



# **BE**LONGING

**Booklet 5**

**How to connect young people  
with their local communities**

# Imprint

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Who We Are

We are the Competence Group Methods, a group of professionals working in the field of international youth work and affiliated with the network of Generation Europe – The Academy, operating across diverse social contexts in various European countries. Our specific aim is to empower young people from diverse backgrounds to raise their voices and take meaningful action in their local communities and beyond. To support this objective, we have created various tools, including this booklet.

## 2. The Main Issue

In other publications<sup>1</sup>, we outlined the strategic objectives of Generation Europe – The Academy, emphasising the need for increased inclusion, diversity, participation in democratic life, and more civic education in youth work. Upon closer examination of these objectives, an essential question arose: how can we enable young people to be part of this process in a sustainable environment? We concluded that **the first step in the process of**

**change is to connect young individuals with their local communities.** This emphasis on the local level is deliberate for two significant reasons. Firstly, because local communities are the environment where young people first get into contact with the aforementioned objectives. Secondly, the experiences of our network stem from local youth work across different European countries.

As a matter of fact, young people constitute over a fifth of the world's population, holding substantial influence at the local level as well. However, they are often ignored in decision-making processes and economic planning, both globally and locally, as indicated by the UN in their report "Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

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1 Consult our website [generationeurope.org](http://generationeurope.org) for general information. On [generationeurope.org/booklets](http://generationeurope.org/booklets), we are also publishing Booklet O, a roadmap for navigating through our set of booklets. It provides an overview and outlines the different levels of objectives which the programme aims to achieve.

Moreover, the neighbourhood in which a young person lives has a big effect on their well-being and behaviour. Studies have consistently shown that in communities where social cohesion thrives, young people are less likely to engage in high risk behaviours and to experience emotional distress. For adolescents, such community connectedness is shaped by the quality of interactions, meaningful participation in community affairs, a sense of safety, and being welcome in public spaces (Blum et al., 2022). Therefore, it is relevant and necessary to build these connections. This Booklet's purpose is to show creative ideas on how to build them.

### 3. The Structure

We would like to indicate the structure and approach of this booklet to facilitate the reader's navigation through the chapters. In the following paragraphs, we will define the theory of change as well as the objectives and purpose of this booklet. Chapter A, titled "**Community and Communities**", begins by encouraging self-reflection, a valuable exercise for understanding the content of the booklet. Apart from defining the terms community and communities, which forms the essence of this chapter, other related concepts such as groups and ecosystems

are introduced. This approach ensures that key terms are used and understood uniformly, akin to building a shared glossary together.

In Chapter B, we provide a guide for **mapping stakeholders**. This section emphasises the significance of cooperation with stakeholders in local community work and any process of change. While both Chapter A and B outline **concrete methods** for connecting young people and communities, these methods are fully detailed later on. Chapter C presents some voices from the community of practice, explaining what the young participants have gained and learned from the projects, highlighting the intrinsic connection between the group of youngsters and the local community, which serves as the foundation for these learning opportunities – which are received like a gift by the youngsters. Finally, in the **Conclusion** (Chapter D), we revisit the specific objectives and aims of this booklet, as defined in the following paragraphs, to assess the extent of the work accomplished.

## 4. Theory of Changes, Objectives and Aims

### 4.1. Statements about Changes – Justifying the Core Question

To ensure consistency and establish a strong foundation of the booklet within the framework of Generation Europe – The Academy, and to address the fundamental question of why and how to connect young people with their local communities, we need to begin by revisiting and emphasising specific initial statements about change. These statements will provide a common basis to collectively understand the importance of initiating change and working together towards this goal.

The statements fall into two categories. They pertain to the local–global dimension of the processes of change and the necessity of a strong partnership to implement them effectively (which the ongoing discussions in our network have highlighted). They state:

**a.** Every change starts within the local community, where the individuals involved are well aware of the global impact that influences all local realities and dynamics, creating a continuous cycle from the local level to the global level and back to the local level.

**b.** To produce a positive impact, forming the right alliances with all stakeholders is necessary.

Understanding the nature of the required changes in this way (a), helps us to understand why it is crucial to connect youngsters with their local community and how this connection should work (b). Thus, it makes sense and assists in formulating the specific objectives and aims of the booklet in a coherent and consistent manner.

### 4.2. Specific Objectives and Aim of this Booklet

#### a. Specific Objectives

- ▶ To **identify the key components necessary to create synergy between young local action groups and community dynamics**, enabling them to understand the processes and tools needed to integrate young people into their local communities.
- ▶ To **establish a common approach within the GenE–A network concerning community and stakeholders and the role of young people within community dynamics**. The booklet provides valuable information to help local action groups engage

with meaningful community dynamics, thereby increasing young people's participation in community-based activities.

- ▶ To offer efficient and effective **methods and tools for youth leaders**. These methods aim to empower young people to initiate meaningful projects in their local communities based on real local needs and sustainable solutions. It is essential to understand how to plan and develop cooperative initiatives where young people can develop competences and support local changes.

## b. About the Aim

The aim of booklet 5 is to explore the effective connection between young people and the local community to instigate the anticipated changes, which are meant to commence at the local level. Furthermore, it aims to strengthen the sense of belonging and emphasise the importance of effective communication and synergies within the community and with the relevant stakeholders. Together, these efforts are meant to facilitate the necessary changes collaboratively.

# A. COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITIES

Before probing into the theory of community and communities, we invite you, dear reader, to consider a few questions. This exercise will help you explore your affiliations and identifications.

## Questions to the Reader

- ▶ Where is my place of birth?
- ▶ Where do I live now?
- ▶ To which social groups do I feel a sense of belonging? (This could be related to economic, cultural, educational background, age, gender, sexual orientation, minorities, etc.)
- ▶ What attributions related to social groups have I experienced in my life so far? Do I agree with these attributions?
- ▶ Which rights are truly important to me?



Now, let's dive into the core of the subject: what do we understand when we speak of communities?

## 1. A Few Thoughts About One Word

The term "community" is one of the most frequently used words in social work, political science, art, sustainable development practices, and everyday discourse. Despite its common usage, its meaning often eludes us, being multifaceted and diverse in different contexts or perspectives. There is abundant literature exploring the historical and varied meanings attributed to the term. While a detailed exploration of these nuances is beyond the scope of this booklet, it is crucial to present aspects of the community theory pertinent to local youth work and, more importantly, to define how we will use the terms "community" and "local community" in this booklet from now on.

## 2. Geography or Sociology?

Approaches to understanding community can broadly be categorised into two axes:

### 2.1. Territorial Communities

These are **linked to geographical regions, varying in size, and function horizontally within a confined place**. They encompass the entire population of a given neighbourhood, town, city, or region. Our birthplace and current residence determine our affiliation with these communities, meaning we are citizens of a certain administrative unit, we share a culture (language, habits, norms, laws, form of government, etc.) and face the same challenges linked to the territory (e.g. climate, environment, etc.). However, belonging to a territorial community does not necessitate active participation.

### 2.2. Social Identity Communities

**These communities revolve around shared identities or vital interests**, such as LGBTQ+ communities, disabled people's communities, migrants' communities, social, political, human rights movements, and ideological communities. These communities are vertical but universal, coexisting independently or jointly in different locations. They involve collective action toward social change and require active involvement from individuals.

These two axes often overlap and intertwine, but conflicts may arise, especially concerning the rights of underserved communities and social groups, where local dominant norms can be perceived as oppressive or ignorant.

### 3. What is a Local Community in Youth Work?

If you equate a local community solely with a geographical entity, dear reader, especially if you are the youth leader in charge of the group dynamics, please reconsider! Your group is based in a certain geographical space, ranging from a few blocks or neighbourhoods to a big city, prefecture, country; and your group has high chances to be involved in exchanges with other youth groups with their respective layers of geographical anchoring.

While youth groups are grounded in specific geographical areas, each member (or sub-groups of them) identifies with different socially-bound communities based on gender, culture, politics, socioeconomic background, and ideology. Recognising this diversity is vital, making generalisations about the group's identities, problems,

challenges, and priorities, can be misleading. "Diversity is our strength" is one of the mottos of the GenE-A network. Embracing this diversity enriches groups, fostering learning, openness and progress.

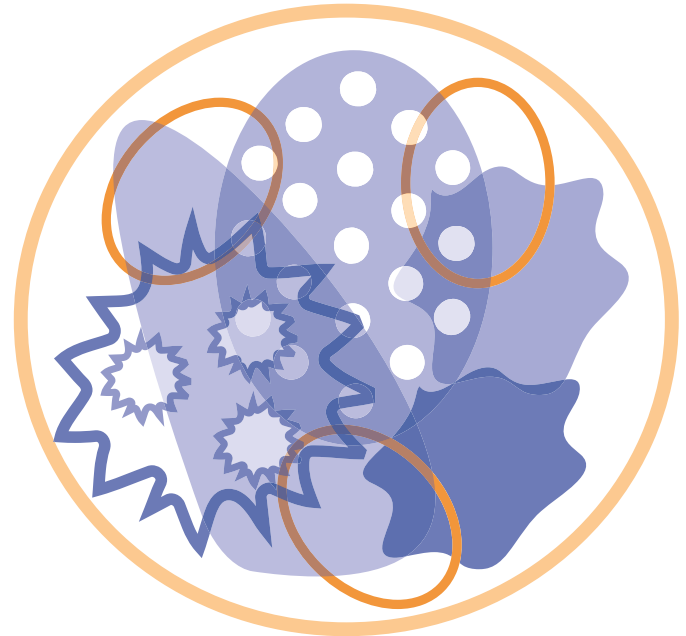


Figure 1: Community and communities

Do we need a single, narrow, rigid definition of “community” for our work? Probably not. Attempting to encompass all aspects of diversity might inadvertently exclude something essential. Instead of a fixed definition, we offer a model: consider **a local community and communities as a vast, round, place-specific bubble, encompassing smaller bubbles of different shapes, colours, and textures. Each smaller bubble represents the diverse values and claims of various social groups.** Let’s work to keep the bigger bubble, which we will term “local community” from now on, as transparent as possible, allowing us to clearly see the smaller yet invaluable “communities” within it.

### To go practical

From this perspective, a practical method to connect young people with the local community could be the exercise “Community is about...” found in this booklet. This activity helps to cultivate a sense of belonging to the local community while encompassing the entire spectrum of the community’s reality.

This feeling of belonging is fundamental to establishing a strong connection between young individuals and their local community. Experiencing this sense of belonging

unquestionably paves the way for transformative change. Another effective method to achieve this is the activity “Public space, personal memory” which complements the “Community is about...” exercise mentioned above.



Figure 2: Creating the emotional connection

## 4. Group vs Community

The words “community” and “group” are sometimes used interchangeably, but do they really mean the same thing? The answer is no! Let’s illustrate these differences.

A community, as discussed earlier, is a social unit comprising people who share a territory, a sense of identity, and values. **Social identity, linked to long-term collective action towards social change, is a characteristic often emphasised in communities** (Van Zomeren, 2008 & 2009).

**In contrast, a group consists of people brought together occasionally within a specific time frame, pursuing a particular goal** (e.g. a psychotherapy group, a tour group, a pottery learning group). Group members do not necessarily share the same values or belong to the same communities. They can join or withdraw from the group voluntarily almost at any time, if the group does not meet their aims and needs.

Unlike groups, individuals cannot easily enter and exit communities since they belong there. Communities undergo changes, as do the people within them, but this transformation is a longer social process rather than an individual one.

The term “social group” is more complex: it can refer to a section of society sharing socially significant characteristics but not closely tied to specific communities, such as single-parent families, a group of people with a similar income level, etc.

## 5. Community of Practice

Another term frequently used in youth work and education settings is “community of practice”. This term refers to a **group of individuals who share a common concern or interest and interact regularly to address it**. Originally coined in cognitive studies, it described apprenticeship as a learning model highlighting how people can effectively act as a living curriculum (Wenger, 1998). Over time, it has been proven valuable in understanding various collaborative and peer-learning environments and dynamics, with youth work being one of them.

Sharing best practices and advancing knowledge through interaction are central aspects of a community of practice. The GenE-A network can thus be viewed as a broad community of practice, where concerns and approaches are shared openly in a collaborative space of exchange, practice and reflection among managers, youth and youth workers, and peer learners. Local youth groups, although smaller in scale, are equally significant communities of practice, where interests in addressing local matters are combined with upscaling skills, competences, and knowledge.

## 6. Ecosystems and Local Communities

Finally, it's important to understand the term "ecosystem" in relation to the local community.

The notion of an ecosystem is commonly used to describe a set of relations between individuals, and social structures, such as political systems, religious organisations, community groups, and enterprises, interacting within a specific environment, like a city.

This ecosystem is characterised by complex and dynamic relationships that evolve with social, economic and political changes. All these relationships influence the daily behaviour and choices of individuals in society.

Ecosystems are primarily defined by the institutions and social structures that compose them. On the other hand, local communities, as mentioned earlier, are defined by geographical or cultural features and the social relations among their members, often rooted in shared values.

Local communities are part of broader ecosystems, which are more diverse and complex than communities. These ecosystems encompass various institutions, social groups, and enterprises with different, often conflicting interests. In contrast, communities are more homogenous and focused on preserving common values shared by their members.

The following graphic (Figure 3) illustrates the ecological relationship between ecosystems and communities. Ecosystems include abiotic elements, whereas communities exist at the biotic level, representing life forms.

## ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES

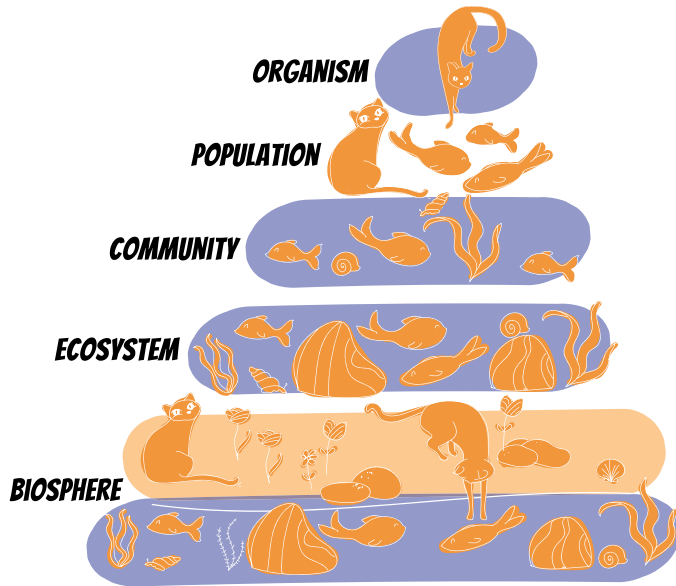


Figure 3: Ecological relationship between ecosystems and communities

## A SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

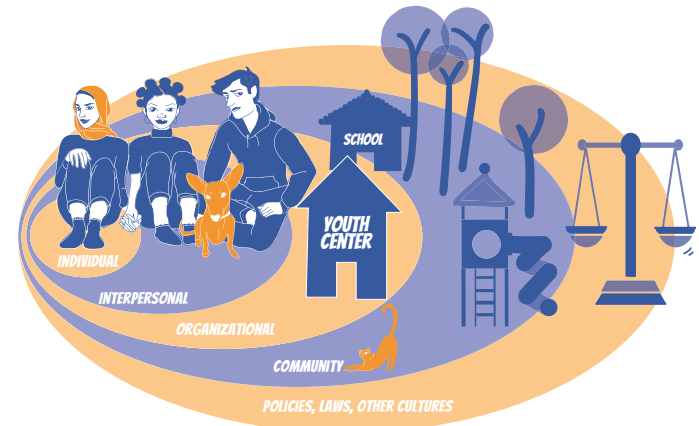


Figure 4: Translation of the ecological approach into the social realm

In Figure 4, we observe the translation of the ecological approach into the social realm.

In this scenario, the ecosystem represents the overall context. Similar to the ecological model, policies, laws and other structures function as the abiotic elements of the system while communities and groups constitute the biotic elements.

Several authors have emphasised the significance of local communities within ecosystems for ensuring the sustainability of the whole ecosystem. Communities can help the ecosystems to be more balanced, equitable and sustainable, both environmentally and socially. The impact of communities varies depending on the specific ecosystem under consideration.

The ecosystem is a way for the local community to be involved in and influence local–global change (as mentioned in Chapter A, paragraph 3, in the introductory statement about changes).

This is important when evaluating the role of stakeholders in establishing effective connections between young people and local communities.

## ***B. THE STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING***

To drive meaningful changes, it is imperative to form partnerships with all relevant stakeholders. Establishing a framework to facilitate these changes is essential.

### **1. Defining “Stakeholders”**

Since the 1980s, various authors, such as Freeman, Mitchell & Agle & Wood, Donaldson & Preston, Giddens, Bourdieu, Touraine, Morin; and more recently, Zygmunt Bauman, have provided definitions of “stakeholders” within their respective fields and contexts of study: they all acknowledge that stakeholders hold significant power and influence within specific contexts, making it essential to consider them in any strategy aimed at shaping social changes.

Stakeholders can be individuals, groups or entities directly or indirectly affected and interested in the anticipated changes. They may benefit from these changes

or face negative consequences. Moreover, stakeholders can exert varying levels of influence on the impact of the project, making their involvement indispensable.

This category includes politicians, members of parliament, and others involved in the decision-making processes of institutions, cities, regions, countries, or supra-regional entities like the EU or the Council of Europe. Influential people from academia, the business sector, civil society, or philanthropy can also fall under this umbrella – individuals whose opinions are respected, heard, and potentially acted upon.

Mapping stakeholders involves creating a visual representation that situates them based on their relationship with the community of practice and the environment. This process helps in understanding their connection with the project's objective and anticipated changes. It also involves assessing their area of expertise, interests, potential contributions and influence. This mapping exercise is crucial for effecting the desired changes.

## 2. Definition of “Stake”

When aiming for change, two levels come into play:

- ▶ The “cultural” level: values, beliefs, feelings, behaviours, and attitudes we want to encourage or reinforce or create;
- ▶ The “structural” level: the framework which makes sure that the changes achieved at the cultural level could endure over time, through public policies, rules and regulations, infrastructure, etc.

To achieve enduring change, it is crucial for decision-makers and individuals/entities capable of influencing or supporting the decision-making process to actively participate and collaborate. They are essential to the success of any proposed change, as they bring a variety of skills, knowledge, know-how and perspectives to any decision-making process. Identifying these stakeholders within or around the community of practice is essential.



This is where stakeholders mapping plays a pivotal role. Its purpose and challenges lie in establishing the right connections between the community of practice and the appropriate stakeholders. By forging these connections, the mapping process facilitates the implementation of change, ensuring its success and longevity.

### 3. Desired Changes by the Community of Practice

Any project aiming to implement social changes and improve the state of the planet, both socially and environmentally, needs the theoretical foundation of a “theory of change”.<sup>2</sup> This framework justifies one strategy over another. The exponential acceleration of changes brought about by the digital revolution in the 2010s, has made managing and understanding changes very complex.

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<sup>2</sup> Five main currents of thoughts constitute the history of the “theories of change”: from Lewin to the theory of complexity, through Kater, Kotter and the collaborative approach.

What remains clear is the intricate web of connections, interactions and interdependence among all actors’ actions at various levels, from local to global, shaping these changes.

Within this intricate framework, it is essential to analyse, monitor, and evaluate the interactions among stakeholders affected by these changes. This includes those who stand to benefit, individuals who may lose certain privileges, and those who can influence the direction of these changes due to their positions. This process is a critical step within the project.

Therefore, creating a “Stakeholder Map” becomes an invaluable tool for both young people and the local community to foster a shared interest and a collective, necessary, and urgent approach to the changes they anticipate. Thus, mapping would be a participatory process developed and implemented by both the youngsters and the local community, allowing them to grow together in the process of change.

## 4. Stakeholders and the GenE–A Community of Practice: Status, Power, and Role

### 4.1. Identifying Key Stakeholders and Their Roles

It is crucial to know who needs to be involved in the process to make change happen. Understanding the specific roles of stakeholders is essential because, as previously emphasised, changes must occur at both cultural and structural levels. Let's categorise and define the types of stakeholders who can be instrumental in this process:

#### Categorisation & Status

- 1) **Decision and Policy Makers:** they have direct influence over societal laws, rules, and structures. They may include members of parliament, mayors, institutional representatives, ministers, etc.
- 2) **Lobby Powers, Advocacy Groups, or Pressure Groups:** they can raise awareness about social issues and have the power to influence decision-makers through collective strength. Their role is to apply pressure. Examples include trade unions, parent groups, churches, and similar organisations.

- 3) **Opinion Builders:** they help to shape public opinions, and have the power to transmit or manipulate information. They could be mass media representatives, communicators in the oral tradition,<sup>3</sup> singers, social media influencers, etc.
- 4) **Knowledge Transmitters/Teachers:** they explain concepts and dynamics, and can influence the process by ensuring a shared understanding of the ongoing developments. They are academia representatives (teachers, professors, writers, etc, ) as well as non-formal education experts.
- 5) **Business Sector Representatives:** they have the power to influence policy-makers, due to their extensive networks, interests and financial resources. They can be important enterprise directors, public relations heads, and communication specialists within businesses.

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3 In some cultures, so-called "traditional communicators" are important "influencers". Through their songs, they recall the importance of social links which have existed throughout history and can convince of the importance of a certain action.

6) **Civil Society Representatives:** They mobilise people, and are vocal advocates for local concerns. NGOs, social movements, charismatic activists, and local GenE-A groups working towards similar goals fall under this category. Collaboration between these groups can create synergies and amplify their impact.

Making changes requires a clear and shared understanding of the desired outcome. It involves a determined effort to advocate for these changes, garner support from external stakeholders, shape public opinion, lobby decision-makers, and translate these changes into concrete actions, including legal reforms, to ensure their long-lasting impact.

### **Inside/Outside the Local Community**

Stakeholders, as mentioned earlier, can either belong to the local community or come from external sources, such as renowned local university teachers or famous singers, and even members of supra-institutions. The mapping process will clearly identify the boundaries whenever possible, so that the feeling of belonging could be operative and tactical, when seeking alliances.

For example, approaching a university teacher allows students to connect on a personal level. However, approaching the mayor of a city involves other tactics, such as considering risks, employing rational arguments, and even conducting lobbying campaigns. Considering on the one hand the emotional closeness within the local community and on the other hand the broader narrative scope outside it, could guide strategic actions toward the desired changes.

## **4.2. Youngsters as Stakeholders**

### **Empowering Youngsters**

**Young people play multifaceted roles as stakeholders, actively contributing to implementing changes.**

Within their communities, they act as active citizens and potential future leaders with a strong interest in the well-being of their community, schools, and environment. Those of legal voting age can participate in elections and join a political party to represent their peers and communities. They can have a say in who represents them and makes decisions on their behalf.

Personal development is always encouraged. Young people have creative ideas, different ways to express them and can establish meaningful connections within their social circle. Youngsters can also be activists and opinion builders using social media platforms to advocate for causes they care about, such as climate change, education, and social justice. By doing so, they ensure their perspectives are considered in democratic processes, asserting their influence on decisions affecting their lives and the future of their communities.

### **Significance of Claiming Stakeholder Status**

**Taking on the role of a stakeholder gives young people a sense of ownership and responsibility for their future, as well as the opportunity to make a positive impact on their communities and society as a whole.** It allows them to identify their individual strengths, form opinions, and learn the art of initiating change. Active involvement in change processes sharpens valuable skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, essential for their future careers. Youngsters will inherit the future and they have a stake in the decisions that are being made, all of which should be sustainable and equitable for the next generation.

### **Status and Role of Youth Leaders whose Youth Group is considered “Stakeholder”**

Power sharing means the process of distribution of power. “Power sharing tries to answer the question of how a person can share their own advantages with others who do not have these privileges” (Haruna-Oelker, 2022, p. 110). Embracing power sharing as the spirit of democracy, it is important to reflect on the role of youth leaders, analyse the status of each person involved in the project and determine how power can be shared among the group, for instance by sharing information or building bridges by connecting youngsters to decision-makers.

Youth leaders should ask themselves: Am I working at eye level with the group? Does everyone have the opportunity to express their opinion? How can I support youngsters and create a framework so that they can express their opinions and wishes? What do they need to be empowered to play on the stage together with other stakeholders? What tactics can we develop together when talking with decision-makers?

The group can be a safe space in the learning process to experiment and express strategies. “Growing together

within a group can be part of a healing process for all: overcoming speechlessness and fears [...]” (Haruna-Oelker, 2022, p. 110).

By giving the status of stakeholder to young people as a whole, importance is given to power sharing. The involvement of youth leaders can empower all young individuals, enabling them to perceive and experience their role in shaping and participating in discussions alongside other stakeholders.

### **Creating Synergies Between and Among Stakeholders**

During the learning process, it is important to identify stakeholders who share common interests and goals, and who can effectively communicate with decision-makers. This involves recognising mutual interests, fostering open communication and collaborating, to find solutions that benefit all parties involved. Aligning opinions and shared values can promote cooperation and coordination. Having a comprehensive understanding of existing stakeholders and their status is crucial for strategic involvement in the process.

Moreover, It is vital to choose appropriate settings to ensure that the voices of young people are not only heard but also addressed together with the effort of all other stakeholders. Through this collaborative approach, the anticipated changes can be effectively implemented, leading to the desired positive impact.

## **5. Mapping: Drawing the Sociogram**

### **5.1. Barriers, Bridges and Alliances**

Drawing the sociogram is a valuable tool to build effective strategies, to achieve project objectives. This method involves mapping out stakeholders and drawing connections between them, so that bridges and alliances, as well as barriers, are highlighted.

### **5.2. Strategies and Tactics**

The strategy will then focus on overcoming obstacles and conflicts by creating winning synergies and avoiding barriers which could impede the achievement of determined objectives. The method “The Sociogram” (see page 30) demonstrates how this process works.

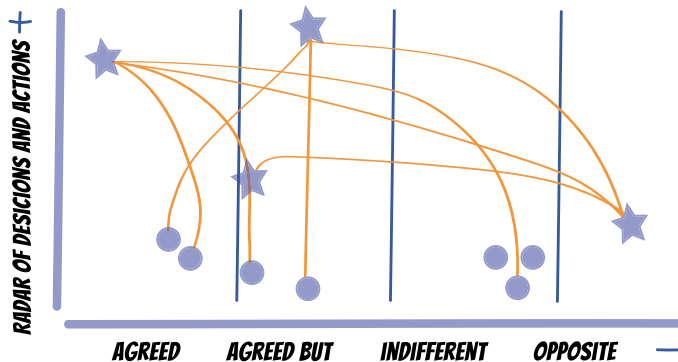


Figure 5: The Sociogram

## 6. Concluding Thoughts on Stakeholders

In conclusion, each local group will create a customised sociogram which corresponds to the realities of the communities they are working with and the broader ecosystem surrounding them. Each local group must then formulate a detailed, systematic and appropriate plan of action. This plan will empower them to engage with the appropriate stakeholders, strengthening their connection with the local communities in a manner that is not only robust and relevant, but also effective and solution-oriented.

## C. VOICES AND FEEDBACK

Below, you will find a selection of quotes reflecting various strategies for engaging young people in local youth work and fostering connections with local communities. These quotes are from project managers, youth leaders and ambassadors, providing a broad spectrum of perspectives on Generation Europe – The Academy.

They show examples of how learning experiences have been created in the process of different projects. These learning experiences have helped the respective groups to move forward. The quotes are categorised into "Learning Gifts and Accomplishments" where network members share joyful experiences, "Learning Possibilities", where they discuss challenging experiences they've learned from and "Final Learnings", where they offer advice.

## 1. Learning Gifts and Accomplishments

*“And I think the most important thing is motivation. And the inspiration.”*

*“Every process has so much to give to everyone and success is to co-exist in a group, in a small community.”*

*“And I think in general, that when something becomes successful, it’s because there was a combination of many factors. It takes patience, belief in what you’re believing in, it needs trust between the members of the team. It needs teamwork – of course.”*

**Garyfallenia Tsinopoulou**, Ambassador, Synergy of Music Theatre

*“I think that the most important outcome is not the fun itself, but the feeling of the youngsters that they can actually make a difference in their lives.”*

**Tiina Kyllönen**, Youth Leader, Oulun Nuoret Kotkat ry

## 2. Learning Possibilities

*“I think it is always very difficult if pedagogues or adults decide: now the youngsters have to be active! And tell them: Now be active! [...]”*

*“The youngsters are coming back very motivated from our seminars. And then it’s very difficult in the schools, because they have to fight a lot of fights with the structures. They want to make the schools more sustainable, and then they need a lot of support, motivated teachers to help them to handle this frustration. It’s easy to talk about these topics here in our seminar rooms and our safe space, and they have a lot of plans. But then, to fulfil them in their own structures after coming back is not so easy. So, I think here we need more openness in a lot of spaces to let them do what is important for them.”*

**Léonie Reif**, Project Manager, Jugendakademie Walberberg

### 3. Final Learnings

*"I think the kids themselves were able to voice their opinions, which I think is valuable. And even if there is disappointment with the fact that a construction didn't happen after years of development, hopefully it coiled to conversations on what should happen instead. Maybe other solutions can be found. So, I think agitating for democracy, if you want to call it that, is valuable itself, if it mobilises and raises some sort of community."*

**Jacob Leuchovius**, developer at the unit for development and social sustainability; Kungsbacka, Sweden

*"Sometimes I get the vibes from the youngsters that they feel that no one really cares. [...]"*

**Tiina Kyllönen**, Youth Leader, Oulun Nuoret Kotkat ry

*"I remember a phrase that is like: You have to be committed, because without commitment, you never start and without consistency you never finish. So I try to be consistent and committed to my local group so we can reach our goals."*

**Zihad Hossain**, Ambassador, Irenia

*"You also need to be brave, and empower the youngsters to be brave enough to do it, and motivated enough, and to know which doors you can open or which are already open."*

**Tiina Kyllönen**, Youth Leader, Oulun Nuoret Kotkat ry



These voices from the network were collected collaboratively in interviews. People described their experiences and perspectives on connecting with their communities through the project. Participants discussed their needs in order to be connected with communities and stakeholders. In addition to describing how they connected with the community, they share their learnings during the process, group dynamics and the overall impact of these connections. The partners interviewed focused mostly on practical approaches for facilitating connections, rather than describing why it is important to connect young people with local communities. This emphasis could come from a shared understanding among the interviewees that it did not need explicit mention.

## ***D. CONCLUSION***

Following a precise approach and in-depth analysis of the concept and practice of communities and stakeholders, the conclusion is: a strong connection between young individuals and their local communities is not merely important, but an essential prerequisite, to implement genuine change and create a real impact. To enact this connection, they need to cultivate a sense of shared participation in the dynamics of change, fostering a sense of belonging to a collective growth process – hence the title “BeLonging”.

Simultaneously, they must collaboratively construct a “winning alliance” with stakeholders, a partnership that facilitates enduring change. Building the Stakeholders Map serves the dual purpose of strengthening the bonds between young people and their communities while enabling lasting impact. So, BeLonging and mapping the road to change are the key components creating synergy between young local action groups and community dynamics – the primary objective outlined in this booklet (refer to paragraph 3.1.).

Moreover, the compelling evidence of these connections explicitly delineates the role of young people within community dynamics, thereby enhancing their status as genuine stakeholders in the process of change – the second objective.

Lastly, this booklet empowers both young people and youth leaders by equipping them with concrete methods and tools. These resources prepare them to take initiatives to support change, aligned with local needs and sustainability – the third objective.

In essence, “BeLonging” has paved the way for an effective connection between young people and their local communities by exploring and reinforcing the sense of belonging and emphasising the importance of effective communication and synergies within the community and with relevant stakeholders, to build together the due changes. The circle is squared.

## METHODS



## COMMUNITY IS ABOUT...

<b>Type of method</b>	Groupwork, brainstorming Possibility to implement digitally
<b>Source / Author</b>	Dimitra Zacharouli (inspired by a poster by artist Karen Kerney)
<b>Number of participants</b>	Minimum 6
<b>Related competences</b>	Communication, social awareness
<b>Objectives</b>	Understand how communities can be supported and empowered, thinking from smaller to bigger ideas.
<b>Time / Duration</b>	60–90 min
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A printed or drawn poster</li><li>• a projector (if presented digitally)</li><li>• flipchart and markers</li><li>• Optionally stickers and colourful decoration material for the posters</li></ul>
<b>Facilitator requirements</b>	Basic sociology understanding could be helpful but not mandatory. Art/drawing skills could add a level of attractive visualisation, but not necessary
<b>Room requirements</b>	A bare wall to project or hang a poster

### Description of the activity

**Step 1 (5 min):** Invite participants to introduce themselves stating their name and the community they believe they belong to. Start by introducing yourself, giving an example. Let them know that if they are not sure what a community is or what community they belong to, it is ok, they could just name their city or neighbourhood.

**Step 2 (15 min):** Present the poster. Ask 1–2 volunteers to read it aloud.

Give participants time to reflect or comment on the poster. Does it represent their understanding of community? Are there any other approaches they would like to mention? Make sure to refer both to geographically-bound communities and to social/human rights-bound communities. Then sum up all the points mentioned.

**Step 3 (15 min):** Split the participants in smaller groups of 3–5 people each and ask them to add more sentences/ suggestions to the poster. What are their ideas on how they could build/ reinforce a community? Ask them to decide on a rapporteur, a person that takes notes and will be later responsible to present the outcomes.

**Step 4 (10 min):** Each group takes 2–3 minutes to present their ideas.

→

# PUBLIC SPACES, PERSONAL MEMORIES

**Step 5 (20 min):** Ask them to go back into their groups, and to focus on a shared community they are part of. This could be the city/town/village, or their neighbourhood, or a social group: e.g. the youth community of their town, or the community of people with migrant background, or the LGBTQ+ community, or the feminist community.... The only prerequisite is that all people in the group can identify with this specific community. Give them 5 min to decide on the community of reference for their group, and then another 15 minutes to create their own poster of ideas on how to sustain and empower the community of their choice. Finally, they present their posters to the plenary.

## Debriefing

A discussion may follow after the final presentation of the new posters.

- How was the process for the participants?
- Did they realise anything new about their communities?
- Could any of these ideas be the basis of an action plan for the group?
- If yes, which idea would they be interested in working on?

## Remarks/Technical settings

If done digitally, choose an online platform with the possibility for using break out rooms. The poster can be found here: <https://www.syracuseculturalworkers.com/products/poster-how-to-build-community>

<b>Type of method</b>	Guided imagination, creative writing
<b>Source/Author</b>	Inês Vasquez (YouthCoop) – Method adapted from Margret Geraghty: The Five Minute Writer, Exercises and Inspiration in Creative Writing in Five Minutes a Day.
<b>Number of participants</b>	1–20
<b>Related competences</b>	Community, Awareness, Communication & Expression, Emotional Management & Empathy, Active Listening
<b>Objectives</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Understand that places are capable of retaining fingerprints of people who have been there, places do have power to elicit feelings</li><li>2. Explore the physical/geographical spaces as community ground</li><li>3. Connect the emotional dimension to social, cultural, political contexts</li><li>4. Explore the feeling of belonging to a community</li></ol>
<b>Time/Duration</b>	40 – 60 min

### Materials

- A5 or A4 paper
- Pens or pencils
- Drawing materials if you want to expand this exercise in a creative way

### Facilitator requirements

Guided imagination skills & experience.  
Conversational skills and coordination of a discussion

### Room requirements

A room suitable for the size of the group, ideally equipped with chairs & tables

### Description of the activity

**Introduction:** The power of the place to stimulate the imagination may be connected to the ways in which our brains store emotionally- arousing material.

Psychologists call this ‘flashbulb’ memory, an intrinsic characteristic which is a detailed recall of ‘place’. It makes more sense to do this activity within your community.

**Preparation:** Distribute a piece of paper and a pen/pencil to each participant. Ask them to close their eyes and breath slowly, guide individuals through a mental journey to their memories of familiar places. This could be their neighbourhood, or places they often pass.

To think about where they felt good and where not so good.

**1st part:** Ask the participants to come back to the present moment. Invite them to describe the places based on the following list. You can suggest that they write brief texts about their memories, or create drawings, or share orally their thoughts about:

- A place where you were happy.
- A place where you were angry.
- A place you found exciting.
- A place where you felt safe.
- A place where you felt frightened.
- A place where you were lonely.
- A place where you made friends.
- A place where you made an enemy or enemies.
- A place that inspired you.
- A place you'd like to live in – if you could.

(Suggest as many ideas as manageable in the timeframe you have)

If the participants are not comfortable to share or write about the place, they are free to opt out, as long as they spend some time at least thinking about it.

**2nd part:** The group ideally can think of a way to present a “product” of this process: this could be a theatre play, a song, a poem, a collective painting/sculpture, a performance, a photo exhibition etc. Or to create an action plan making use of the highlights of the process.

## THE SOCIOGRAM (MAPPING THE STAKEHOLDERS)

### Debriefing

This is a very important step to connect this activity to the notion of community. Facilitate a discussion based on questions such as:

- What is the connection of our feelings to the concept of community?
- What makes people come together?
- Are feelings important to the construction of a community?
- Which kind of feelings are essential to a community?
- How can we channel these outputs into action towards change?

**Type of method** Sociogram

**Source/Author** Gianni Orsini  
(Ganuza et al., 2010; CIMAS, 2009)

**Number of participants** Up to six groups of four people each

**Related competences** Critical and active thinking, communication and collaboration competence, cross-cultural awareness and expression, conflicts transformation approach

**Objectives** Building optimised alliances to change the ecosystem with respect to the question "How to improve the youth structures and capabilities" by:

- generating collective knowledge on the nature (culture and structure) of the ecosystem at a specific moment, through brainstorming and through analysis of the situation
- working out collective strategies to transform conflicts of interests within the ecosystem and make progress from them

→

It helps to know the map of relationship around a question / issue / problematic theme (QIPT), in this case “How to improve the youth structures and capabilities” and the position of the stakeholders/actors – at a specific moment – with respect to this QIPT and, thus, to work out the due strategy and a plan of action to transform the ecosystem.

**Time/Duration** 3:15 hours

**Materials**

- Flipcharts
- School materials such as rulers, squares, protractors, post-its in the form of squares, triangles and circles, etc.

**Facilitator requirements** To understand the logic of the method well, be a good pedagogue; have the capacities of analysis and synthesis; have moderation skills; keep the attention and focus of the participants

**Room requirements** Tables for 4 people (max 6 tables)

### Description of the activity

1. Explain the concept and figures and lines (complementary document A, download at [generationeurope.org/booklets](http://generationeurope.org/booklets)) to the whole group
2. Formulate/understand the question “How to improve the youth structures and capabilities”
3. Define clearly the “local community” they want to connect with
4. Identify / Design the ecosystem (e.g. the city, the neighbourhood, the school or in general the environment which the youngsters are aiming to have an impact on)
5. Make a list of the stakeholders they assume are important (45 min)
6. Make groups of 4 and put on the map the stakeholders they have listed, following the figures (circles, triangles, squares) defined in the complementary document (download from [generationeurope.org/booklets](http://generationeurope.org/booklets)) and the typology defined in Chapter C, Paragraph 4. Identifying as much as possible their status, role and power
7. Build the lines and relations between them (steps 6 and 7), approx. 60 min.
8. Back in plenary, share results and draw / agree on the map of stakeholders with figures and lines

→

## MORE METHODS

9. Identify together the barriers and bridges and the synergies, alliances or conflicts (according to intensity scale from 1 to 10) within the ecosystem (steps 8 and 9), approx. 60 min.
10. Define the longer-term strategy and the shorter-term tactics to “use” the stakeholders’ power to answer the “initial” question, approx. 30 min.

### Debriefing

Question to the facilitator: Do you feel comfortable to run a sociogram exercise?

Questions at the end of the exercise with the participants (community of practice or youngsters, according to the target group):

- How did you personally feel in front of the group?
- What was the importance or difficulty of the semantic, i.e. with the words/concepts/groups names used?
- Have you had the feeling that your vision of the conflict enlarged?
- Do you feel that the objective of the exercise has been met?
- Do you have the feeling that the sociogram is a good method to approach a conflict?

Other ideas for methods to work with a group on the notions of community links and synergies can be found in the **Generation Europe Method Box** (Generation Europe, 2021): To introduce how values can be shared in a community, check out the method “The Most Important Thing” (p. 72). To start imagining a multi-level stakeholder synergy for problem solving, check “The Solution Tree” (p. 86).

The **Compass** manual for human rights education with young people, published by the Council of Europe (Brander et al., 2020) is another useful source of inspiration. The dynamic tool “Making Links” (p.225) is a good help to create synergies with major stakeholders in order to consolidate the democracy, hence the participation of the youngsters and the community/ies they belong to in the democratic life of their ecosystem. And to measure the degree of participation of these youngsters within their communities, or within any other social circle they belong to, “On the Ladder” (p. 238) is quite useful.



In the network of Generation Europe – The Academy, the further development and testing of new methods is an ongoing process. We will continue to share our experiences with the community of practice. For example, our network partner IRENIA recently collected “Messages in a Bottle” in their local community. By this, the local youth group wanted to raise awareness and start an exchange about racism with the inhabitants of the Raval area of Barcelona. It turned out that the method was also a great help to build up a team spirit within the local youth group and to connect with likeminded people in the community.

Finally, **the Guide to Activism**, as well as the **handbook “Take Power”**, released in the frame of Generation Europe – The Academy, are also valuable tools. We collected links to tools available to download at [generationeurope.org/booklets](http://generationeurope.org/booklets). You can also scan the QR code after the reference and literature section to access the website.



Figure 6: Waiting for messages in the bottle in the framework of the local project

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## USEFUL LINKS

We have collected links to useful resources on group communication, group development and related topics. Go to <https://generationeurope.org/booklets> or scan the following QR code:



## ABOUT GENERATION EUROPE – THE ACADEMY

Generation Europe – The Academy is an international network of youth work organisations and a funding programme for European cooperation. We want social participation for all. Young people raise their voices and take action: in their local communities and across all boundaries. Together, we are contributing to an active and inclusive European citizenship.

The young people of our network form local groups and connect at international youth encounters. Together, we create opportunities for participation on local and European level, regardless of origin, parents' income and previous success in the formal education system. In each of our project partnerships, youth from three countries work together. They identify local problems and support each other to address them.

# GLOSSARY

**Local Group:** A group of young people organised at a local partner organisation in the network of Generation Europe – The Academy.

**Partnership:** International group consisting of three local partner organisations, that signed a partnership agreement, and their local groups.

**Project manager:** A person who is responsible for the general management of the matters concerning Generation Europe – The Academy at the local partner organisation: planning, implementation, accounting and reporting. He\*she has decision making competences in his\*her organisation.

**Youth leader:** A professional working in the field of non-formal education, that takes responsibility for the local group and/or the youth encounter.

**Ambassadors:** Former participants of international youth encounters, that are very active and interested. They are trained to take responsibilities on all levels of Generation Europe – The Academy. They become

mentors in their local groups, a link between the youth leaders and the local youth, and also important advocates for the needs of young people in Europe.

**Participants:** Young people who are taking part in the local group and/or in the youth encounter. (In some cases the local group is really big and only parts of the local group will also join the youth encounter.)

**Activity:** Umbrella term for workshops, excursions, games, informal moments, free time activities and so on.

**Method:** Pedagogical concept of an activity, that also defines its aim. It also has different parts like introduction, implementation, reflection.

**Method Sheet:** The form where all the information needed for carrying out an activity is explained.

**Facilitator:** A person that has different roles/tasks at an event or activity, like moderating, presenting, visualising. A facilitator can also be a project manager, youth leader, ambassador, participant or an invited expert.

## ***ABBREVIATIONS***

### **IBB e.V.**

Internationales Bildungs- und Begegnungswerk e.V. / International Association for Education and Exchange. IBB e.V. is the coordinating association of Generation Europe – The Academy.

### **GenE-A**

Generation Europe – The Academy

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