two cities. It is disputable whether this will bring about a sustainable future prospect for the inhabitants of Karlovac.

In Karlovac, we recognized three major, partially inter-related problems, affecting the local dynamics: (1) high unemployment rates among young people; (2) high rate of NEETs (young persons who are neither in education, nor in training, nor are employed); (3) widespread pessimism about one's own future prospects in their place of residence due to the belief that there is a lack of good opportunities.

It has to be said, that the unemployment rate among the youth in Karlovac decreased significantly during the last 5 years, however this doesn't necessarily mean good news.

Firstly, the drop in the unemployment rate is partially related to emigration at a mass scale and secondly it has only emphasized the problem of NEETs. Young persons who are neither in education, nor

in training, nor are employed are getting increasingly recognized by EU institutions as an especially vulnerable group regarding the risk of long-term unemployment, social marginalisation and poverty. An effort to create sustainable future prospects for persons that can be described as NEETs represents a serious structural challenge. This has also been confirmed by the youth workers and stakeholders we spoke with in Karlovac. They confirmed that the young persons in their late 20s with secondary education and no working experience are in the highest risk of long-term unemployment and social marginalisation.

A perceived lack of future prospects for young people in the city and elsewhere represents a strong push factor convincing many to leave. At the same time, towns and areas facing mass emigration and shrinkage are in many cases perceived as unattractive which significantly decreases their appeal among potential immigrants and hence the number of newcomers. Although the subjective perception can be far from reality, it does however contribute to the shaping of this reality.

Job Club for Youth

The project “Job Club for Youth – Karlovac” and its successor “Job Club for Youth – Karlovac County” explicitly addressed the problem of high unemployment rates among the youth in Karlovac and the surrounding area. Nevertheless, the implementation of the project was closely related to the three previously mentioned problems, i.e. challenges: (1) high unemployment rates among the youth (2) high rates of NEETs and (3) widespread pessimism about one’s own future prospects in the city due to a perceived lack of opportunities.

The projects have been developed and carried out by the Carpe Diem Association from Karlovac. The association for the encouragement and development of creative and social potentials of children, young people and adults was founded in Karlovac in 2005. The focus of the organization is on the one hand on non-formal education and promotion of knowledge and skills for young people, and on the other hand on promoting active citizenship and informing young people on volunteering opportunities as well as encouraging them to exchange experiences or participate in various projects and exchange programs.

Carpe Diem currently co-manages the Grabik Youth Centre in Karlovac, established by the city administration in 2007. The association has a very important role in the fields of youth work and non-formal education in Karlovac due to its continuous activity over the years and the broad scope of their projects. Over the years, Carpe Diem has developed a successful cooperation with the administration bodies when it comes to the design and implementation of its programs.

A particularly interesting activity of Carpe Diem in the context of youth work in shrinking cities is their project called “Job Club for Youth - Karlovac”, originally implemented from 2015 to 2017. Due to its success, the follow-up project named “Job Club for Youth – Karlovac County” was approved for the period between 2018 and 2020. It included six additional small towns in the Karlovac county (Slunj, Vojnić, Ogulin, Duga Resa, Josipdol and Ozalj). These settlements have been affected by shrinkage for decades due to the metropolitanisation process and the constant out-migration of young people.

The project “**Job Club for Youth - Karlovac**” as well as the project “Job Club for Youth - Karlovac County” were financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund program which represents a major financial instrument for supporting employment in the member states of the European Union as well as promoting the economic and social cohesion. Both projects were implemented in partnership with the City of Karlovac and the Croatian Employment Service (HZZ). The partnership was extended through cooperation with the Croatian Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Crafts of Karlovac County.

The project idea was developed with the aim of reducing the number of unemployed youths. The specific goal of both projects was to develop services for unemployed young people through which they would acquire relevant skills to increase their chances for employment. The initially foreseen goals of the project were related to the provision of knowledge and skills needed for employment by encouraging the proactivity of young people and by boosting their confidence when it comes to the job search.

By participating in the three-week-long training, participants aged 18 to 29 learned, among other things, how to write a CV and a cover letter, where and how to look for job advertisements, how to contact employers, how to behave at a job interview and how to make a career plan. Apart from boosting their ability to find a job, one of the important parts of the project was to establish the non-formal online networking space for young unemployed people and employers in Karlovac county (online platform).

The project “Job Club for Youth” represents not only a youth work project in a shrinking city but is also an example of good practice when it comes to youth work in a shrinking city. Considering the question of how the project was successful in solving the previously mentioned problems and challenges, the conducted interviews and additional feedback provided by the project manager Branimira Penić offer some interesting insights. Among 140 participants, around 50% of them found a job within a year after the end of the project. This can be considered a success, especially in the face of significant changes in the local environment during the implementation of the project.

Back in 2015, the whole project was developed with the intention of fostering the integration of young people into the job market as well as to decrease the high unemployment rates among the youth. However, the situation in Karlovac and the surrounding area has changed significantly in only a few years, due to the mass scale emigration of young people to Germany and other EU countries. Among those who stayed there were many NEETs and the so-called Hard-to-Reach-Learners.

The challenge of finding and motivating the unemployed individuals who have not been registered by the Croatian Employment Service to take a part in the training proved to be much harder than originally expected. The considerable differences between the participants made the facilitation of the trainings even more challenging. However, the facilitators adapted to all the challenges during the implementation of the project. The participants were found through a variety of channels ranging from advertisement on social media up to a direct approach in pubs. When it comes to the implementation of the program, more time was spent on individual work than previously foreseen.

Some changes were made regarding the content of the training. Instead of time management for instance, which turned out to be a marginal issue for unemployed youth, more time was dedicated to the specific needs as recognised by the participants, for instance the creation of a career plan, which takes into consideration the personal goals and competences that a participant would like to achieve. An important part of the training was identifying people and organisations which could help in achieving the participants' goals. This process removed the focus from the problem (unemployment) and shifted it onto the solution (activities which can be made).

The number of candidates who have so far been successful in their job search is an important but certainly not the only element responsible for the success of the project. It is important to emphasize the fact that the project included many young participants who previously had no experience with activities in the field of youth work and non-formal education.

Several interviewees, especially the young men with secondary education, have stated that they never thought the education project would be so interesting. Many of their friends were however reluctant to join.

Many of those who took part in the training remained active and got involved in other programs related to youth work and non-formal education. Several interviewees described an increased satisfaction with their life in Karlovac, despite the fact that they hadn't found a job yet.

The interviews also confirmed that the economic prospect is only one of the factors in someone's decision whether to leave or to stay. In the meantime, only 4 out of 140 participants have left Croatia. At the same time, many of the participants stated that they had discovered new prospects in Karlovac and said that the participation in the program increased their readiness to stay in Karlovac instead of moving somewhere else.

Sisak

The city of Sisak is located in the central part of Croatia and it is the administrative centre of Sisak-Moslavina county. Sisak had 47,768 citizens according to the last census from 2011. The city and the whole county have been facing negative demographic trends for decades. The Croatian War of Independence which took place in the first part of 1990s had a very negative impact on the town's development. In the post-war period and in the 2000s, the city had gradually gotten deindustrialized and many of the old factories, especially in the steel industry, closed down and left many people jobless.

These factors, together with the close proximity to Zagreb, have led many people and especially the younger generations to find a job elsewhere or to move out of Sisak. Young people mostly go to Zagreb or some other bigger city to study since Sisak offers only one master program – the one in metallurgy.

For many years, Sisak was faced with a serious lack of any content or organized programs for young people, youth-led sports facilities and youth spaces, which along with the collapse of the industry and depopulation has caused a high decline in the quality of life of the Sisak youth.

The extended negative consequences of the world economic crisis from 2008 and the liberalization of the EU job market for Croatian citizens after 2013 has intensified the negative demographic trends. According to the estimation of the Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, the city of Sisak lost 12.6% of its population between 2008 and 2018. This information becomes even more dramatic in light of the estimate that Sisak-Moslavina county lost as much as 17.3% of its population in the same period.

The dynamics of negative demographic trends in the Sisak-Moslavina county are indicative for most regions in the continental part of Croatia. These counties face the problem of high emigration rates including emigration to other counties, low natural increase, low vital index, faster population aging and, consequently, a decline in the population.

Residents of these counties mostly leave the country or go to other counties (mostly the city of Zagreb and coastal counties) due to the economic constraints in their own county. The long-term negative trend will most probably last in the future as well. Projections of future population trends indicate the probability of severe population decrease in Sisak and Sisak-Moslavina county in the upcoming decade. The county is expected to lose as much as 21.7 % of its population between 2020 and 2030.

Youth Club SKWHAT

The Sisak civil society is moderate in size but one program stood out from the first moment we started to investigate it. The youth club **SKWHAT**, led by the youth organizations from all over the city seemed as the perfect example of youth work in a shrinking environment. The Coordination of Sisak Youth Associations (KUMS) operates in the common space of the SKWHAT Youth Club, which exists since June 2005. They pay special attention to young people by respecting and implementing ideas created through the learning process, advocating the determination to achieve one's goals and communicating with young people from the community.

The PRONI Centre for Social Learning also operates within the SKWHAT Youth Club and is largely responsible for launching the idea and opening the Youth Club at its current address back in 2005/2006, when they taught the volunteers and members of the Youth Club SKWHAT the work they are now doing through the system of non-formal education. Its engagement has greatly influenced the quality of work of KUMS and the Youth Club itself, providing KUMS with the necessary knowledge to manage the Youth Club, educate their volunteers and members, develop new project ideas as well as providing them with full organizational and technical support. PRONI Centre in the youth club SKWHAT has opened an Info Centre for Youth Sisak, which greatly complements the program of the Club.

Objectives of the SKWHAT Youth Club:

- Creating a positive environment for action and strengthening the role of young people in society through the active involvement of young people in community activities;
- Activating and involving young people in organizing their free time, encouraging, developing creativity and work habits;

- Popularization of art (music, literature, multimedia, theatre, art etc.) and its development through the organization of cultural activities;
- Popularization and development of volunteering.
- Development of educational programs of the non-formal education system.
- Gathering and organizing individuals and associations that work with and for young people in a unique and equipped facility (Youth Club) in order to implement their programs and projects through teamwork;
- Offering the possibility to young people to independently shape the cultural life of their community;
- Creating a healthy living environment.

In the beginning, everything was done on a voluntary basis, after which the community recognized the efforts of the few enthusiasts that were involved and therefore donated many different materials necessary for the revitalization of the Youth Club through local stores.

They use a direct approach to youth as a specific target group, unlike some other organizations that work with young people among other target groups. In the beginning, they knew little about youth work as such, no one had introduced them to the concept and they had to learn through different education programs and seminars in other countries about proper youth work and the ways to ensure institutional support for youth workers. They consider youth work as “giving the youth free space to implement their ideas, as an alternative to spending time in bars”. They never wanted SKWHAT to be simply a “platform for fun” but aspired to have fun content financed through funds for culture and youth. SKWHAT never wanted to be a commercialized place but wanted to give the youth a chance to express their interests through music.

“We don’t want to impose anything on young people, our role here is that of basic control mechanisms”, they claim.

SKWHAT helped to define the city youth policies with a positive influence. They organised the youth club, the city youth council, defined the volunteering policies and the city developed a youth program

with stable funding for youth organizations. SKWHAT also proved to be a training ground for non-formal learning through which young people can acquire knowledge, learn how to develop programs, how to write projects and how to accept responsibility.

Volunteers are one of the greatest reasons why the community is supportive of SKWHAT. They want to break the stereotypes of culture programs as being places that young people use to get drunk and party but want to provide the community with a wider picture.

Regarding the influence on the city policies, they were part of one KA3 Erasmus project, through which they participated in different working groups which discussed and, in the end, made the city youth program in 2016.

The club's biggest success was to show the community that there are young people who are interested in alternative culture and non-formal programs, which has led them to become recognized as an important factor in the local youth policy development.

In addition, they revitalized the city space through their activities, introduced a gathering place for young people where they had the opportunity to organize their activities, gain experience, knowledge, test their talents and fulfil their potential.



Lessons learned

During our project, we observed two different patterns of shrinking. The process of shrinking in the majority of the observed cities is characterized by deindustrialisation, negative migration and aging of the remaining population. These characteristics could be described as a classic pattern of shrinking which can be recognized in the waste number of small and middle-sized cities across the European continent.

However, shrinking can also affect cities which turned into utterly popular destinations for tourists. This pattern of shrinking is characterised by the emigration of the city-population to the suburbs due to the increased living costs in the city. Concerning the cities, we focused on in our project, this pattern of shrinking can be recognized foremost in Granada, while Cadiz represents a combination of both patterns.

In the face of a growing number of visitors in many European cities, it is important to bear in mind that tourism may turn into a serious challenge for the social sustainability of a city, despite the growth of the local economy boosted by tourism.

However, the previously described classic pattern of shrinking seems to be a far more dangerous challenge for the sustainable future of

shrinking cities. In the eight shrinking cities from this project, we recognized a broad set of youth-work practices which can contribute to the social sustainability of a shrinking city. The practices of youth-work do not directly affect the demographic developments, but rather build up capacities and create opportunities for young people. Interestingly, most of the interviewees did not associate their work with the notion of shrinking cities but rather with one of the consequences produced by shrinking.

The consequences of shrinkage may vary, therefore, it is important to pay attention to the local context. It is important to recognize the major challenges in a certain context before starting to develop the project idea.

A very successful project in a certain context doesn't necessarily work well in another context. However, it was confirmed once again that a realistic project plan, a sustainable financial frame and competent project facilitators represent three significant prerequisites for a successful implementation of any project.

In the following chapter, we tried to sum up the recommendations which should help the youth-workers to conceptualize and implement a project in their own (shrinking) environment.

Recommendations

Before starting to develop a project idea, it is important to understand the local context as well as the needs and wishes of the local community. Societies and local communities are changing at a rapid pace, while the popular trends in the youth culture change even more quickly. Likewise, the relevance of specific issues and challenges in a certain local community are changing fast as well.

For instance, while the problem of a generally high unemployment rate among the youth in the Croatian city Karlovac marked the first half of the 2010s, only a few years later the new challenge was to motivate young people with lower education and lack of skills to take a proactive role in the increasingly competitive and demanding job market.

Therefore, it is essential to analyse the local context, to recognize the current trends and to anticipate future challenges at a very early stage of the project development. It is advisable to use the information from different sources to comprehend the current trends and to find out what other youth projects focusing on a similar subject have achieved so far.

It is important to bear in mind that the project should be developed according to the needs of the project beneficiaries. Therefore, it is important to ask potential beneficiaries for their opinion. It is advisable to check the needs, expectations, and preferences of local the youth regarding content, methods, and communication channels. Better insight into needs and preferences of the potential beneficiaries can be achieved in different ways, for instance through a discussion with a focus group or by some other more appealing method.

It is good to rely on the non-formal methods in youth work from the very beginning. Schooling and lecturing of young people can lead to a fast rejection of a certain initiative regardless of the quality of the project idea.

It is recommendable to provide a space for the youth to discuss potential activities, create a program or even conceptualize a draft of the future project. The quality of the provided feedback may vary but at least some impulses should be used to create a realistic project plan focused on the relevant problem and achievable goals.

It is essential to secure a sustainable time frame and funding for the implementation of the project during the development of the draft. Thereby it makes sense to leave some space in the project calendar for necessary modifications during the implementation. It is hard to anticipate all possible problems and estimate the exact needs of the beneficiaries in advance. Therefore, it is good for instance to envisage a longer time scope for the implementation process than you had in mind originally.

If the project idea doesn't fit the frame of a certain call for funding, one of the options is to divide a foreseen project concept into obligatory and optional activities that may be implemented in case of securing additional funding through some other application.

It makes sense to clarify all open questions with the representatives of the National Agency for the implementation of the Erasmus+ program or to contact other responsible institutions for the implementation of the EU financial programs. The representatives of these institutions can provide a comment on the project draft and thereby significantly improve the quality of the application.

Funding opportunities in many cases require the establishment of a project consortium that would consist of several partner organisations from different countries. Since the quality of the project implementation significantly depends on the contribution of the partners, it is important to think about potential partners from an early stage of the project development and to include them into the negotiations about the project design and foreseen activities.

It is of crucial importance to create a strong team by providing an appropriate role to every team member according to their practical skills, academic knowledge, experience and interests.

Visualisation of the aforementioned questions and answers by use of digital bard can be useful for the division of roles and responsibilities within a team at an early stage of the project development. Discussing these questions before the project application is finalized will enable you to introduce necessary changes in the application before submitting.

Once the project starts, it is important to secure good project visibility. It is advisable to use various communication channels not only towards the general audience but also towards the potential project beneficiaries, especially while targeting young people with fewer opportunities and the so called Hard-to-Reach-Learners who might show their reluctance in joining any form of organized activity.

Therefore, it makes sense to include methods of street youth work or digital communication channels which are popular among potential beneficiaries. Personal participation in the youth-work project increases the readiness of the person to participate in some later activities.

There is a fair chance that some of the participants will be able to convince some of their friends and acquaintances to join them at a later stage. Therefore, it is advisable to inform the beneficiaries about the participation possibilities within and beyond your project. What might seem obvious and well-known to a youth-worker could be an important discovery for a first-time user.

For instance, the information about the possibility of travelling abroad as well as personal participation in international gatherings proved to be sources of very powerful motivation for many young participants to get involved in local activities which might have appeared rather unattractive to them at an early stage of the project.

Although the project facilitators might be reluctant to approach local authorities and public institutions and inform them about their project, informing the local stakeholders about the project might bring considerable advantages to the project implementation and significantly determine the project outcome. Local institutions can help in overcoming expected as well as unexpected challenges during the project implementation.

For instance, local institutions can provide a working space and technical tools for the implementation of project activities, in many cases free of charge. Since there are usually less opportunities for young people in shrinking cities, many stakeholders and community members might be strongly in favour of the project. Using local resources during the project implementation can be beneficial not only for its budget but also for its visibility and prestige. For instance, there are many cases when project managers were able to secure

all the prerequisites for successful project implementation but for some reason were not able to gather enough participants for their activities. In that situation, local partners can help a project manager to reach the foreseen project beneficiaries and to motivate them to take part in the project activities.

For instance, announcing the project activities through a local sports club or locally popular media outlet can result in the overcoming of the initial reluctance by some of the potential beneficiaries. Achieving social impact in the community in many cases exceeds the duration of the project. Therefore, it is especially important to secure the sustainability of the project results after the end of the project, for instance by applying for additional funding or through creation of a new project based on the outcomes of the current project. Securing financial support for a sustainable implementation after the end of the project is a challenge. A lack of financial support means a burden for the project's sustainable performance, thus minimising the sustainable impact of the project. Therefore, it is important to reconsider the next steps and potential funding options in the early stages of the implementation process.

Supporting the strategy

We may describe the strategy applied to projects and programmes as a direction or course of action that contributes to the project's success in its environment. The projects analysed in the previous topics were integrated into a local strategy and planned since their inception.

Implementing successful projects requires planning a strategy and finding innovative means of problem-solving in a specific geographic area. This guide will provide quick steps for designing and implementing a project or strategy in your city or region.

Steps in selecting the right strategy

Do you have an idea, or are you planning a project in youth work to tackle the causes of shrinkage in European cities? Do you know exactly what the problem is and what its effects are? How do you plan to engage the beneficiaries and stakeholders in your solution? Is it going to be sustainable? Is it going to produce a positive change?

Does it need a focus? We propose a pathway to answer these questions before starting to implement a new project.

The proposed approach is a mixture of the steps necessary to build the Business Model Canvas, together with tools such as the Problem Tree and the Theory of Change, to assess the proposed intervention's social impact. It aims to produce a change in society with some degree of complexity, engaging multiple stakeholders in the execution and with the expected duration of one or more years.

Please note that each step is an increment of your strategy - after completing each one, we recommend that you review and adapt the information produced in the previous steps.

You do not need a specific idea for a project beforehand. In the first step (1), you will have the opportunity to brainstorm about your community and possible interventions.

Most of the tasks are best performed with a team of different social, business, and scientific backgrounds. We recommend a group with a maximum of eight people.

Step 1 – Identify the challenge

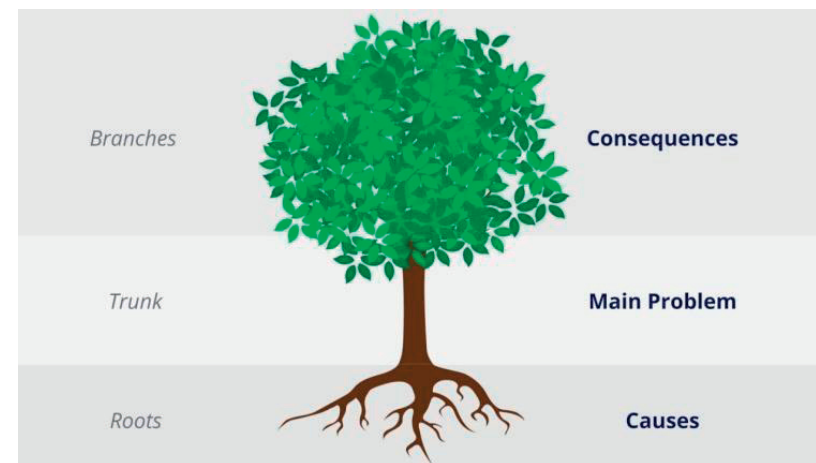
Step 1.1 - Problem Tree

We recommend using the «Problem Tree» method to set a central problem and brainstorm on the causes and effects of that problem. Brainstorming and mapping out the anatomy of cause and effect in a mind map will help you find solutions.

Start by brainstorming five problems in your community or region and assess if you have the resources to tackle those situations. Then narrow down your solution to one issue – the «core problem» and write it on a post-it in the centre of a blank canvas (represented by a tree trunk).

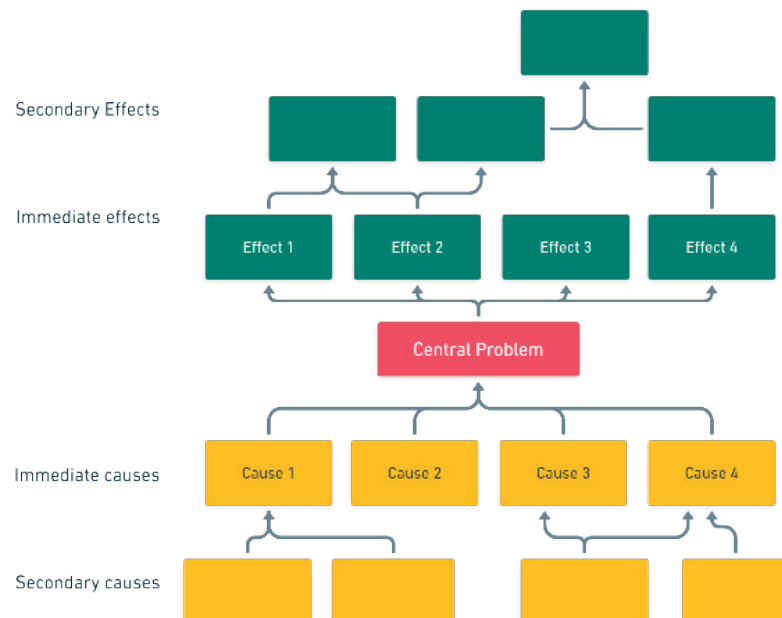
Below the core problem, you will write down the causes of the problem (roots of the tree). The causes are usually written on post-its in the negative form (e.g., lack of resources, not enough access). The causes of a problem can also have sub-causes, allowing you to hierarchically organise them.

Above the central problem, you will write down the effects (the leaves). After selecting the causes and sub-causes, you will brainstorm about the direct and indirect impacts of the problem and register them for each cause. The effects can concern the region, community, or specific stakeholders.



Source: <https://noblemissions.org.ng/training/>

Please focus on present issues and check if they can be verified or backed up with data and facts for both causes and effects. If this is performed in a group setting, choose a moderator to guide the conversation, and take time to allow people to explain their feelings and reasoning, recording their ideas and points that come up in a separate flipchart.



At the end of this step, you will have a flipchart filled with ideas on causes and effects. At this point, you may want to recheck if the central problem needs to be adjusted or changed based on the mapped information. Please mark the immediate and secondary causes that you and your team want to address with the project.

Step 1.2 - Solution Tree

After completing the problem tree, we also recommend the «Solution Tree» method to explore the objectives of the project, allowing possible solutions and alternatives to a specific problem to be found and generating alternative and possible actions that can improve and structure a project.

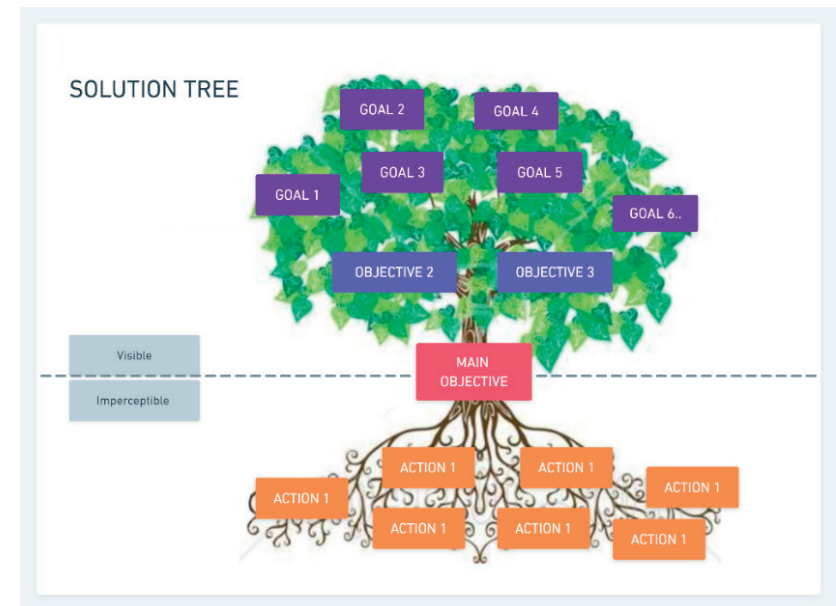
The tree divides into two areas, a lower area representing the roots of the tree – the things that are imperceptible and difficult to see by the general population – and the upper area representing things that are perceptible and visible.

First, you should define your project's goals and write them down in the crown of the tree – what do I want to do and what problem (from the problem tree) do I want to tackle and fix?

The second step is to write down three objectives for your project and define one as the main objective, the primary focus or vision for your project. The main objective is part of the tree's trunk, and the other two are part of the lowest main branches of the tree, right between the main objective and the goals. The objectives must be specific and feasible within the timeframe of a project.

The next step is to define the actions required to make the selected goals possible - these are the roots of the tree and will contribute to the objectives.

The method is essential to brainstorm on different courses of action for your project. Your solution tree must generate alternatives and actions to improve and solve a specific problem.



Step 2 - Identify your resources

To implement an idea and execute a project, you need all the available resources to solve the identified problems.

Brainstorm on all the resources that come to your mind and isolate those relevant to tackling the problems identified in the previous steps.

The resources can be:

- People (you, your team, your organisation, volunteers, etc.) and their skills or competencies (academic or professional background, training, knowledge, experience, etc.);
- Intellectual resources (books, methods, toolkits, strategies, etc.);
- Materials, tools, and equipment;
- Contacts, connections, and partnerships (with local authorities, organisations, experts, media, networks, within the community, etc.);
- Lines of financing or programmes, donors, and social investors.

Step 3 - Define your intervention

Now that you have identified your resources, please revisit and review the selected causes for the core problem and define the type of intervention by answering the following questions as concisely as possible: What are your solutions and your intervention's format? Is it a workshop, a service, a product, or something else? What is the area of intervention (a neighbourhood, community, school, city, region)?

Tips: If you are designing a new project, we recommend keeping both the format and area of intervention as small and specific as possible. You are on a mission to tackle specific causes and produce positive social changes, even if the change is small. Save the world one step at a time – use the available resources with efficiency and efficacy and focus your intervention on smaller areas and a limited number of causes for your core problem.

Step 4 - Knowing the settings

Before you plan and implement your project, you should analyse the community and find your stakeholders.

Answer the following questions:

- What are your beneficiaries? - Who is going to benefit from your intervention and use your services?
- Who are your clients and funders? – Who is going to pay for the intervention and services?
- Who are your stakeholders? – (In your area of intervention)
- Who are your internal stakeholders (employees, managers, owners)? How will they benefit from the intervention?
- Which other stakeholders can be interested in your project (customers, suppliers, government, NGOs, informal groups, schools, universities, businesses, creditors, shareholders, society, etc.)?

Step 5 – Define the value of your proposition

- Here, you will define how your intervention (from step 3) provides value to your main stakeholders (step 4) – with a focus on beneficiaries, clients, funders, and key partners – by contributing to solving the problems by reducing their causes and effects (step 1). Answer the following questions:
- How does your solution or service solve problems and improve on the situations?
- What value does your solution or service bring to your beneficiaries, clients, and funders?
- How is it different from other offers?

Note: «Other offers» may not necessarily refer only to solutions and services such as your intervention, but also to activities that offer similar social advantages (including services or goods) that have direct or indirect relevance to your beneficiaries or clients. For example, a summer camp may use the same time that beneficiaries might use for school activities, scout organisations, social networks, and online games;

Step 6 – Define your channels and key-partners

Channels are the means through which your solution reaches your stakeholders (step 4) and provides them value (step 5).

Answer: How are you going to deliver your value proposition to your stakeholders?

List all the channels you will use – it can be a web application, emails, letters, a mural, a social intervention team in the streets, a network of organisations, a vehicle, advertisement, etc.

After defining the channels, you should determine who your key partners are going to be.

Key partners are entities that you cooperate with to support the intervention and find a mutual benefit. Partners are usually external from your organisations or project and are not your direct beneficiaries or clients. This refers to relationships that you will have with other public and private organisations, businesses or social partners, manufacturers, and suppliers. Your key partners may provide you with resources to improve your intervention's reach or reduce the costs of implementing key activities.

Step 7 – Sustainability

One key aspect of your intervention is assessing your project's sustainability. Your intervention should have enough resources and support to sustain the desired social change activities in a specific timeframe and replicate it in other places.

One factor in creating a sustainable project is identifying the costs of sustaining the key activities and seeking out income to cover such expenses.

Define the key activities: Start by listing all the activities that are necessary to conduct the proposed intervention (step 3) and deliver the value proposition (step 5) where you will use some of the available resources (step 2) and partnerships (step 7). By necessary activities, we refer to those that will compromise the proposed intervention if they are not (correctly) implemented.

Define the costs: Based on the key activities and available and necessary resources, calculate the costs of running the key activities and list the nature of the costs (human resources, internet, laptop, rent, accountant, storage, books, materials, office, etc.). Some activities might require you to plan an investment (buying equipment, renting a space, buying inventory, etc.). You can also create a worst-case and a best-case scenario.

Expected income: After assessing the cost of your intervention, you should assess your income sources to check if you can sustain the project. Income sources might include clients of services or products, specific lines of financing, donors, the government, volunteers, rents, fundraising, etc. Ways of supporting your project by means of reducing its costs might also be considered income, such as volunteers' contributions.

Step 8 – Assessing Impact

You might have the best idea ever, but you need to show how your project will produce positive social change.

For this purpose, you need to implement impact assessment models that will allow you to document this change; this is crucial if you want to appeal to organisations investing in social projects and paying for impact.

At this point, you know that there is a need for a positive change in a specific setting or context. So, what do you have to do to achieve this change? How do you measure it?

Step 8.1 – Define the desired impact

Start by identifying one to three long term goals to which your project will contribute. These should relate to the core problem and causes from step 1 and should not be feasible for the project alone to achieve in the next few years.

Examples: Teenagers of city X participate actively in their community life; Prevention and reduction of ocean pollution by involving the community in recycling and reducing the consumption of plastic;

Increase the sense of community for the resolution of common problems connected to discrimination; Promote multisectoral co-operation for reducing the city unemployment rate.

These are long term goals, and the implementation of concrete policies and multisectoral programs would contribute to them but not achieve them entirely in less than five years. These goals are the desired impact of your project.

Tip: If you are looking for inspiration for your project, the seventeen SDG priorities can be a good starting point. Although these SDGs are aimed at governments and regions, you may adapt them to suit your organisation's intervention level or project.

All United Nations member states adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. They are urgent calls to introduce measures and changes in every country.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Step 8.2 - Theory of change – Social Value Chain Matrix

The Social Value Chain Matrix is a logical method for recording the process of change. In a more straightforward form, it is a table with five columns: 1. Resources; 2. Activities; 3. Outputs; 4. Outcomes; 5. Impact;

You can draw the table on a flipchart or whiteboard and fill it with post-its that you can move around as needed.

All the columns are directly relatable in sequence to this logical model of change. Resources are required and used to implement activities. The activities will have an immediate result (output) for the different stakeholders and cause a short-term impact or change.

If you continue to produce results, they will influence the stakeholders in the long term or even definitely. These outcomes are the long-term results that your project will deliver to the stakeholders and contribute to the desired impact. Specific goals for change, such as changes in the stakeholders' behaviour, come about as outcomes.

To use the Social Value Chain Matrix, we recommend beginning with the fifth column, «Impact»: write here the long-term goals you have defined in the previous step 8.2. Here you will describe the impacts to which your intervention will contribute as a vision for the possible change that is not immediately feasible.

Next, move to the first column, «Resources»: here, you will write down the key resources you wrote down in step 2, including resources that are not currently available but are required by the proposed intervention.

In the second column, «Activities», you register the key activities you listed in step 7. These activities are where you will use the resources you indicated in the 1st column, «Resources». At this point, update the first column with the required resources if something is missing.

The third column concerns the «Outputs»: please brainstorm about the expected immediate results of your activities as related to each stakeholder (beneficiaries, the community, the environment, etc.). It can be an experience, a reflection, or an insight that they should obtain from taking part in your activities.

In the fourth column, «Outcomes», you will brainstorm about long term goals that you may reach if you continue to produce the outputs defined in the third column.

These goals should also be related to the desired impact in the fifth column, and you may decide to connect and group them with the SDGs. A social project may not start producing outcomes in a period of less than a year.

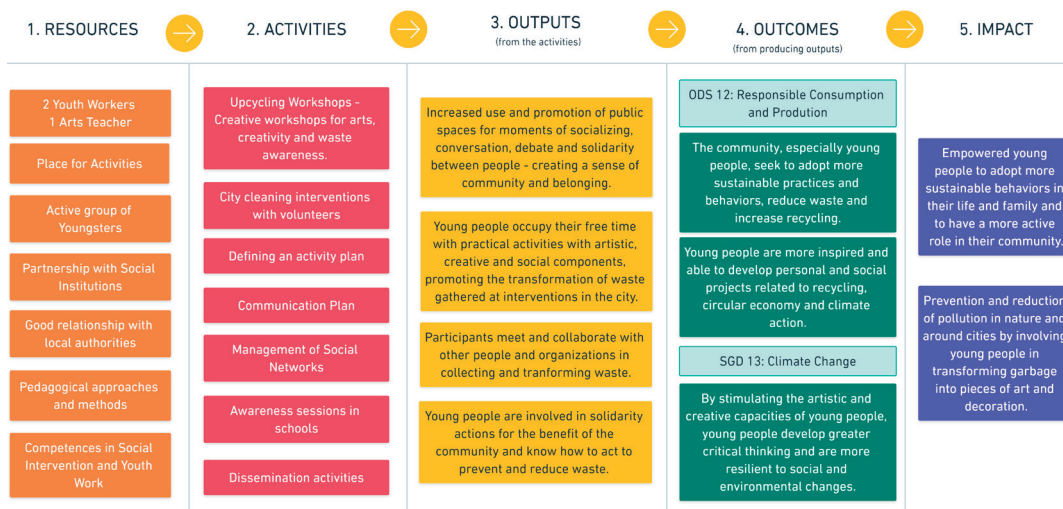
To measure the changes across the project's development, you will need to define indicators. An indicator must be specific, observable, and measurable; any characteristic can be used to show changes or progress an intervention is making toward achieving a specific outcome.

The indicator should be measurable, focused, clear, and specific. For each indicator, you should define the data collection instruments (the means you will use to measure an indicator – for example, surveys, assessments, scales, observation, etc.). For this purpose, the Social Value Chain Matrix is usually used together with the Log Frame – a four column matrix to facilitate the measurement of impact by summarizing the strategy (from the Social Value Chain Matrix), indicators, sources of verification and risks/assumptions.

You can define indicators for most of the Social Value Chain Matrix elements – the activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. However, it would help if you focused on defining indicators for the measurement of outputs and outcomes.

Figure X shows a sample Social Value Chain Matrix for an intervention that includes creative workshops for raising awareness against waste and garbage in the city.

THEORY OF CHANGE - SOCIAL VALUE CHAIN MATRIX (EXAMPLE)



Resources for youth work activities and projects

1. Manual «Have Your Say! – Manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life», 2015, Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN 978-92-871-8165-7. Topics: Youth Participation, Democracy, Youth policies.
2. Manual «Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People», 2012, Council of Europe Publishing ISBN 978-92-871-7320-1. Topics: Human Rights Education, Discrimination and Intolerance, Democracy, Children, Youth Participation, Gender, Migration, Peace and Violence, Poverty, Religion and Belief and others.
3. Manual «Bookmarks – A manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education», 2016, Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN 978-92-871-8201-2. Topics: Hate Speech, Racism and Discrimination, Freedom of expression, Private life and safety, Democracy and participation, Human Rights Education.

4. Manual «Manual for facilitators in non-formal education», 2009, Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN 978-92-871-6602-9.
Topics: Youth Work, Non-Formal Education, Facilitation.
5. Manual «Mirrors – Manual on Combating antigypsyism through human rights education», 2015, Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN: 978-92-871-8086-5.
Topics: Racism and Discrimination, Stereotypes, Human Rights Education.
6. Manual «We Can! – Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives», 2017, Council of Europe Publishing, ISBN: 978-92-871-8445-0.
Topics: Hate Speech, Racism and Discrimination, Freedom of Expression, Life Stories, Private life and safety, Democracy and Participation, Human Rights Education.
7. Manual «Inclusion A to Z – A compass to international Inclusion projects», 2014, SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion Resource Centre.
Topics: Social exclusion and inclusion, Social Project Management, Strategic Planning.
8. Toolkit «[Training Toolkit for Youth Workers – Enabling Youth Workers and Educators to Deliver Digital Skills Enhancements Workshops for Young People](#)», 2019, Skill It for Youth – Integrating Digital and Future Skills into Youth Work <https://digipathways.io/>
Topics: Digital Youth Work, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Information and Media Literacy
9. Toolkit «[Spread Ability – a collection of non-formal learning activities for youth work with young people with special needs](#)», 2020, <https://www.youthforequality.sk/>
Topics: Inclusive Youth Work, Disabilities, Inclusion and Integration, Non-Formal Education
10. Toolkit «Facilitator Handbook #1 - Steps toward Action – Empowerment for self-responsible initiative» 2016, MitOst Editions, ISBN 978-3-944012-26-1 <http://competendo.net/>
Topics: Facilitation, Civic Engagement, Motivation, Empowerment, Support

11. Toolkit «Facilitator Handbook #2 – Holistic Learning – Planning Experiential, Inspirational and Participatory Learning Processes» 2016, MitOst Editions, ISBN 978-3-944012-31-5, <http://competendo.net>

Topics: Learning, Empowerment, Facilitation, Session Planning.

12. Toolkit «Facilitator Handbook #3 – The Everyday Beyond – European, International and Global Dimensions of Learning Processes» 2017, MitOst Editions, ISBN 978-3-944012-33-9 <http://competendo.net>

Topics: European Identity, Citizenship, Competences, Sustainability.

13. Toolkit «Facilitator Handbook #4 – Creativity – Building Connections, Drawing Inspirations & Exploring Opportunities as Individuals & Groups» 2017, MitOst Editions, <http://competendo.net>

Topics: Creativity, Empowerment, Learning Processes, Creative Facilitation.

Other resources for good practice in youth work

«International Journal of Open Youth Work – Theory and Practice», European Research Network of Open Youth Work, <https://www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/the-international-journal-of-open-youth-work/>

- Issue 1 2017, ISSN 2514-1821
- Issue 2 2018, ISSN: 2514-1813
- Issue 3 2019, ISSN: 2514-1813

Logbook, POYWE, <https://magazine.poywe.org/> – a biannual magazine about professional open youth work in Europe. It explores the diverse realities of youth work and tells stories about relevant topics for the field – <https://magazine.poywe.org/>

Council of Europe's database of stories, tools, good practice on youth work, non-formal education and youth policy: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/good-practices>

Youth Participation Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy, 2014, Finnish Youth Research Network and Finnish Youth Research Society Internet publications 69, ISBN 978-952-5994-45-2
http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/images/julkaisuja/youthparticipation_goodpractices.pdf

Conclusion

Shrinkage represents one of the major challenges in the 21st century Europe. The inhabitants and authorities of many cities and regions across the continent are already facing a shrinkage to a dramatic extent. The bad news is that once the shrinkage has started, it is hard to stop it without significant and very expensive interventions. A decisive investment in the local infrastructure or an acquisition of tax benefits for entrepreneurs may create new jobs and thus contribute to the revitalisation of the local economy. However, even when the investments are assured, there is no guarantee for long-term social sustainability of a shrinking city.

City shrinkage has a negative impact on local communities in different ways, including facing the consequences of their poor reputation once the shrinkage starts to shape the perception of the city. Only a rare kind of migrants will purposely look for their luck in places which are known for their structural difficulties.

At the same time, many young people from shrinking cities are motivated to leave for other destinations which they consider more promising or at least less depressive than their current environment. However, the presented examples of youth work illustrate how to address the challenges related to shrinkage and thus contribute to the social sustainability of shrinking cities.

Youth work can build up capacities and create opportunities for young people and help them face personal and social challenges in their environment. The practice of youth work presented in this toolkit illustrates various possibilities to do something despite the unfavourable circumstances. As the presented cases illustrate, youth work can be a strong tool of social inclusion for young people and thus foster their readiness to take an active role in the local community.

Youth work can be a powerful mechanism of achieving a sustainable future perspective for the local community. It can help young people not only to gain the necessary social skills but also to better understand the opportunities in their local environment. Likewise, youth work can play an important role in the social integration of newcomers.

We hope that our toolkit will find its way to the people involved in youth work. Moreover, we hope that the ideas contained in this toolkit will be useful for their future work.

Youth work alone can hardly turn the negative demographic trends in a shrinking city, but combined with other policies and practices, it can provide a contribution to the sustainable future of the (shrinking) cities.

This publication was realized under the frame of the Erasmus+ KA2 project “Strengthening the role of youth-work in contesting dynamics of shrinking cities” which was implemented in the cooperation of following partner organizations:





**strengthening
youth work
in shrinking cities**

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