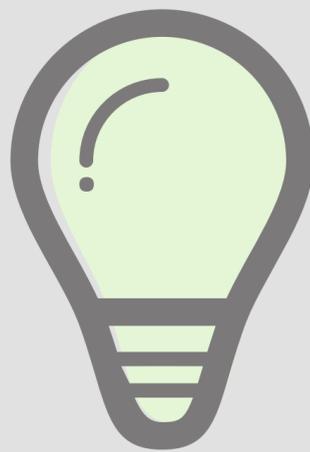
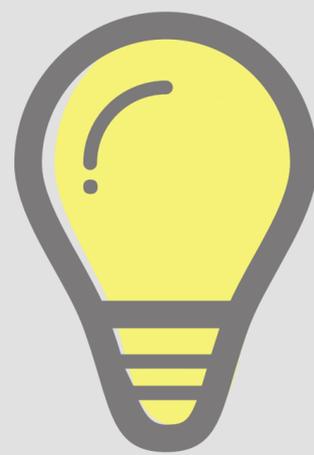
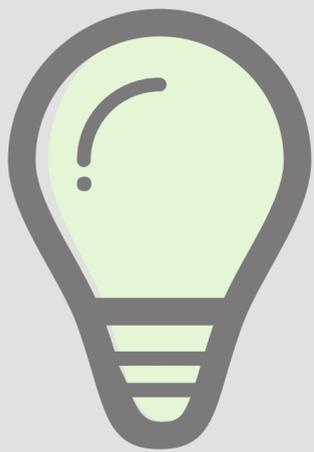


ERASMUS +

RURAL INNOVATORS

BOOKLET



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INTRODUCTION

The European Commission states that rural areas are diverse and include many important regions. However, some rural areas, and in particular those which are the most remote, depopulated or dependent on agriculture, face **particular challenges** as regards growth, jobs and sustainability in the coming years.

These include:

- *lower levels of income,*
- *an unfavourable demographic situation,*
- *lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates,*
- *a slower development of the tertiary sector,*
- *weaknesses in skills and human capital,*
- *a lack of opportunities for women and young people,*
- *a lack of necessary skills in parts of the agricultural sector and food processing industry.* <http://ec.europa.eu/>

Young people in these rural and isolated areas often face a series of **challenges**:

- *fewer opportunities for formal and non-formal education: specialised schools and universities as well as youth NGOs are often non-existent,*
- *employment: there is a small jobs market and high unemployment rate among youngsters,*
- *leisure time activities: few or no cultural activities such as theatre, cinema, concerts,*
- *transport and mobility: public transport is often non-existent or very scarce, lack of information about youth-related issues, opportunities and initiatives,*
- *healthcare: the nearest hospital and specialised doctors are far away, frequent alcohol and smoking problems among youngsters due to boredom and lack of opportunities, the local bar is often the only meeting point in the village,*
- *infrastructural problems: new technologies are lagging behind or non-existent, no internet in some areas, less and more expensive access.*

Nevertheless, the countryside also has its **strengths and opportunities**: close social network to support youngsters in setting up their own initiatives, projects or businesses, good quality of life. Rural areas are also characterised as being very family-friendly, no or low crime rates and in general a safe environment, strong sense of identity, going hand in hand with many traditions and customs. Less focus on consumerism, healthier lifestyle and healthier food, ‘everyone knows each other’ in rural areas: this helps to gain direct access to the mayor, local media... and build up good contacts, easy to get attention and cooperation when organising projects, holding special events, doing rural youth work.

International activities for rural youth need to be **tailor-made and adapted** to your target group. Many of the problems and challenges rural young people face, as well as the strengths and opportunities of the countryside, can be addressed in international projects. Not only the young people, but also the entire rural community can **profit** a great deal from these initiatives.

The European Commission is strongly convinced that **international youth projects can make a difference** in rural and geographically isolated areas. For this reason, they are paying special attention to geographically disadvantaged young people within their Inclusion Strategy of the Erasmus+ YiA programme.

PROFILING YOUR ORGANISATION 💡

- By being active on a European level, by receiving European funding (for your international projects) or by co-operating with organisations abroad, you raise your organisation’s **profile and visibility**. As not many rural NGOs deal with international projects, your rural youth club/organisation will immediately get **attention from the media and local authorities**. Mayors are usually quite keen to welcome international visitors to their village. Cooperation with the local authorities can also lead to their **financial support**.

- When rural youth organisations co-operate (on an international as well as on a national level) they benefit from a **synergy effect** that is crucial for their **lobbying and advocacy work**. United, you are always stronger and can get your message across more easily.
- International rural youth projects are great for **stimulating** organisations to increase their commitment to **bigger issues in a wider context**. For example, to develop common strategies to prevent the brain drain from the countryside, which is an increasing phenomenon in many rural areas in Europe. In many cases, **rural development strategies** are exchanged and expanded, and local initiatives benefit from international exchange and support.

DEVELOPING THE ORGANISATION 💡

- **Contacts** with different organisations and youth workers (abroad), through international youth activities, stimulate **new ideas**: for new projects, to inspire new working methods, to take fresh initiatives, to do things differently. There is great potential to **learn from one another**.
- Organising an international youth project is a great opportunity to develop **organisational and project management skills** within your organisation e.g. intercultural competence, international co-operation, etc. which can also be beneficial for other activities.
- Participation in projects with international partner organisations allows you to **compare** and to find out how good a job you are doing.
- Participation in an international project could **motivate** youth workers in their work and be a new **challenge** for them as well.

THE ROLE OF THE RURAL YOUTH WORKER 💡

You, as a youth worker, are a **motor for change** in a rural setting. You can build up relationships with the young people there and stimulate them to become active in their rural environment and improve their living conditions and opportunities.

Get Active – Exercise

Ask yourself: How do you see your role?

- To help young people to find their own way, to become involved and active
- To pursue a change in the community
- To inspire young people / to create ideas
- To give young people the chance to explore the world
- To give young people a positive self-image
- To offer young people interesting things to do in their free time
- To acquire funding for projects
- To create a strong link between youth work and the benefits to the whole community
- To do something for ‘somebody else’ – but also do it for ‘yourself’ (your chance to learn professionally and personally)
- To open young people’s minds
- To offer Non-Formal Education and leisure time activities
- To offer space for self-development and being creative
- To be aware of their identity and find their place in local society
- To give young people an active role – make them responsible
- To be a coach for young people
- To get involved in the young people’s ‘way of life’, in order to design projects according to their own desires and needs
- Is there anything missing for you?
- What is the most important feature (skill, competences...) a rural youth worker needs to have in your village/rural area?
- Why are YOU a rural youth worker?
- What are your personal motivations?

BASICS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT 💡

For every **successful project** you need to look at **four different factors**:

1. START FROM A NEED OR PROBLEM

Projects work best when the people developing them know and **understand the needs and problems** they want to tackle.

It is important to evaluate the need or problem before starting any project.

- *What causes this particular problem in our rural area?*
- *What are the symptoms?*
- *What is the scale of it?*
- *For whom is it a problem?*
- *Only for young people – or for the entire community?*

2. SEE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR PROJECT

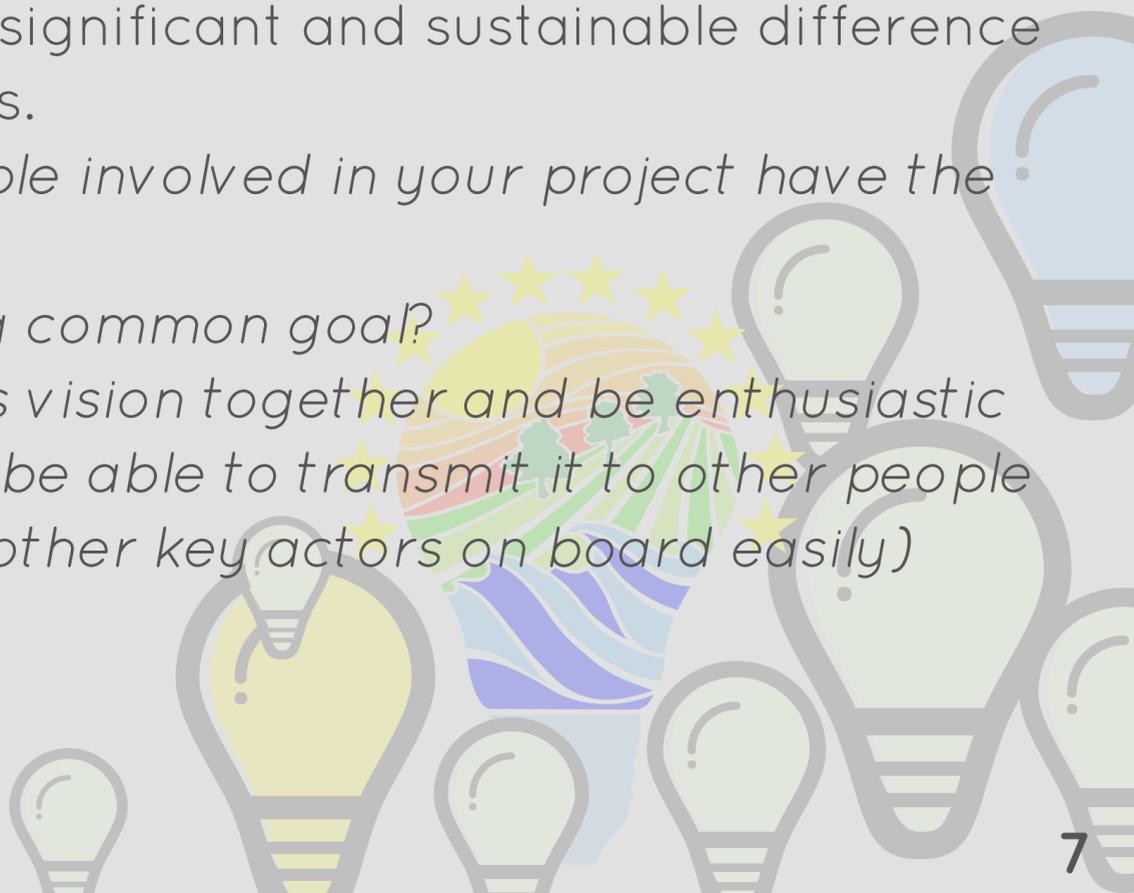
Projects need to have, or to **create, a space** in which to operate. Projects need to be **actively supported** and backed with more than just money. There must be support for the project from **key people** and **active participation** from the target group.

- *Are your young people behind the project?*
- *Do they have sufficient time to deal with it?*
- *Which other actors need to be involved?*
- *How will they support you/ your project?*

3. CREATE A VISION

Projects need a vision to **frame all the activities and efforts**. It is from the vision that strategies, objectives and work plans flow. The big idea behind the project should be clear enough to **show how** the project will make a significant and sustainable difference to the needs or the problems.

- *Do all the rural young people involved in your project have the same vision?*
- *Are you working towards a common goal?*
- *Are you able to picture this vision together and be enthusiastic about it? (only then will you be able to transmit it to other people in your community and get other key actors on board easily)*



4. GATHER SKILLS AND RESOURCES

Projects need the right **balance of skills, energy, resources and organisation** to get going and deliver results. You need to design them so that they are able to **make an impact and create results**.

- *Do you have a capable and balanced team, with complementary skills and resources behind the project?*
- *If there are some specific skills missing, whom are you going to consult to get the necessary skills/ knowledge/ know-how on board?*
- *Are the results, and the impact you are aiming for, clear to everyone? What is it for: you/ your youth group/ your community? Are your aims short or long term?*

Tips:

You will have a better chance of succeeding if you **know what you are aiming** at. You will be able to avoid doing unnecessary and unwanted work.

Don't underestimate the **duration of your project**, including all preparation, as well as follow-up at the end of the activity. Rather, **overestimate the amount of time** in your project- and activity plan! Most likely you will need it!

FOLLOW-UP, DISSEMINATION AND EXPLOITATION OF RESULTS 💡

YOU SHOULD PLAN WHAT HAPPENS AFTER AN ACTIVITY BEFORE THE ACTIVITY!

Already when applying for funding (e.g. in a E+ YiA application), you are asked what you are going to do in terms of follow-up and dissemination of results. The point is that you **do your project for a reason**, to have some impact. This impact should not stop as soon as the activity is over.

You can undertake different activities or develop different tools to follow-up and to **'disseminate and exploit'** the results of your project. Sending out the results of your project (e.g. a report, the lessons learnt, a booklet, new methods...) is one thing, getting them USED is even better.

You will need to have a look at your project's **potential to have an impact** at an early stage – before you actually start the project!

PARTICIPATE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S PROJECT FIRST 💡

If you think it is a bit daunting to do your own international youth activity, no worries: you can **first experience someone else's project** before doing one yourself.

Plenty of international activities for rural young people already exist. You can just join in an activity or match up with an organisation you find particularly interesting.

Many European institutions and organisations offer great **training and exchange opportunities**.

MONEY FOR INTERNATIONAL RURAL YOUTH PROJECTS 💡

Taking part in and organising international projects does not come for free. Travelling, eating, sleeping & working together costs **money**. However, there are a number of funding opportunities around for youth projects in general, and even some specifically for rural youth.

The **Erasmus plus YiA programme** of the European Commission offers a variety of smaller scale youth projects, and focuses on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

Besides this user-friendly programme, other funding opportunities for youth and rural projects exist.

MONEY FOR INTERNATIONAL (RURAL) YOUTH PROJECTS 💡

- **European Youth Foundation** (Council of Europe): www.coe.int/youth/ - The EYF funds international youth projects (minimum 4 European partner countries).
- **European Mobility Fund** (Council of Europe): www.coe.int/youth/ - The Mobility Fund pays rail travel for disadvantaged groups participating in international youth projects.
- **Interreg**: www.interact-eu.net - Interreg is financed by the European development fund for social cohesion and supports cross border trans-national and interregional cooperation.

Maybe your region is part of an Interreg project.

- **European Cultural Foundation:** www.eurocult.org - ECF is an independent non-profit organisation that promotes cultural cooperation in Europe and gives funding for projects with a strong cultural component e.g. concerts, theatre...
- **World Bank Small Grants Programme for local communities:** www.worldbank.org/smallgrants - The Small Grants Programme is one of the few global programmes of the World Bank that directly funds civil society organisations.
- **Rotary & Lyons Clubs:** www.rotary.org & www.lionsclubs.org - These are associations of professionals that sometimes give money to projects which answer the needs that challenge communities around the world.
- **Embassies & Cultural Institutes:** Some Embassies and cultural institutes (e.g. Goethe Institute, British Council, Alliance Francaise...) are actively involved in supporting local projects in different countries.
- **Nordic Council:** www.norden.org - The Nordic Council funds projects with a Nordic dimension in different fields, e.g. children and youth.
- **Different foundations:** Find an overview of foundations at Funders Online www.fundersonline.org - Funders Online is an initiative of the European Foundation Centre www.efc.be - The EFC promotes and supports the work of foundations and corporate funders in Europe.
- **Corporate social responsibility:** www.csreurope.org - Companies supporting social projects or civic society. CSR Europe regroups over 60 multinational corporations as members. This is a programme that funds projects for youth development.

INVOLVE RURAL YOUNG PEOPLE 💡

HOW CAN YOU GET YOUNG PEOPLE INTERESTED IN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH ACTIVITIES?

In many cases, there is a lack of social activities in the countryside – especially for young people. There are not many initiatives – and if any, they are on a local level.

The international level seems too far away, somehow alien and unreachable to young people in rural areas. Are they just not interested in international projects? Or is it just difficult to get young people on board for any activity? As a rural youth worker, what can you do?

Have direct contact with the young people

- You can make as many leaflets and posters as you want, but this alone will not be enough to get young people on board your project. It gives them the information, but most likely a personal chat would be more efficient if you want to find out what the young people's interests are or what their reasons are for not participating.
- Organise an open door activity and attract the young people. At the same time talk to them about 'going international'.

Go where the young people are

- Maybe you do not want to reach the 'same old' young people who already come to all your activities. To catch new target groups, you should go where they are.
- Go out to schools and talk about your international activities in class. Alternatively, if the young people you are aiming for are online a lot, find them in the virtual world.
- You could also surprise them after school: give them some action, show them what kind of activities you do, do a promotion stunt, **publish a local newspaper...**

Keep it interesting and link into the young people's world

- When you are recruiting young participants for your activities, they are probably not so interested in the educational value of international projects. Make sure you show them the fun side of it as well, next to the interesting challenges of such a project.
- If you make information material, make sure to appeal to young people (or ask them to make your info material!). Use slogans with expressions that young people use, use their language. Use people, pictures or videos from other projects.

- If you are targeting special groups, you need special tailor-made approaches (e.g. to get minority youth on board, or young people with disabilities). Show the young people what is in it for them.

Young people are not an island

- Young people do not decide alone if they will come to your (international) activities. It will also depend on their friends and family.
- You can think of ways to convince the kids' families about the benefits of international projects, that you will get European funding for it and that you are skilled youth workers taking them on interesting projects.
- Ask the young people who are already interested and committed to bring their friends to the activities or camps. Peer contact often works.

Peer-to-peer communication

- Instead of a youth worker (adult) trying to get young people on board, they might be more open to a message coming from peers. Ask participants of a previous international activity to talk about their experiences. This is highly motivating for others and spreads the international fire.
- Or bring a current EVS volunteer from another country to your youth organisation or to the schools in your area. They can talk about their experiences and make other young people think about doing something similar.
- Intercultural effect! Do some recording / filming of intercultural things as well as international groups and have a prize for the best video within your local rural youth club. Invite the whole community to the prize ceremony.

Building up step-by-step

- If international projects are a new thing in your area, young people probably need to warm up to this possibility. Organise international clubs and explain what kind of international activities and opportunities exist. Organise an international evening with intercultural games to give them a taste.

- You can also bring the international dimension to the local community e.g. by organising an international folk dancing festival, bringing in EVS volunteers, etc. to make people gradually more open towards international people and topics.
- If there is an international youth project happening in your region, try to get your rural youth organisation involved – to meet the foreign youngsters – at least for an evening, an excursion during the day...so that they see what it's like and become motivated to organise similar activities themselves!

Gain respect for the youth work you do

- It is perfectly normal that parents would not let their children go to some strange unknown place or group abroad. Therefore, it is important for you, as a youth worker, to show why you are doing the activities you are doing. Make them aware of how enriching this experience can be for their children and for the local community.
- You can also tell the parents or people in the local community about 'positive examples': e.g. other young people (who you know or they know) who have profited from a stay abroad and got a better job, improved their language skills, become more active in the community afterwards, etc. House visits or chatting in the street, in the local shop or at the pub could help.
- Build trust with the local community and the parents. Show that you know what you are doing with their children, and that you have the necessary competencies to do your job (maybe you have a youth work qualification, or a first aid certificate...).
- You can show that you will manage the project professionally through regular communication about it and other activities. Or you can also try to involve the community in the implementation of the project. This way, they can experience at first hand the way you work and the enthusiasm of the Young people.
- Sometimes parents are more inclined to trust people or documents with more 'status'. Get the oldest and most serious looking youth worker (in a suit and tie?) to talk to the parents, or show your grant contract, or send them the article in the newspaper about your project...

- Gaining respect is also about not losing respect. Avoid situations that might show your youth organisation or project in a negative light (e.g. getting a bit too drunk at a party, mis-managing the money, complaints about the kids, not responding to problems...)

Working on stereotypes and changing mentalities

- Small communities tend to stick to tradition. Things are done in a certain way in the village, and most of the people prefer that it stays that way. Combine this with relatively extensive social control and you find yourself quite limited in the things people will accept from you. Therefore you need to find the middle way between respecting traditional values, but still doing a project that aims to change something small or that tries to do things differently (e.g. going abroad).
- Communicating about your project and the reason you do it. Put your activities in a broader picture: show that other (respected) people think or do the same. E.g. the prime minister also did youth projects when he was young, the youth exchange is part of someone's social studies, etc.
- Involve important figures from the local community e.g. the mayor, the priest or school teachers. Show off the way in which these people approve of what you are doing e.g. at meetings or in the media. If they support you and your cause, other people from the community will also tend to do so.
- The people in your village will give you more credit and leeway if there is also something in it for them. Involve them in the project to give them a taste of the international dimension. Do something useful for the community, which will benefit all the people (e.g. cleaning a beach or forest path during your project about ecology). This way they will come to respect you more and approve of the work you are doing.
- Create visible final products from your (international) projects: e.g. a movie or a theatre play, write diaries to publish in the local press or on internet blogs, create a website about your project. Present this to as many people as possible in the local community.

Make use of the local media (newspaper, radio, TV).

- If people have stereotypes and prejudices about the partner countries you are working with, you could bring them into contact so that they can get to know what the people are really like. This can be via articles, but also at village parties, meetings or by hosting a group in people's homes.
- Prejudices only change through positive experiences. It is impossible to change people's minds by force. The opposite is more likely: mostly people counter-react if they are pushed in a certain direction. However, if they have free choice, their change of mind will be more sustainable.

MAKE YOUNG PEOPLE PROUD OF THEIR RURAL HERITAGE

HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOUNG PEOPLE STAY IN RURAL AREAS AND PREVENT BRAIN DRAIN?

It is a growing trend in Europe that young people are leaving the countryside to seek education, a professional career, life and luck in the cities – this phenomenon is called brain drain. In addition, many young people see living in the countryside as a barrier and not as a fortune. They do not identify with their rural heritage and are not proud of their roots. Is there anything you as a youth worker can do?

A conscious decision is a good decision

- The rural areas are not better than the cities – but the opposite is also true. Even though many young people see the cities as places full of action and opportunity, this is just as much a biased view as that of a romantic life in the countryside. People do have different preferences – but people cannot make a decision until they know both options.
- Youth workers can help young people consider both the positives and the negatives of living in the countryside and of moving to the cities. Often, young people tend to focus on the negatives of the rural areas, and all the excitement of the city. You can do some activities to counter-balance this.

Why not do a plus-minus exercise with the young people, listing all the positive things about the countryside on one side (+) of a piece of paper, and the negative things on the other side (-)? This helps people become more conscious of the pros and cons of staying and moving.

- **Remember:** It is impossible to change people's minds by force... If it is obvious that you are trying to influence the young people, they will have a tendency to do the opposite...Be warned!
- If you want to have young people staying in the villages instead of leaving for the cities, you will have to provide in the countryside what they otherwise look for in the cities and would avoid the reasons that cause them to leave.



RURAL INNOVATORS

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