

Interreg
Danube Region



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Community Engagement Plan

for RurALL communities in rural areas of
Danube area

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INTRODUCTION

The RurALL starting point:
As rural dynamics evolve, traditional engagement methods may fall short, necessitating innovative strategies.

RurALL addresses the challenge of depopulation in rural areas that is considered a major challenge in the Danube area. The project's main objective is to develop a governance model on addressing depopulation in rural areas. To do so, it aims at improving planning, management, decision-making and collaborative capacities of rural communities when exploiting the potential of deteriorating dwellings. RurALL will bring together a critical mass of international experts, policy-makers and citizens, and enable intense knowledge exchange, pooling of ideas and resources, uptake of good practises and innovative and/or improved solutions.

Core concept of RurALL is the New European Bauhaus initiative¹. In line with the initiative's motto »beautiful | sustainable | together«, community engagement is a crucial element to bring forth sustainable and aesthetically pleasing innovative solutions for rural areas. In particular, the variety of the Danube region in many regards – political, cultural, or socioeconomic, just to name a few – allows for a rich tapestry of the RurALL project.

This Community Engagement Plan (CEP) aims to have practical value for partners in the RurALL project and for anyone collaborating with communities in their environment, work, or projects. It supports everyone who engages in community development with the awareness that inclusion and collaboration enable to achieve positive outcomes for the community and each individual within it.

The Community Engagement Plan provides an outline for the piloting activities in later stages of the project. It introduces the New European Bauhaus Principles and provides an overview on the status quo on community engagement in RurALL municipalities. To offer partners a suitable

¹ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en (12.06.2024)

process while encouraging flexible implementation, we opted for an approach of Design Thinking. By integrating principles of Design Thinking and the New European Bauhaus, the RurALL community engagement strategy encourages an inclusive, sustainable space, establishing new and innovative ideas for dwellings in rural areas and finding entrepreneurial ideas.

Methodologically, we drew overall guidelines for community engagement from the New European Bauhaus initiative and further literature, complemented by partners' inputs via desk analysis and questionnaires. As the RurALL piloting areas are different and complex and some already rely on locally established engagement approaches, the strategy for community engagement and the presented approaches are a theoretical and practical offer, rather than a mandatory approach. To better understand communities' needs, preferences and perspectives, we gathered and systematically reviewed insights from project partners on community engagement in rural areas that are part of RurALL. This analysis of questionnaire data helped us identify the most suitable engagement approaches and methods and ensure that the project's initiatives will be well-aligned with the community's context and expectations. Moreover, to acknowledge the unique situations of rural areas, we conducted interviews to deepen our understanding of the specificities of the Danube area and to tailor the overall framework to partners' needs.

The CEP serves as a comprehensive guide, detailing a suitable community engagement approach. It provides actionable insights and recommendations for effectively involving rural communities in the project. At the heart of our project is the belief that meaningful community engagement is essential for driving positive change and promoting sustainable development in rural areas. By actively involving residents, local organizations, authorities, and other stakeholders, we aim to harness the diverse perspectives, expertise, and energies of our community members to address shared challenges and capitalize on opportunities for growth. Our goal is to enhance the project's impact by leveraging community strengths, addressing their concerns, and ensuring that engagement activities are both inclusive and effective.

The plan contains general universal guidelines, instructions and methods for organizing and implementing an inclusive engagement process. It serves as a valuable tool for those who want to get involved in community engagement and collaborative processes in their environment. However, it does not aim to address all the questions and challenges that each territorial partner will encounter during the implementation process in their environment. Some questions and challenges will have to be addressed by the partners themselves, with the assistance of a wealth of knowledge and resources gathered on the World Wide Web or through collaboration with experts in their local environment. The plan will guide them in finding the direction and path to reach the goal.

We invite you to join us on this journey of co-creation and collaboration as we strive to build a stronger, more resilient community. Together, we can make a meaningful difference and create lasting positive impact.

The New European Bauhaus

At the heart of RurALL is the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative, embodying the ethos of »beautiful | sustainable | together.« These core values guide the implementation of transformative projects, ensuring that solutions in the built environment are both innovative and aesthetically pleasing, achieved through collaborative efforts. The NEB initiative is inspired by the historical Bauhaus movement and it sets out to connect the European Green Deal² to concrete living spaces and experiences.

The European Commission envisions the NEB³ as a key initiative for advancing a greener and more inclusive future, as NEB »(...) is a project of hope and perspectives. It brings a cultural and creative dimension to the European Green Deal to enhance sustainable innovation, technology and economy. It brings out the benefits of the environmental transition through tangible experiences at the local level. It improves our daily life.«⁴ The initiative aims to integrate sustainability with aesthetics, fostering innovation that benefits both the environment and society. Rather than being a top-down approach, the NEB encourages collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders, including multinational corporations, local community groups, and individuals. In this way, the NEB seeks to ensure that accessibility and diversity are central to its projects, and where accessibility and diversity aren't afterthoughts but guiding principles.

This vision aligns with the European Commission's broader climate agenda, aiming to transform abstract sustainability goals into practical, impactful solutions that are co-created by and for Europeans.

² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en (12.06.2024)

³ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/about/about-initiative_en (13.06.2024)

⁴ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0573&from=EN#:~:text=The%20New%20European%20Bauhaus%20\(NEB,experiences%20at%20the%20local%20level.](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0573&from=EN#:~:text=The%20New%20European%20Bauhaus%20(NEB,experiences%20at%20the%20local%20level.) (13.06.2024)

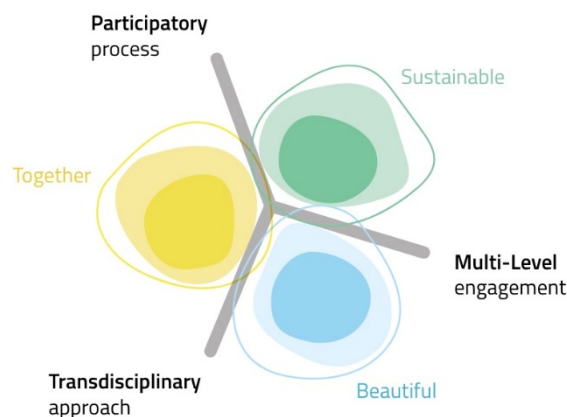


Figure 1: Values and Principles of New European Bauhaus (NEB Compass)

The NEB Compass published by NEB initiative serves as a navigational tool for aspiring creators within the NEB framework⁵. It outlines the key characteristics of successful NEB endeavours and provides directional guidance for change. In the NEB Compass, the European Commission acknowledges that a profound transformation must occur across multiple fronts to truly realize the aspirations of the European Green Deal and foster a sustainable society. Sustainability isn't a solo endeavour; it requires a collaborative effort involving a myriad of stakeholders. At the societal level, achieving environmental progress necessitates not just technological advancements, but also shifts in economic structures and power dynamics. We must delve deeper, addressing ingrained behaviours, worldviews, and paradigms to effect meaningful change. On an individual level, sustainability hinges on virtues like compassion, empathy, and creativity. It's about fostering a sense of unity and empowering people to embrace new perspectives and paradigms. To inspire action, we must make sustainability tangible and relevant to everyday lives. The quality of our living environments is paramount, and art and culture serve as potent catalysts for improvement. Leveraging frameworks such as the Davos Baukultur Quality System⁶ provides a solid foundation for this endeavour. Ultimately, the transition towards sustainability transcends mere environmentalism; it's equally a cultural and social metamorphosis. This is the central tenet that the New European Bauhaus seeks to explore and champion.⁷ Also a supportive document on NEB is the NEB Toolbox which »(...) aims at supporting the interaction and engagement of the project team and the project stakeholders through co-creative activities to shape NEB projects. To this aim, it introduces a three-phase methodology (Identification, Exploration, Refinement).«⁸

⁵ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/document/download/405245f4-6859-4090-b145-1db88f91596d_en?filename=NEB_Compass_V_4.pdf (14.06.2024)

⁶ <https://www.davosalliance.org/about> (17.06.2024)

⁷ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/document/download/405245f4-6859-4090-b145-1db88f91596d_en?filename=NEB_Compass_V_4.pdf (14.06.2024)

⁸ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/document/download/3f591237-1626-4959-920a-5271382bdd1b_en?filename=NEB%20Investment%20Guidelines.pdf (09.08.2024)

Beside the three core values, activities and project should embrace three key working principles - participatory process, multi-level engagement, and a transdisciplinary approach - which guide how the project operates and ensure it meets its ambitious goals.

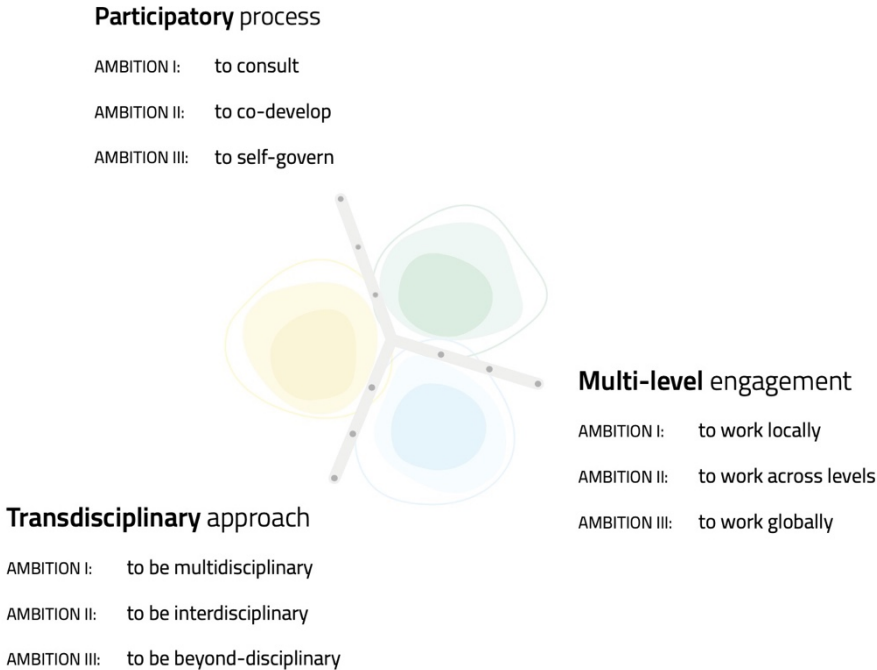


Figure 2: Working Principles of New European Bauhaus (NEB Compass)

The first principle aims to involve all stakeholders in an open and equal manner, considering diverse perspectives and making the project more inclusive and fairer. According to the second principle, the project should also work across various levels of governance and sectors. This means collaborating with local communities, organizations, and policymakers to create solutions that are widely accepted and beneficial for everyone. Finally, the third principle encourages to combine knowledge and methods from different disciplines to tackle complex issues. This holistic approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of social, environmental, and structural factors, leading to more comprehensive and effective solutions.

Each value and working principle defined in the NEB Compass can be applied to a wide range of transformative actions. However, the true uniqueness of the Compass and of the NEB lies in the combination of all three values and working principles. For a project to be considered a full NEB initiative, it must incorporate all three values and working principles, at least at a basic level. This holistic approach ensures that the project aligns with the NEB's vision of creating inclusive, sustainable, and beautiful spaces.

The New European Bauhaus initiative calls on all of us to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for our eyes, minds, and souls.

Beautiful are the places, practices, and experiences that are:

- **Enriching**, inspired by art and culture, responding to needs beyond functionality.

- **Sustainable**, in harmony with nature, the environment, and our planet.
- **Inclusive**, encouraging a dialogue across cultures, disciplines, genders and ages.

The New European Bauhaus has created a broad community of organisations and citizens all around Europe working around a common vision combining sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics. There are a number of practices that can be a source of inspiration and you can find them in the Annex V.

FRAMING THE LANDSCAPE ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As we navigate the landscape of community engagement, let's immerse ourselves in its principles, tackle the challenges, and celebrate the positive impacts to gain a deeper understanding of our communities.

Community engagement serves as a cornerstone for building vibrant, resilient communities. »Community is a complex system of interrelationships woven across social difference, diverse histories and cultures, and determined in the present by political and social trends.«⁹ (Ledwith, 2011, p. 34). Within this intricate web, community engagement becomes crucial, involving the active participation of individuals, groups, and organizations in decision-making, problem-solving, and collaboration. By empowering community members, promoting inclusivity, and fostering transparency and accountability, community engagement strengthens these interwoven relationships, ultimately leading to more resilient and united communities.

Moreover, community engagement is an opportunity to build trust among stakeholders and to shape better and more sustainable policies and living environments. The collaborative, dynamic

⁹Ledwith, Margaret. Community Development (Second Edition): A Critical Approach. REV-Revised, 2. Bristol University Press, 2011.

and inclusive nature of community engagement seeks to empower community members, fosters collaboration, and builds stronger, more resilient communities.

Community engagement is crucial, especially in rural areas, as it has the potential to transform isolated rural communities into vibrant hubs of activity and connection. It promotes stronger relationships and cooperation among individuals, grassroots organizations, local businesses, and authorities, driving collective progress and hastening the achievement of shared goals. Through active participation, individuals gain the confidence to drive their personal growth and contribute to community development, fostering a deep sense of ownership and impact within their local areas. Understanding the importance of engaging community also lies in understanding that *»[p]eople will act on the issues on which they have strong feelings. There is a close link between emotion and the motivation to act. All education and development projects should start by identifying the issues which the local people speak about with excitement, hope, fear, anxiety or anger.«*¹⁰ (Hope and Timmel, 1984, p. 8)

A key benefit of community engagement is its ability to incorporate diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise into decision-making processes. By involving a wide array of stakeholders, community engagement initiatives can generate innovative and effective solutions to complex challenges. *»The strengths of the methods (...) »how citizens participate«: the design, moderation and facilitation are essential elements of the methodology; they define the conditions for a respectful dialogue between citizens, leading to constructive compromises and consensus – or a space for ‘informed disagreement’ -, as well as co-developed, collectively owned recommendations.«*¹¹ Additionally, community engagement can cultivate trust, accountability, and a sense of ownership among community members, garnering greater support for initiatives and projects that benefit the community as a whole.

While rural areas may face unique challenges, community engagement holds the key to their transformation into thriving, interconnected societies by fostering cooperation, empowerment, communal support, and resource-sharing. Community development is inherently a mutual process that *»begins in everyday lives, understanding histories, cultures and values, and listening to hopes and concerns as the beginning of a process of empowerment and change«* (Ledwith, 2011, p. 51). It's vital to recognize that building strong connections isn't just about overcoming obstacles; it's about nurturing a sense of belonging, unity, and collective success. Through collaborative efforts, rural communities can unlock their inherent potential and create a brighter future.

To enhance this, we should lead the process with experienced facilitators. As *»(f)acilitators are impartial and trained in creating an inclusive dialogue. They ensure that all participants have an equal say and nobody stays silent. They introduce the purpose of the meetings, ensure that all citizens are*

¹⁰ Hope, Anne and Timmel, Sally with Hodzi, Chris. Training for transformation: A handbook for community workers (Books. 1-3), Mambo Press, 1984.

¹¹ CORPORATE GUIDANCE Citizen Engagement, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024 (https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ebc24405-4220-4273-9284-6ef84aa15344_sk?filename=Corporate%20Guidance%20on%20Citizen%20Engagement.pdf) (29. 8. 2024)

informed about the overall process, and make sure that the objectives of the discussion are reached.»
¹² (p. 55)

Involvement versus Engagement?

Fields such as governance, urban planning, or project development frequently refer to the terms of "public involvement" and "community engagement". While they seem similar, they differ when it comes to working with people affected by decisions or projects. Understanding the difference between these two concepts is important for anyone aiming to foster meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Public involvement

Public involvement is the process through which government bodies, organizations, or agencies actively seek input from the general public during decision-making. The aim is to ensure that the voices of a wide range of people are heard and taken into account when policies or decisions are made. Public involvement often follows a formal structure, such as holding public hearings, conducting surveys, or organizing town hall meetings. These methods allow authorities to inform the public about decisions and to collect feedback on predefined options, specific issues, policies, or proposals. While it can involve two-way communication, the public is often consulted on decisions that have already been largely framed by the organizing body. The emphasis is on ensuring that the public has an opportunity to express their views, but the actual influence on outcomes can vary.

Community Engagement

On the other hand, community engagement goes beyond merely collecting feedback from the public. It involves a deeper, more participatory approach where specific communities are actively involved in shaping the outcome of a project or decision. Community engagement focuses on building long-term relationships with these communities, ensuring they are involved not just in the final stages of decision-making but from the very beginning. This approach often includes participatory workshops, ongoing dialogues, and partnerships between communities and decision-makers. In community engagement, the aim is not only to listen to what the community has to say but also to empower them to co-create solutions and influence the direction of the

¹²CORPORATE GUIDANCE Citizen Engagement, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024
(https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ebc24405-4220-4273-9284-6ef84aa15344_sk?filename=Corporate%20Guidance%20on%20Citizen%20Engagement.pdf) (29. 8. 2024)

decisions being made. It is more collaborative and relationship-driven, with an emphasis on fostering ongoing connections with community members.

Engagement necessitates sharing of views and communication, which can take many forms. Public engagement practitioners and scholars often refer to a continuum or spectrum of engagement activities based on the direction of communication. The direction of communication (one-way, two-way, multi-way to all-way) is one major factor to consider in the design of public engagement efforts, because it implicates the goals and outcomes of engagement activities.

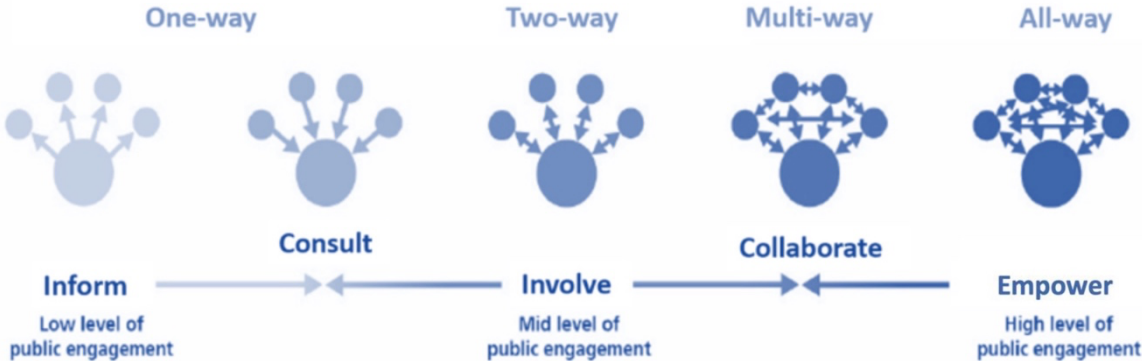


Figure 3: Level of public engagement (adapted from Spectrum of Public Participation - from the International Association for Public Participation.)¹³

In the community engagement process, the final goal should be to move beyond merely informing or consulting and strive for a deeper level of collaboration with the community. While informing and consulting are important foundational steps, they are often one-way or limited interactions that may not capture the full potential of community input. Collaboration, on the other hand, fosters a two-way, dynamic relationship where the community actively participates in shaping decisions and solutions. This approach leads to more comprehensive, inclusive, and innovative outcomes, as it leverages the collective expertise, insights, and resources of the community. By working together, both the community and decision-makers can ensure that solutions are well-informed, widely supported, and easier to implement, creating a shared sense of ownership and responsibility. Empowering the community further can solidify long-term trust and engagement, but at the very least, aiming for collaboration should be seen as a critical success factor for sustainable and meaningful results.

So, the key difference between public involvement and community engagement lies in the depth and nature of participation. Public involvement often focuses on **gathering input** at specific points in the decision-making process, while community engagement is more continuous and seeks to **empower community members** to play a more active role. While public involvement is typically broader and aimed at ensuring a wide range of voices are heard, community engagement is often more focused on specific groups, aiming to empower and enable them to

¹³ <https://www.iap2.org/page/SpectrumEvolution> (24. 9. 2024)

have a direct influence. Public involvement tends to be more top-down, where authorities lead the process, whereas community engagement is more bottom-up, fostering collaborative relationships and encouraging communities to take part in shaping decisions from the start. While both public involvement and community engagement aim to involve people in decision-making, community engagement, is more participatory, collaborative, and focused on empowering specific groups to take an active role in shaping outcomes.

Factors and Principles

In understanding the dynamics of community engagement, it's essential to recognize the variety of factors that shape interactions among individuals, groups, and organizations within a community. These factors significantly influence the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of engagement initiatives, offering insights into both the complexities and opportunities for improving community efforts. This chapter explores these influences, showing how aspects such as communication channels, cultural diversity, and governance impact engagement practices.

Effective **communication** is crucial to shaping engagement, with channels like social media and community meetings providing avenues for interaction. Respecting cultural diversity is equally important, as it requires sensitivity to different backgrounds and perspectives. Transparent governance and strong leadership foster trust, while the availability of resources, including funding and infrastructure, supports initiatives. A clear understanding of community needs enables tailored approaches that enhance participation. Trust-building, positive relationships, and the empowerment of community members through capacity-building initiatives all encourage collaboration. External factors, such as political climates, also play a role in engagement dynamics. Inclusivity and accessibility remain central to ensuring equitable participation, while feedback mechanisms allow for continuous improvement. By thoughtfully addressing these factors, communities can create resilient and sustainable engagement processes that empower residents and drive positive change.

Planning effective community engagement also requires careful consideration of factors influencing stakeholders' readiness, accessibility, and understanding. Subjective beliefs and strong opinions can sometimes create obstacles, underscoring the need for timely and accurate dissemination of information to prevent misconceptions. Positive attitudes and cooperative intentions are critical for success, while alignment with community values strengthens communication and information-sharing efforts. Motivation plays a key role in encouraging community members to participate, as does the belief that community action can lead to meaningful results. Trust—reliant on the consistent and transparent actions of others—is a cornerstone of cooperation. Communication shapes social norms, helping to reduce resistance to engagement, while a sense of belonging fosters identification with the community's goals. Legal and economic conditions, knowledge, and available time are also essential elements, as are established community habits, which can shape decisions and responses to engagement efforts.

Community engagement brings a host of **benefits**, some of which are immediately visible, while others emerge over time. One of the primary benefits is a deeper understanding of practices and the development of more comprehensive solutions. By bringing together the expertise and diverse perspectives of various stakeholders, engagement allows for a range of viewpoints that lead to innovative solutions. It also facilitates early identification of potential pitfalls, as community members can highlight overlooked aspects of planned decisions, thus helping to prevent unintended consequences. Engagement further supports smoother implementation of solutions by fostering ownership among participants, which eases the transition into action. Additionally, community engagement can help address conflicts early on by reconciling differing perspectives, thus reducing opposition later in the process. Finally, it enhances the legitimacy of decisions and fosters greater trust within the community, as individuals who are actively involved feel a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility, bridging the gap between “us” and “them.”

Despite these benefits, several **challenges** can arise during community engagement. Funding constraints, extended timelines, and the risk of high stakeholder expectations or dominant interest groups are common issues. A lack of skilled moderators with leadership abilities can also hinder the process, as traditional engagement methods can be time-consuming and may yield limited results. Community disinterest, stemming from a perception that public issues don't directly impact daily life, highlights the need to maintain stakeholder motivation. Trust is another key factor, as some may doubt their input will be valued. Poor communication can further alienate potential participants, who might not even be aware of engagement opportunities. Barriers such as limited time, digital exclusion, and resistance to change also complicate participation, emphasizing the importance of open communication and demonstrating tangible benefits.

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to approach community engagement as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Continually informing stakeholders about activities and addressing their suggestions and concerns fosters trust and a sense of ownership in the process. These challenges should be viewed as guideposts for creating well-organized, inclusive, and resilient community engagement efforts, rather than as obstacles to deter public participation.

The factors influencing community engagement closely align with core principles that guide effective practices; these shared foundations highlight the importance of inclusivity, transparency, and trust.

Principles of Community Engagement¹⁴

When engaging citizens in policymaking, it's crucial to avoid »rubber stamping« decisions. This means **genuinely valuing and working with citizen input** as an integral part of the process.

¹⁴CORPORATE GUIDANCE Citizen Engagement, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024 (https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ebc24405-4220-4273-9284-6ef84aa15344_sk?filename=Corporate%20Guidance%20on%20Citizen%20Engagement.pdf) (29. 8. 2024)

These engagements, funded by taxpayers, should be seen as authentic opportunities for citizens to influence policy with their unique knowledge, values, and perspectives.

Engaging citizens needs careful planning. To extend beyond traditional consultation, this implies dedicating the necessary time to involve citizens effectively from the design through to the evaluation phases. According to the principle of openness of process and process results, input of citizens is welcomed early in decision-making, fostering collaboration and informed choices. Yet, the scope and mandate of the engagement must be clear from the outset, ensuring the process is well-defined and aligned with the available resources. Inclusiveness is key, with participants selected to reflect demographic and geographic diversity. This builds on the insight that everyone in the community has something to offer. *»Most communities address social and economic problems with only a small amount of their total capacity. Much of the community capacity is not used and is needed! This is the challenge and opportunity of community engagement. Everyone in a community has something to offer. There is no one we don't need.«*¹⁵ Transparency is essential, with clear communication throughout the process and information readily accessible in the participants' native languages. A good engagement process also includes timely feedback, as participants should know how their input will be used and what the follow-up steps will be. The integrity of the process must be upheld through professional planning, implementation, and evaluation, with experts ensuring rigorous and respectful dialogue. Finally, proper follow-up is critical to maintain trust and prevent frustration, as failed processes can undermine future engagement efforts.

In essence, effective citizen engagement requires a commitment to openness, inclusiveness, transparency, and respectful dialogue, ensuring that citizens' voices genuinely shape policy outcomes. We should embrace the principle of openness, welcoming input from interested parties at the earliest stages of decision-making. This inclusivity fosters a collaborative atmosphere where diverse perspectives can contribute to informed choices. Special emphasis should be on principle of accessibility by making the process, as well as all materials and professional resources readily available to the community. This ensures that information necessary for meaningful engagement is easily accessible to all stakeholders. Also, we commit to the principle of responsiveness, ensuring that participants receive feedback on the consideration of their input. Here, clear communication on the rationale behind decisions strengthens trust and accountability. Lastly, we emphasize the principles of transparency and traceability, providing clear information on the purpose of community involvement, the regulatory content, participation methods and deadlines, and the handling of received proposals and comments. By publishing all relevant materials and responses, we promote accountability and demonstrate our commitment to inclusive decision-making.

¹⁵<https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/resources/Documents/WhatisAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment.pdf>. (17. 7. 2024)

Recommendations for Community Engagement

Effective community engagement is essential for fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and empowerment within a community. To ensure that community engagement efforts yield meaningful results, several **recommendations** should be considered.

Conducting thorough community assessments entails not only identifying key stakeholders, assets, and needs but also conducting **qualitative and quantitative research** to gain insights into the community's values, aspirations, and challenges. This requires engaging with community members through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and data analysis to ensure a holistic understanding of the community's dynamics.

Developing clear goals, objectives, and strategies necessitates a **participatory approach** involving community members in the planning process. This involves establishing consensus on desired outcomes, defining measurable objectives, and devising actionable strategies that align with the community's vision and priorities. Effective goal-setting involves setting objectives that provide clear direction and accountability.

Further, establishing **effective communication channels and mechanisms** requires a multi-faceted approach that caters to diverse communication preferences and accessibility needs within the community. This may involve organizing regular community meetings, distributing newsletters or flyers, and utilizing social media channels to disseminate information and foster dialogue. Additionally, employing culturally sensitive and inclusive communication strategies is essential to ensure that all community members feel represented and engaged.

Encouraging **meaningful participation and input** from community members involves creating opportunities for active involvement in decision-making processes. This may include establishing community advisory boards, organizing participatory workshops or forums, and implementing feedback mechanisms to solicit input and feedback on proposed initiatives. An important aspect is also building partnerships and collaborations with local organizations, agencies, and institutions. This can be done by forging strong relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and shared goals, as well as by leveraging resources, expertise, and networks.

Evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of community engagement activities is essential for continuous improvement and learning. This involves establishing clear evaluation criteria, collecting data on engagement outcomes, and analysing results to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Regular feedback loops enable stakeholders to reflect

on their progress, adapt strategies based on lessons learned, and ensure that engagement efforts remain responsive to evolving community needs and priorities.

By adhering to these recommendations, community engagement efforts can become more holistic, participatory, and impactful, ultimately contributing to positive social change and sustainable development in rural communities.

SETTING THE SCENE - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES WITHIN RURALL COMMUNITIES

Traditional assumptions are outdated.
Communities require fresh insights and actions.

Rethinking Community Engagement in the Danube Region

Community engagement is an established practice, but it's gaining fresh importance with the NEB initiative. The Danube region, with its rich diversity, presents unique opportunities and challenges for implementing effective community engagement. To make the most of it, it's essential to know where to start and to gather successful practices from the region for harnessing the full potential of this region's varied communities.

Gathering experiences

To better understand community engagement practices within rural environments, the project designed a tailored questionnaire to gather crucial information about existing engagement methods, preferred communication channels, and the unique needs and challenges faced by rural communities in project partner countries.

The questionnaire addressed both general and localized aspects of community engagement and gathered comprehensive insights from project partners to identify the most effective strategies for engaging rural communities involved in the RurALL project. Key areas covered by the questionnaire included **community needs and preferences** regarding project involvement and communication, as well as **obstacles and barriers** to engagement in local communities. Moreover, it addressed **current engagement methods** and approaches used within the communities, as well as preferred and used **communication channels**. As *»[t]he community profile enables you to make critical connection more readily if you juxtapose the voices of local people, statistical evidence, sociopolitical trends and community development interventions in a more structured way.«*¹⁶ (Ledwith, 2011, p. 36).

In rural communities, engagement approaches must be tailored to address unique challenges such as geographic isolation, socio-economic status, ethnic diversity, limited access to technology, and varying levels of literacy. By analysing questionnaire responses, we uncovered valuable information about the community's communication preferences, social dynamics, and

¹⁶Ledwith, Margaret. Community Development (Second Edition): A Critical Approach. REV-Revised, 2. Bristol University Press, 2011.

resource availability. This, in turn, allows for the development of targeted strategies that foster meaningful participation and collaboration.

Project partners across the Danube region in different countries enlightened our insights with their expertise and connections in their communities by filling out the questionnaires. The collective input from these partners provides a diverse and comprehensive dataset, reflecting the varied realities of rural communities involved in the project. [see Annex I]

The analysis of the questionnaire employed descriptive statistics as main method, and the findings shaped the engagement strategies recommended in this document. By understanding the current landscape of established engagement practices and by identifying gaps and opportunities, we aim to propose innovative and effective approaches tailored to the unique dynamics of rural communities.

»From a regional perspective it is recommended to not regard the countries of the Danube Region as homogenous entities. Rather they should be viewed of being the sum of quite differentiated regions, in terms of income, industrial structure etc., which all have their own needs to develop and prosper.«¹⁷
Recognizing this diversity is crucial for crafting tailored approaches that address the unique challenges and opportunities within each region, ensuring that development efforts are both equitable and effective.

The questionnaire analysis highlights key insights into community engagement across small rural municipalities, emphasizing common themes, significant differences, and actionable takeaways for the RurALL project. It reveals how demographic factors, stakeholder priorities, and engagement methods impact the success of community initiatives. Common themes include the importance of accessible communication and inclusivity, while significant differences arise based on demographic variations and local priorities. These insights provide actionable guidance for enhancing community engagement efforts, with further details available in the Annex of this document.

Community structure

Most respondents from partner organizations represent small rural municipalities, where personal engagement is more effective due to the intimate scale. Communities exhibit diverse characteristics with respect to age, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic aspects. Socio-economic diversity stands out as a key factor, indicating a need for inclusive engagement initiatives that consider financial disparities. Age diversity is also crucial, requiring strategies that engage multiple generations. Geographic dispersion and linguistic differences further emphasize the necessity of regional representation and multilingual materials, particularly for minority groups like the Roma community. These variations stress the importance of tailoring engagement strategies to the unique makeup of each community. In terms of stakeholder priorities, partners rank government agencies and faith-based organizations as the most

¹⁷Centre for European Economic Research GmbH (ZEW) Mannheim (2015), "Socio-economic assessment of the Danube Region: state of the region, challenges and strategy development", Final Report Part 1 – Update, available at https://ftp.zew.de/pub/zew-docs/gutachten/DanubeRegionFinalReportPartI_Update2015.pdf (10.7.2024)

influential stakeholders in community development, followed by experts and community organizations. Surprisingly, residents are seen as the least important stakeholders, which suggests that efforts to enhance resident involvement and empowerment are necessary. To make engagement efforts more impactful, the analysis suggests a shift toward increasing the role of residents in decision-making processes, ensuring their perspectives are more thoroughly integrated into community development projects.

Established community engagement methods

Traditional methods dominate community engagement strategies, with 58% of respondents relying on community surveys and 50% using town hall meetings and partnerships with educational institutions to generate ideas. This preference for face-to-face interactions, such as collective brainstorming in community events, highlights the value of personal, direct engagement over digital tools. The analysis reveals that partners frequently use social media platforms, focus groups, community forums, and advisory boards to engage the public, while surveys, interviews, and public comment periods also play a significant role. Despite their less frequent use, methods such as participatory budgeting and hackathons are gaining traction but are perceived as less effective. To enhance engagement, a multi-channel communication approach, combining digital and in-person strategies, is recommended to reach a broader audience.

Perceived Challenges

Community engagement faces several challenges, with the primary barriers being concerns about conflicts and disagreements among community members, as well as resistance from specific groups. These interpersonal and relational issues are considered major obstacles to effective engagement. Financial and human resource limitations are also significant challenges, hindering the ability to fully involve the community in activities. Time delays, particularly in the early stages of projects, are moderately concerning but are often managed through strategic planning. Other obstacles include limited participation (reported by 16% of respondents) and resource constraints (34%). Communication and consensus-building pose further challenges, with 33% of respondents viewing them as major hurdles. Securing the support of community leaders and ensuring that engagement activities align with community needs are essential for overcoming these difficulties. Previous negative experiences with engagement tools create skepticism, while geographic and socio-economic differences exacerbate challenges, making it harder to engage dispersed communities effectively. Trust in local institutions also remains a critical issue, with many community members reluctant to participate due to past experiences.

Perceived Benefits

The analysis highlights the perceived benefits of community engagement, with the highest-rated benefit being the improved sense of belonging among community members. This underscores the importance of social cohesion and fostering emotional connections within the community. Transparency and trust-building are also seen as critical outcomes, reflecting the value placed on open communication and accountability in sustaining long-term community involvement. Practical outcomes, such as the increased relevance and effectiveness of projects, and the

tapping into local expertise, are moderately important. Interestingly, community ownership is ranked as a less critical benefit, suggesting that while it is valued, it is not seen as the primary goal of engagement efforts.

The analysis offers several recommendations to address the identified challenges and enhance community engagement. To overcome conflicts and disagreements, investing in conflict resolution strategies and training facilitators in mediation is crucial. Inclusive engagement practices should be adopted, actively listening to diverse perspectives and ensuring transparent decision-making processes. Efficient resource management is another key area for improvement. Partners should explore creative solutions to maximize involvement despite financial and staffing constraints. Streamlining communication, using multiple platforms, and leveraging local leaders are essential steps to ensuring broad outreach and building trust with residents.

The success of engagement efforts also hinges on personalizing approaches to the community's specific needs and context. A participatory approach, where residents are involved in the planning and decision-making processes, can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility. Emotional engagement, which connects residents to the larger community goals, can also strengthen participation. Tools like highlighting personal benefits, and celebrating small wins can make engagement more meaningful and relatable for individuals. Improving trust in local institutions and aligning engagement activities with the community's socio-economic realities are vital. Tailoring the engagement approach to reflect the diverse backgrounds and needs within the community is crucial for fostering stronger, more cohesive communities.

This analysis underscores the complexity of community engagement in rural, diverse settings. While certain obstacles such as limited participation, resource constraints, and conflicts present significant barriers, effective strategies that prioritize inclusivity, clear communication, and conflict resolution can greatly enhance engagement efforts. The key to success lies in recognizing the unique demographic and cultural factors of each community, leveraging personal interactions, and ensuring that residents are empowered and involved in meaningful ways. By addressing the challenges head-on and adapting engagement methods to community needs, partners can drive more impactful and sustainable community development outcomes.

THE RURALL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Traditional engagement methods may fall short, necessitating innovative strategies rooted in community-centric approaches and design thinking principles.

Based on the analysis of partners' responses, this chapter proposes a community engagement framework. It serves as a guide for partners, illustrating the process from broadly brainstorming and developing visions for their respective areas with experts, stakeholders, and the public, to formulating concrete investment ideas and outlines how partners can initiate community engagement or integrate established community engagement activities into the RurALL project.

In community engagement, transitioning from broad, general discussions to specific, actionable ideas is crucial for driving meaningful change and achieving desired outcomes. We explore the process of moving from general engagement to individual ideas within the context of community engagement planning. By understanding how to effectively harness the collective wisdom of the community and translate it into tangible initiatives, organizations and stakeholders can foster deeper engagement, ownership, and impact within the community.

The structured approach outlined here will enable partners to:

- **Initiate Community Engagement:** Begin by involving a diverse range of community members, experts, and stakeholders in broad discussions to develop a shared vision.
- **Integrate Existing Activities:** Seamlessly incorporate ongoing community engagement activities into the RurALL project to ensure continuity and leverage existing momentum.

- **Brainstorm and Develop Visions:** Utilize collaborative brainstorming sessions to gather input and ideas from various participants, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered.
- **Translate Discussions into Actions:** Convert broad, general discussions into specific, actionable ideas that can be implemented as concrete investment projects later on.
- **Foster Deeper Engagement:** Enhance community involvement by ensuring that initiatives are reflective of the collective input, thereby increasing ownership and impact.

By following this framework, partners can effectively bridge the gap between general discussions and specific investment ideas, leading to successful community engagement and meaningful outcomes within the RurALL project. However, given the variability in community structures, and the deriving different needs of communities in terms of engagement, this framework should be considered a suggestion rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Guiding Principles for Engaging Your Community

Before we delve into details of the framework, we present three general guiding principles for engaging communities. These guiding principles are important for all kinds of engagement in the RurALL project, to ensure open-endedness of the process and relevance for the local communities.

Start from actual needs!

RurALL as a project aims at developing concepts for long-lasting and sustainable renovation and (re-)use of abandoned dwellings in rural areas. However, partners should be aware that while this is without a doubt the focus of the project, this may not be the first thing to think about when exploring opportunities for community engagement in the respective area.

Rather than starting with the object to be changed (i.e., the abandoned dwellings themselves), it is important to identify the actual and specific needs of the community to whose solution the (re-)use of abandoned dwellings is supposed to contribute.

Therefore, the framework of RurALL needs to dedicate room to analyse and explore the actual and specific needs that the proposed solution is supposed to meet in the respective community.

Before you start ‘doing’, you need to ‘think’ – understanding (locally specific) reasons for depopulation

Reasons for depopulation may differ between areas, but also between stakeholders in the respective area. Therefore, it's crucial to identify the locally specific circumstances that lead to depopulation from different perspectives, find overlaps and identify main reasons. Subsequently, the selected engagement approach should provide enough flexibility and space to develop ideas in a co-creative manner. In any case, identifying the specific challenges of communities leading to depopulation is crucial to finding tailor-made long-lasting and sustainable solutions.

By acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs, concerns, and aspirations of all community members, including marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as minorities, elderly individuals, or people with disabilities, designers can ensure that solutions are truly inclusive and equitable. This requires actively involving stakeholders in the design process, providing platforms for their voices to be heard, and co-creating solutions that address their unique perspectives and experiences. Inclusivity not only fosters social cohesion and solidarity within communities but also leads to more resilient, vibrant, and thriving societies in the face of demographic challenges like depopulation.

Make use of what is already there

Every community is different, between as well as within countries and regions due to differences in demography, (local) politics, socioeconomic factors, availability in infrastructure or resources, cultural specificities etc. Accordingly, a one-size-fits-all solution is neither desirable nor feasible.

Therefore, a community engagement strategy should embrace these differences by valuing what a specific community has to offer as a starting point for initiating the work to be carried out in RurALL. To do so, a mapping of resources provides a valid starting point. In RurALL, this is accounted for in a specific regard (mapping dwellings with GIS). However, what we mean by “mapping” here goes beyond the mapping of dwellings. Rather, it explores all kinds of needs and skills present in communities – from creative potential like music bands to useful craftsmanship for renovating buildings, already existing engagement activities (regular’s table, citizen assemblies etc.) or investment capital (either private or municipality, crowd-funding etc.).

'Design Thinking' for Community Engagement

Design Thinking combines identifying problems with concrete solutions and allows for a flexible selection of methods. Originating from the field of design, it is oriented towards users, markets, and products.

Why Design Thinking?

Our questionnaire and interviews showed the variability of the initial situations of the RurALL communities leading to depopulation in the respective areas. Accordingly, RurALL developed a community engagement strategy that allowed to propose a specific, yet flexible process to cater to all communities' needs: prototyping inspired by Design Thinking.

Design Thinking allows to consider aesthetics and inclusion together with feasibility and practical aspects. It integrates ideals of community engagement like relevance of the problems and outcomes to people, openness of the process, inclusiveness regarding participants with RurALL's aspirations to make viable real-life contributions in its communities.

Design thinking is solution-focused and human-centred and consists of four key characteristics:

- it places humans at the heart of the method
- it embraces optimism and openness of participants and solutions
- it is an iterative and experimental approach using a variety of design methods
- it emphasizes collaborative and accessible methods of communication to share a common understanding of the project development (Raynor et al., 2017).

In theory, Design Thinking consists of several steps, which differ slightly between approaches and can easily be adjusted to specific situations (see figure below).

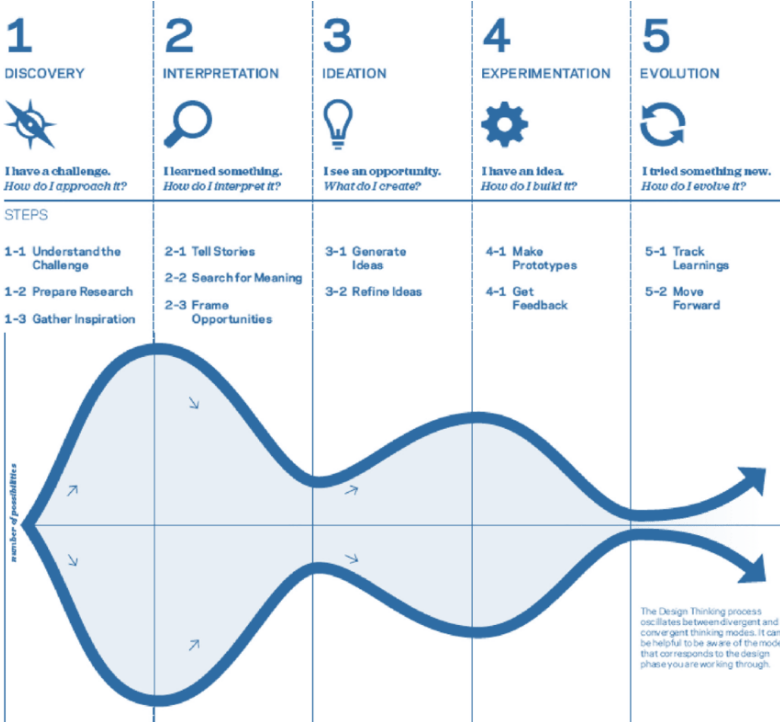


Figure 4: Steps of Design Thinking (Raynor et al, 2017, p.220)

Like Design Thinking, New European Bauhaus emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the specific challenges and aspirations of communities. By incorporating principles of Design Thinking into the New European Bauhaus approach, practitioners can ensure that their initiatives are not only aesthetically pleasing but also responsive to the needs and values of the people they serve. The connection between the Design Thinking approach and the New European Bauhaus lies in their shared emphasis on human-centred design principles and community engagement.

Moreover, both approaches advocate for **collaborative and participatory processes** that involve stakeholders in the **co-design of solutions**. By engaging communities in the design process, practitioners can leverage local knowledge and insights to create more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable outcomes. This collaborative approach aligns with the overarching goals of the New European Bauhaus to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and social cohesion across Europe.

Design Thinking emphasizes empathizing with users, understanding their needs, and iteratively developing solutions that address those needs. Similarly, the New European Bauhaus approach places a strong emphasis on creating designs that enhance the well-being and quality of life for people, considering aspects such as inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability. They advocate for interdisciplinary collaboration among designers, architects, engineers, artists, policymakers, and

other stakeholders. Design thinking encourages diverse perspectives and expertise to converge in the design process, fostering creativity and innovation. Similarly, the New European Bauhaus approach promotes collaboration across various disciplines to co-create solutions that integrate aesthetics, functionality, and sustainability, reflecting the values and aspirations of European society. Embracing a mindset of experimentation and iteration in the design process, Design Thinking encourages designers to prototype ideas quickly, test them with users, gather feedback, and refine solutions based on insights gained. Likewise, the New European Bauhaus approach encourages experimentation with new materials, technologies, and design approaches to explore innovative ways of addressing societal challenges while fostering cultural and artistic expression. This iterative approach allows for continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving needs and contexts.

Design thinking approach provides a valuable framework for implementing the principles of the New European Bauhaus by facilitating human-centred, iterative, collaborative, and adaptable processes that engage communities in the co-design of solutions for a more sustainable and inclusive future.

Implementing a laboratory of ideas: step-by-step¹⁸

The RurALL community engagement strategy is a core activity of the RurALL project. It draws from several activities, such as the governance model (T1.1), the community engagement plan (T1.2, especially the questionnaires and interviews with communities), the mapping of abandoned dwellings in the communities (T2.1), and integrates the activities of the transnational expert network (T1.3), as well as the activities developing business models (T2.3).

Disclaimers for partners

This strategy is a suggestion to engage communities in the RurALL project. Partners should adapt it to local specificities where necessary and make use of already established engagement activities in their communities or use methods that seem suitable for their specific contexts (for a range of proposed methods to choose from see for example Annex III).

However, please make sure to document any deviation and provide a reasoning as to why you selected another process (see templates).

The RurALL community engagement strategy in a nutshell

Overall, the RurALL community engagement strategy aims at **crafting ideas about community futures** and should be considered as **'serious play'**. It sets out to **generate ideas** on how to revitalize and design community live considering local resources, in particular built environment, as concretely as possible. The strategy provides a first step to accompany communities in the process of materializing their desires. Depending on ownership and local politics and policies, these ideas may materialize in renovation activities in follow-up initiatives.

The RurALL community engagement strategy consists of several consecutive face-to-face and online workshops. In so doing, the process allows to mobilize group dynamics, which is vital for

¹⁸ This process (including workshop materials) has been developed with Marie-Theres Zirm, cardamom (www.cardamom.at).

keeping people engaged throughout the process and beyond. To consider inclusivity and diversity adequately, local face-to-face workshops should be as easily accessible as possible.

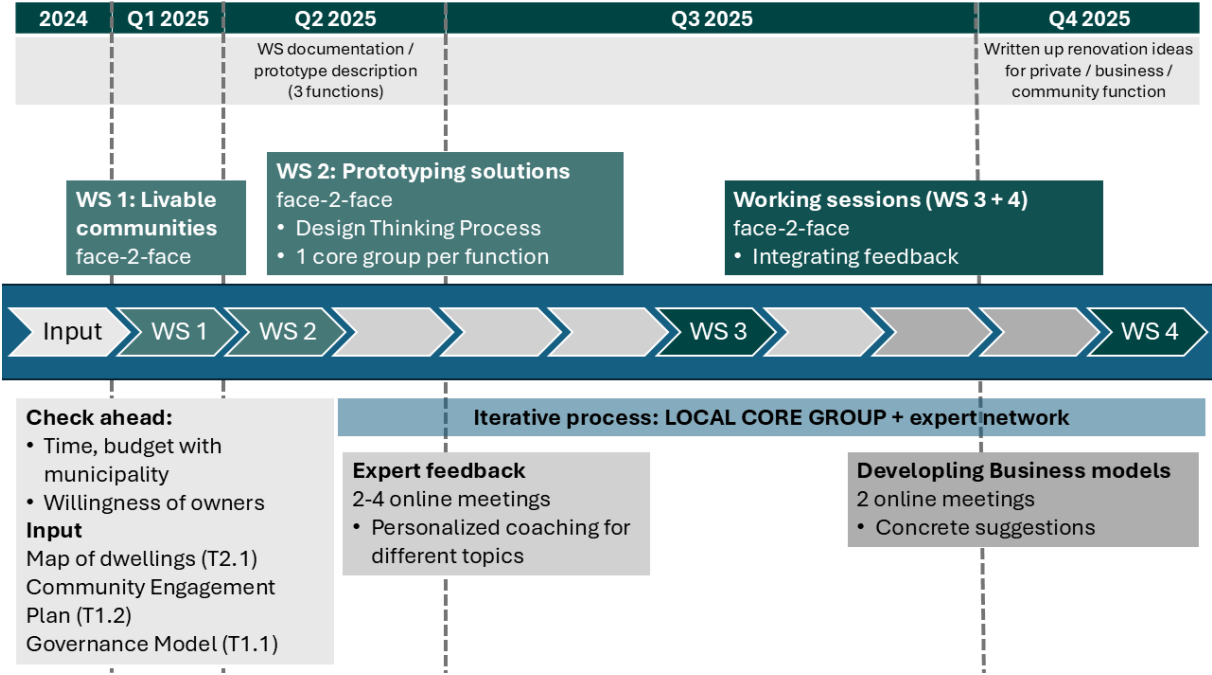


Figure 5: RurALL community engagement strategy

A successful community engagement strategy entails two preparatory steps. For one, verify the willingness of the owners of dwellings identified in the mapping to have their dwellings considered as prototypes (Details in Workshop 2). This is particularly important to build trust with the community you are working with. You might verify the willingness as you are doing the fieldwork for the mapping or in a subsequent step. For second, partners should check and define with the local municipality whether there is a budget and a timeframe to consider when developing ideas during the RurALL community engagement. Clarify if there are any funding programmes and their requirements. Based on the outcome, adapt questions in Workshop 1 and 2. In any case, the community engagement strategy can be developed by assuming no budget, while choosing a timeframe for reference is helpful for prototyping (the suggestion is to consider three years). This starting point may uncover that a community has many resources, beyond financial ones.

The RurALL community engagement strategy starts out by mapping the overall challenges according to three dwelling functions (private/commercial/public) (face-to-face workshop 1 – WS1) and developing solutions for these functions in a design thinking mindset (face-to-face workshop 2 – WS2). These two live workshops are followed by a series of online workshops with the transnational expert network (2-4) and business network (1-2) (online workshops) that aim at supporting to develop the ideas further. To keep the process in the communities alive, we suggest that the core groups meet at least twice to integrate the inspiration and feedback they get in the meetings with international experts (face-to-face workshop 3 and 4 - WS 3/WS4).

Each of the workshops has a dedicated aim to bring the ideas of reviving and renovating the RurALL communities further. The **first live workshop** aims at (a) raising **awareness** about the RurALL project; (b) defining the overall **objective** of the community regarding different dwelling functions, and (c) gather first ideas of **what is needed** to achieve these objectives. In the **second live workshop**, ideas are gathered and one for each dwelling function is selected and developed by means of prototyping. The **online expert workshops** (transnational experts, business models) aim at **providing expertise** to communities that is necessary to concretize and develop the ideas further. The proposed design ensures that the **feedback** of expert can be specific to the respective idea while at the same time community members can get **inspired** by others' ideas and gain insights beyond their own case. The **business model workshops** work in a similar way. The **third and fourth live workshops** are dedicated working sessions to integrate the feedback and inspirations provided by the experts (and fellow communities) in the online workshops and to refine the design ideas of workshop 2.

In the following, we will shortly introduce the live workshops to indicate their respective objectives. This should provide partners with a guideline on what to pay especial attention to. For detailed moderation sheets and check lists for organizing the workshops, please see Annex III.

This process (including workshop materials) has been developed with Marie-Theres Zirm, cardamom (www.cardamom.at).

Workshop 1: Liveable communities – a laboratory of ideas

Objective

The workshop has four objectives: to inform about the RurALL project; to interest participants in the project and the engagement process; to identify a broad range of ideas about what the community needs; and to collect first ideas about how to use abandoned dwellings.

Participants

This workshop is a combination of catching people's interest for the RurALL project in an interactive way and generating information about local resources. Thus, it should be as open and easily accessible as possible. One suggestion could be to set it up in a (quiet) café or bar in a cozy »living room setting«.

Timeframe

2-3 hours in the evening

Approach

The workshop starts with a short welcome and introduction into the project. Participants are invited to explore the question of how to keep their community livable. According to the three dwelling functions of RurALL (private/commercial/public), participants will split into groups and discuss the following questions:

1. How can my community remain livable and worth living in?
2. How can we use unused local resources, like abandoned dwellings or human/economic/natural resources, to achieve this in the next (X) years?

In the end, each group presents their results to the others.

Preparation

Adapt question 2, based on the discussion with the local municipality about whether there is any budget, funding programme or timeframe to consider. It is recommended to at least set the timeframe (f.ex. three years). If no budget is available, explore and make use of resources present in the communities, from human and creative resources to natural ones.

Prepare **fact sheets** to briefly present **the mapped dwellings** with potential to the participants during the break. Invite the owners of the dwellings identified in the mapping to the workshop, and check in advance that they are happy for their dwellings to be presented in a factsheet. Remind them that there is no obligation to implement any idea emerging from the community engagement. It is recommended that only dwellings of owners who have agreed to this should be displayed in the Dwelling Gallery.

If you do not have enough buildings, where the owners have agreed to the process, you can carry out Workshop 1 preparing factsheets for dwellings with characteristics typical of those in the area.

Workshop 1: Livable communities

Timing	What	Comments
30 min	Participants arrive	Provide drinks, create welcoming atmosphere
10 min	Welcome & introduction	Introduce yourself, the project and its objective
5 min	Warm-up	Participants introduce themselves: Why did you come here today?
10 min	The engagement process	<p>Explain the engagement strategy and its overall aim to participants. Why are we doing this?</p> <p>Explain set-up of today's workshop</p>
5 min	Split into 3 groups	<p>According to the functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ private (potential for individual use, single family use and multi-family use, potential use for elderlies and deprived groups) ○ commercial (potential for start-ups, small business, tourist services, etc.) ○ public (potential for common good, serving community needs, providing accessibility)
30 min	Discussion 1	<p>How can my community remain livable and worth living in?</p> <p>Participants gather around the respective flip chart and choose one person to write/facilitate (name – in case you are lost in documentation)</p>

		Facilitators will have to translate this into concrete ideas via templates (think about the 20 ideas we need!)
15 min	<i>Break & Dwellings gallery</i>	Participants walk around in the room to read the fact sheets, presenting the dwellings with potential identified in the mapping. Using post-its, they can add usage ideas & express preferences for the selection of each dwelling for prototyping.
30 min	Discussion 2	How can we use unused local resources, like abandoned dwellings or human/economic/natural resources, to achieve this in the next (X) years? See question 1
30 min	Present findings shortly	Each group presents their findings (5-10 minutes)

Set-up

The set-up of the workshop is very free. If you feel the three groups won't work (e.g., because there are not enough participants), consider a worldcafé setting where the group rotates from one function to another. The last session is then to sum up the discussion altogether. Also, you could think of other formats, like 'speed dating' or 'structured interviews'. [see Annex II]

Whatever the format, make sure that the set-up of the room is adequate (space/tables/flipcharts on tables/on pinwalls, marker, post its). Make sure that that the location is welcoming.

Don't forget

Before people leave, they are invited to the second workshop and asked to register. Additionally, use flyers, black boards, (community) newsletters, local newspapers etc. to inform people about the second workshop and to register for it. Ensure that local stakeholders are invited, too.

Workshop 2: Prototyping Solutions - Design Thinking Sprint to co-create solutions for YOUR town

Objective

The aim of this workshop is first, to identify community needs that RurALL could address (see principle 1) and second, to generate concrete and feasible ideas for how to (re-)use abandoned dwellings in a multi-stakeholder setting to satisfy the identified community needs.

Participants and requirements

People who have expressed interest by registering at the workshop. There are not specific requirements to join (regarding education, etc.). If possible, ensure that the local experts, house owners and stakeholders participate as well. Likewise, if possible, ensure to invite a broad range of participants (marginalized groups, gender balance, socioeconomically diverse etc.).

Preparation

Adapt the question (in “Understanding the Problem” below), based on the discussion with the local municipality about whether there is any budget, funding program or timeframe to consider. It is recommended to at least set the timeframe (f.ex. three years). If no budget is available, explore and make use of resources present in the communities, from human and creative resources to natural ones.

Invite the **owners of the dwellings** identified in the mapping to the workshop, and check in advance that they are happy for their dwellings to be used to prototype ideas. Remind them that there is no obligation to implement the ideas. It is recommended that only dwellings of owners who have agreed to this should be considered for prototyping. If, for example, you do not have a building where the owners have agreed to the process, you can carry out Workshop 2 using a prototype of a dwelling with characteristics typical of those in the area.

Timeframe

8 hours

Approach: Design Thinking Sprint

There are many approaches to Design Thinking (Raynor et al. 2017¹⁹ Lorusso et al., 2021²⁰), and while they differ with regard to the applied methods, they all aim at opening up the question at stake before narrowing down towards concrete ideas, i.e., they emphasize a thorough investigation of the challenge at stake before moving to the ideation phase. This emphasis strikes helpful when thinking about complex challenges like depopulation. For RurALL, we opted for a Design Thinking *Sprint*.

¹⁹RAYNOR, Katrina Eve, DOYON, Andréanne and BEER, Tanja (2017). Collaborative planning, transitions management and design thinking: evaluating three participatory approaches to urban planning. *Australian Planner*, 54(4), 215–224.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07293682.2018.1477812>

²⁰LORUSSO, Lesa, LEE, Jae Hwa and WORDEN, Elisa A. Design Thinking for Healthcare: Transliterating the Creative Problem-Solving Method Into Architectural Practice. *HERD: Health Environments Research & Design Journal*. 2021;14(2):16-29.
doi:10.1177/1937586721994228 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1937586721994228> (13.06.2024)

Prototyping Solutions - Design Thinking Sprint (© developed with Marie-Theres Zirm, cardamom)

08:00	01:00	Preparations	3 rooms with posters, moderation cards, flipcharts/pinwalls, markers, pens, Tixo, scissors etc.
09:00	00:15	Arrival, Check-in	Poster with three 3 groups if set menu: decision for lunch
09:15	00:25	Welcome in plenary	<p>Welcome CLARIFY the ROLE of participants (e.g., house owners, community) --> emphasize the (serious) game character of today</p> <p>Introduction territorial partner: Name - Organization - one keyword on the project - why am I here?</p> <p>Background & agenda of the day Aim and questions of the process Roles, Rules and Location</p>
09:40	00:40	1. Understanding the problem	<p>1. What is the question at stake? Understanding the problem Using our own associations/ideas and build hypothesis</p> <p><i>"Within the next (x) years and [the existing regional resources (knowledge, companies, engaged people)/ a budget of xxx €], what could be developed to make [municipality] more livable, starting from [abandoned dwellings/ building X] to fulfill a [private/ commercial/ community] function?"</i></p>
10:20	00:30	2. Asking people	Interviews beyond our circle/ group in pairs; one person asks, the other one takes notes (post its)

10:50	00:30	3. Define common ground (starting point for developing ideas)	Collecting & Focusing Results of interviews are presented in the small group and clustered (post its)
11:20	00:40	4. Find ideas	From POINT OF VIEW to IDEAS
12:00	01:00	LUNCH	
13:00	01:00	5. Prototyp >> 1. Prototyp	The PROTOTYPE develops
14:00	00:40	6. Pitching ideas Presentation and feedback	How do others (the market) react? TESTING!
14:40	00:20	COFFEE	
15:00	01:00	7. Integrate Feedback >> 2. Prototyp Preparation to present the prototype	Develop further!
16:00	00:30	8. Testing the prototype Presentation of the result	Testing
16:30	00:30	OUTLOOK	How do we proceed?
17:00	01:00	End of event	

Set-up

Make sure that that the location is welcoming (daylight, drinks/food and coffee). The set-up of the workshop should allow for concentrated group work, i.e., ideally has individual rooms for each group. Make sure that the rooms are well equipped (laptop/presentation wall, space/tables/flipcharts on tables/on pinwalls, marker, post its).

Don't forget

This meeting is important, not only because a prototype is developed, but because people need to be identified, who commit to not only to the Design Thinking workshop but to the whole engagement process. They need to carry the idea further and to integrate the feedback from expert workshops ('idea carriers', local core group). Ideally, it would be someone with self-interest in the matter, e.g. the municipality, the house owner, investors in accordance with house owners etc.

Online Workshops: Co-creating solutions for YOUR town (expert feedback and developing business models)

In RurALL, 11 communities are supposed to develop 3 ideas for abandoned dwellings each, one for each function (private, business, community). One person or small team (the 'idea carrier(s)') are responsible for the development of these 33 ideas; they pitch their ideas to, receive feedback from and exchange ideas with the RurALL transnational expert network and the partners responsible for business models.

Objective

The objective of these expert meetings is to develop the ideas for the specific functions further.

Participants and requirements

Experts (depending on the questions of participants), 33 idea carriers, territorial partners

In preparation of the workshops, partners must prepare a short, standardized description of the status of their idea and questions (one week before meeting).

Timeframe

3 hours each

Approach

The expert workshops are all structured the same way to ensure that communities have the chance of one-on-one in-depths consultancy. Also, they allow for knowledge exchange beyond the respective local community (transnational aspects).

In preparation of the workshops, partners must prepare a short, standardized description of the status of their idea and questions (one week before meeting). Based on these descriptions, facilitators assign ideas to experts, so all three idea carriers in one session address a similar/same

topic. Ideally, ideas of the same community are assigned different slots, so territorial partners can join each of them.

The online workshop itself starts with a short expert input on a general topic (e.g., architectural aspects, introduction to business models, common challenges in renovation, financing of renovations etc.). Then, the interactive part of the workshop starts. Facilitators assign participants to 11 parallel break-out groups according to the questions that the idea carriers would like to discuss with the experts. Each break-out group consists of one expert (on the respective topic), three idea carriers and – if applicable – a territorial partner. Idea carriers should not be from the same communities. The first idea carriers now have 45 minutes to talk to ‘their’ expert, while the other two listen (as they have a similar challenge to address, this may already hold some insights). Every 45 minutes, they switch roles, so every idea carrier in the break-out group gets their one-on-one consulting. Territorial partners who are not idea carriers follow ‘their’ community in all three sessions. To conclude the workshop, the experts will provide short spotlights on the discussions.

The format is flexible and can be adjusted (e.g., expert input in the beginning, coffee break,...).

Expert workshop/ business model workshop (ca. 3 hours)	
20 minutes	Expert input (on general topic related to renovation/revitalization)
45 minutes	Session 1 11 parallel break-out groups consisting of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expert ○ 3 idea carriers (feedback in 3 rounds) ○ Territorial partner
20 minutes	Coffee (optional)
45 minutes	Session 2 (like session 1)
45 minutes	Session 3 (like session 1)
20 minutes	Expert highlights (2 min each)

Set-up

Use any online collaboration software (Microsoft teams, Zoom, etc.).

Don't forget

In general, online formats are easy to use. However, make sure that you have at least 2 facilitators and one person for technical support for each meeting.

Workshop 3 and 4: Finalizing the result

Objective

These working meetings aim at integrating the feedback from the expert workshops and finalizing the prototype. At the end, the prototype and explanations could be displayed publicly (e.g., at the local authority, etc.).

Participants and requirements

These working meetings provide time and space for the 'idea carriers' to finalize the prototype.

Timeframe

3 hours each

Approach

A free working space to provide space and a dedicated time to finalizing the prototype. Ideally, territorial partners are present to clarify questions and to show commitment to the process as well.

Set-up

The set-up should be easy, but welcoming. A room/table dedicated to this work with material present should suffice.

Don't forget

Design Thinking (and the whole RurALL process) is about pooling knowledge and ideas and to commonly carry individual ideas further. Accordingly, make sure that the location is welcoming (daylight, drinks/snacks). The set-up of the workshop should allow for concentrated group work and should be well equipped with moderation materials (paper, pens, post its) just in case.

Please think about...

Roles of participants and personnel during the workshops

In general, be welcoming and appreciative of people dedicating their time to the process. They contribute voluntarily and this may not be easy for them. Also recognize each of their roles during the process.

Roles during WS 1

Stakeholders: Local authority & regional planning, local businesses, public

They are supposed to give their perspective and input throughout the process. Local authority/ regional planning should consider local strategies shaping the structure of their community/municipality, if applicable (e.g., regional development plans).

House Owners

This is a rather fragile position. In WS 1, it may be easiest, if they are not part of a group where their own house is discussed to not block the flow of ideas. It has to be made clear from the beginning that the buildings selected for developing the ideas serve as examples of how they could develop in practice, but that the process is neither an 'official mandate' by local authorities, nor is the implementation secured.

Roles during WS 2

Stakeholders: Local authority & regional planning, local businesses, public

They are supposed to give their perspective and input throughout the process. Local authority/ regional planning should consider local strategies shaping the structure of their community/municipality, if applicable (e.g., regional development plans).

House Owners

We assume that the ones participating in WS 2 are genuinely interested in the ideas that their buildings evoke. Pay attention on how they fit into the discussions. If facilitators have the feeling that house owners are curious about the ideas that evolve around their buildings, they may join

this group; if they feel that house owners are anxious and block ideas, it would be better to assign them to a different group. It must be made clear from the beginning that the buildings selected for developing the ideas serve as examples of how they could develop in practice, but that the process is neither an 'official mandate' by local authorities, nor is the implementation secured.

Idea carriers

Each detailed idea (one per function) should be assigned at least one person ('idea carrier') who is committed to the process (not only individual workshops). Ideally, 'idea carriers' don't work alone, but at least in groups of 2 to distribute the workload and to provide feedback to each other. Everyone with a stake in the matter could be an 'idea carrier', (e.g., someone really interested in the municipality or process, an investor, the community, a house owner curious about what could happen to their building etc.).

Roles during online workshops

Experts

Experts are supposed to give input, on a general topic dependent on what the communities need and on the individual project progresses as presented by the idea carriers.

Idea carriers

It is the idea carrier's task to ensure that the prototype is developed further, i.e. commitment to the project is needed. The idea carriers get the option of one-on-one consultancy during the meetings and integrate the feedback afterwards, i.e., to develop a concrete plan for one function for a currently abandoned building. In preparation of each of these meetings, the idea carriers need to prepare a short briefing on the current status of their idea and the current topics they need to discuss/ questions they need to be answered.

Territorial partners

Territorial partners (if they are not idea carriers themselves) 'follow' their municipalities through the meetings.

Facilitation/ Organization roles for face-to-face workshops

Main facilitator

Guides through the day and facilitates the overall process, keeps time of individual working times etc. This person should be familiar with Design Thinking as a method (or very well prepared), and to be aware of the potential pitfalls (eyelevel discussions, playfulness vs. expertise, etc.)

It is also important to emphasize the potential result of the process, i.e. to understand it as an exploratory 'laboratory of ideas' (rather than an actual renovation plan), where ideas are allowed to concretize. This is particularly important because there may be people present, whose houses are taken as examples to play through the manifestation of ideas.

Additional facilitators

Support the main facilitator and support discussions in individual teams.

Technical/organizational person

Takes care of the technical set-up and anything organizational (e.g. look, whether food is being served); kind of a 'jump around' kind of person who helps while others are busy. This is not obligatory but may take pressure off the facilitators.

Facilitation/ Organization roles for online workshops

Main facilitator

Guides through the day and facilitates the overall process, keeps time of individual working times etc.

Additional facilitators

Support the main facilitator and support discussions in individual teams. They also assign the breakout groups. Make sure that territorial partners can 'follow' their communities, i.e., no parallel consultancy for idea carriers of the same community.

Technical/organizational person

Takes care of the technical set-up. Important 'trouble shooting' function, do not skip!

»How to get people to come?«

Community engagement relies heavily on **active** participation from community members. Convincing people to participate in initiatives requires thoughtful planning, strategic communication, and an understanding of the community's needs and interests.

Understand your community

Before planning engagement activities, it's essential to understand the community's demographics, interests, concerns, and communication preferences. We already did some steps to evaluate valuable insights into what motivates our communities and community members to participate.

Broad, but clear communication is key

It is at most importance to communicate the purpose, benefits, and details of the engagement activities clearly and concisely. Use language that resonates with the target audience and emphasizes the relevance of their participation. Utilize various communication channels such as social media, email newsletters, flyers, posters, local newspapers, and personal approach to reach different segments of the community. Think about how to include and collaborate with local organizations, community leaders, schools, businesses, and other stakeholders to extend the reach of engagement efforts. Partnering with trusted entities can enhance credibility, access hard-to-reach populations, and leverage existing networks for promotion.

Have in mind that you have to customize messages to appeal to diverse community segments. Highlight how participation aligns with their interests, concerns, and values. Address potential barriers to participation, such as language barriers, accessibility issues, or conflicting schedules, and provide solutions or accommodations. Reach out to community members personally through phone calls, door-to-door visits, or face-to-face interactions, as direct personal invitations from trusted individuals or influencers can significantly increase attendance and engagement. On the other hand, it's important to offer incentives or rewards to encourage participation, such as free refreshments, gift cards, raffle prizes, or certificates of appreciation. Emphasize the benefits of participation, such as learning opportunities, networking, community empowerment, and the chance to influence decisions. When organizing an event, keep in mind which times and locations are convenient for the target audience. Consider factors such as work schedules, school hours, transportation availability, and cultural or religious observances. Choose accessible venues that are familiar and welcoming to community members.

It's a (serious) game

In the realm of community engagement, the approach we take can turn serious topics into opportunities for connection and collaboration. Creating an atmosphere where participants feel comfortable and valued is crucial for fostering meaningful interactions. An opportunity for participants to get to know each other and feel at ease in the group (e.g. introductions at the beginning and trust-building exercises later). In short meetings, these introductions have to be rather quick, but if all the participants do not know one another, they are essential. Otherwise, the group will not recognize or make use of the possible contributions of all members. In longer workshops, introductions should be given enough time, as this is the first step in building trust and community.

Building on these initial connections, it's important to maintain a dialogue that encourages participants to share their concerns, hopes, and expectations for the workshop. Even if the staff have gathered information beforehand, the participants need to share concerns with each other. This exchange of ideas can lead to a deeper understanding of shared goals and aspirations, further strengthening the group's bond.

Community engagement activities shall be interactive, informative, and enjoyable. After the activities maintain ongoing communication and engagement with the community. By keeping community members informed about progress, updates, and future opportunities for involvement, you cultivate a sense of belonging and ownership. This sustained engagement helps build trust and encourages community members to feel that their voices are valued and heard. By treating the engagement process as a serious game, we can harness the power of collaboration to achieve impactful outcomes that resonate with all involved.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Let's embark on this journey together, ensuring every voice is heard and every resource is maximized for the community's good.

In developing a community engagement plan for rural areas in Danube area, we kept in mind that a deep understanding and appreciation of the unique characteristics, values, and challenges that these communities embody is crucial. Rural areas often have strong community ties, rich cultural histories, and distinct socio-economic landscapes, which influence how they interact and engage with external initiatives. Understanding the nuances of rural life is paramount. This means that our approach to engagement must be thoughtful, inclusive, and tailored to reflect these core values.

Together, we will engage the community to tackle pressing issues such as the deterioration of dwellings and the challenge of depopulation in these areas. By focusing on a common goal, we can address these challenges head-on, turning them into opportunities for revitalization and growth. By working together, we can weave a vibrant tapestry of support and celebrate the strengths of rural communities while fostering resilience and a brighter future. Let's take these steps forward, united in purpose and driven by a shared vision of a thriving community where everyone feels empowered to contribute to its success.

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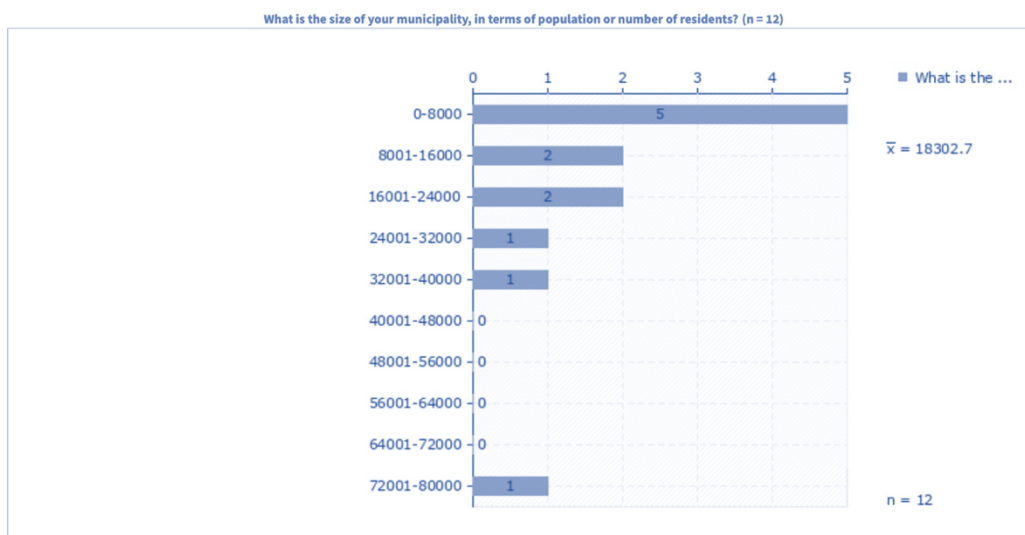
Annex

ANNEX I: Questionnaire Analysis and Findings

In this section, we present the key findings from the questionnaire analysis, highlighting common themes, significant differences, and actionable insights. These findings will inform the subsequent recommendations for community engagement, ensuring they are grounded in real-world data and are responsive to the actual needs and preferences of the rural populations involved in the RurALL project.

Small is beautiful

In analysing the state of community engagement in different environments, it was essential to understand the demographic context of the respondents' municipalities. Knowing the size of the municipality, in terms of population or the number of residents, provides valuable insights into the community's scale and can influence the interpretation of other data points. This context helps tailoring engagement strategies to suit communities of different sizes and ensures that the findings are relevant and actionable for diverse municipal settings. Since most of the communities are small rural communities, the approach can be more personal and direct. The x-axis on Table 1 shows how many municipalities answered, while the number of inhabitants that are shown on the y-axis.



Diversity characteristics

Diversity characteristics within the communities based on the provided answers shows the specific characteristics of the local environment that RurALL aims to engage with. The x-axis on Table 2 shows how many partners (participants) answered [more answers were possible], while the different specific characteristics are shown on the y-axis. All partners (100%) recognize socio-economic diversity as a significant and crucial characteristic of their community. This indicates a wide range of income levels, economic statuses, and financial backgrounds among community members. Addressing socio-economic diversity is crucial for inclusive community engagement and ensuring that initiatives reach all socio-economic groups. A significant majority identify age diversity as a key characteristic. This highlights the presence of multiple age groups within the community, from young children to the elderly. Engagement activities and later on solutions in pilot activities should therefore be tailored to be inclusive of all age groups, addressing the specific needs and preferences of each demographic. One-third of respondents indicate cultural diversity as a characteristic. This suggests that there are various cultural backgrounds and traditions within the community. To effectively engage with the community, it's important to recognize and celebrate cultural diversity, potentially through culturally relevant events and activities. A quarter of partners note ethnic or racial diversity. This points to the presence of multiple ethnic or racial groups within the community. We shall involve these different groups, ensuring representation and inclusivity. One of the partners reports that there is a significant Roma community and one that the ethnic diversity stands out in mining settlements, where over 30 different nations settled for work since 100 years ago, which also brings rich cultural diversity which is cherished and cultivated in their municipality. Also, for some communities, geographic diversity was highlighted, indicating differences based on location within the community, such as rural and remote areas. Engagement activities may need to consider geographic distribution to ensure that all areas of the community are equally represented and involved. Linguistic diversity is noted, indicating the presence of multiple languages spoken within the community, for those communication should include multilingual materials and translation services to accommodate non-native speakers if needed. While gender diversity is the lowest among the listed factors from partners point of view, it is still important to ensure that engagement activities are gender-inclusive and sensitive to the needs of all genders.

How would you describe the diversity within your community, specific characteristics of the local environment, that RurALL aim to engage with? (n = 12)

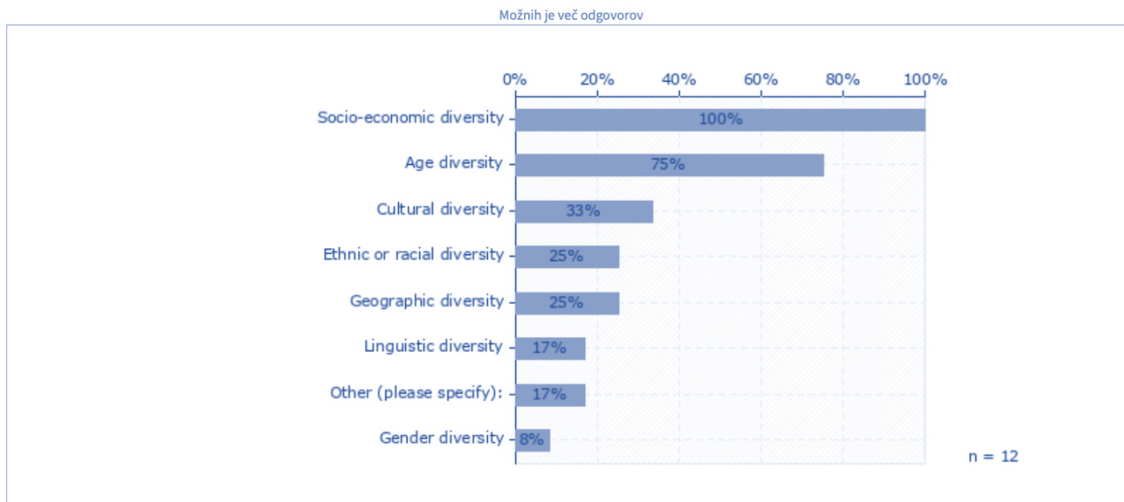


Table 2: Diversity (specific characteristics) within RurALL communities

The analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of diversity within communities. For effective community engagement, it is essential to adopt a holistic approach that considers socio-economic status, age, cultural background, ethnicity, geographic location, language, and other forms of diversity. By addressing these factors comprehensively, RurALL can create more inclusive and impactful engagement initiatives.

Targeting who?

With regard to stakeholders important for community development, responses of our questionnaire showed that government agencies are considered the most important stakeholders, with the highest ranking, which indicates a strong belief that government involvement is crucial for the success of RurALL. Faith-based organizations are also viewed as highly important and their involvement is seen as almost as critical as that of government agencies. Experts are ranked third and we anticipate that partners and community values the input of professionals who can offer technical knowledge and innovative solutions. Their expertise is seen as vital to achieving project objectives. Community organizations are next, as they play a significant role in local engagement. Tied with community organizations, educational institutions have a similar average ranking, where educational bodies are important for fostering awareness, education, and long-term sustainability of project initiatives. Compared to educational bodies, local businesses are ranked lower. Still, they are considered important as they may drive economic growth and provide practical support for community projects. Despite being the direct beneficiaries of the project's objectives, residents are perceived as the least important stakeholders in this context. This might suggest a need for better engagement and empowerment strategies to increase their involvement and perceived importance.

The ranking reveals that institutional and organizational stakeholders are perceived as more crucial the success of objectives of RurALL compared to individual residents. This highlights the

community's reliance on structured entities for support and guidance. However, it also points to an opportunity to enhance the role and engagement of residents to ensure a more balanced and inclusive approach to achieving the project's goals. The x-axis on Table 3 shows average ranking based on ranking from the partners, while on the y-axis stakeholders are shown.

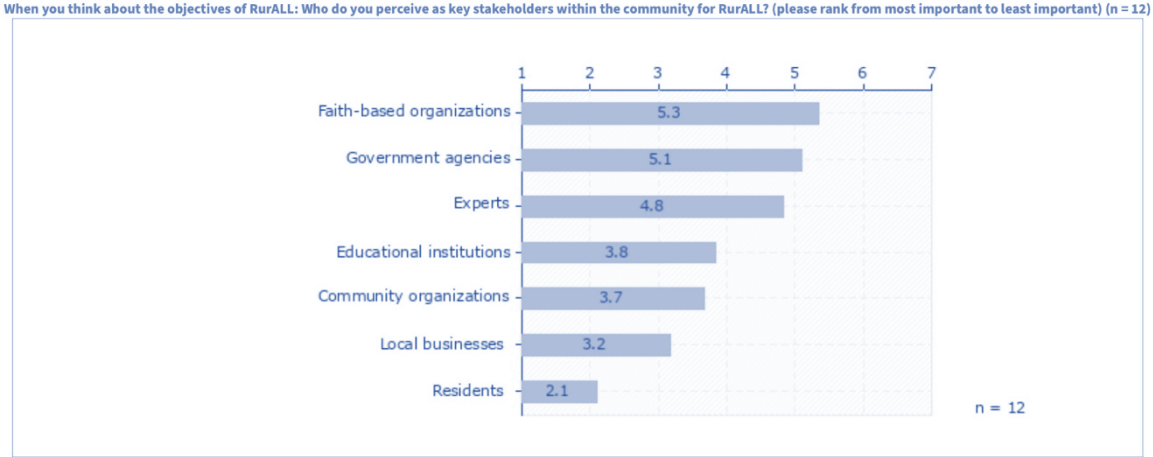


Table 3: Key stakeholders within the community for RurALL

Creating something new...

Understanding the mechanisms through which communities come up with new ideas or initiatives is crucial for fostering innovation and effective problem-solving. The most used methods are community surveys or feedback mechanisms (58%), which are effective tools for gathering a broad range of opinions and ideas from the community. This method ensures that many voices are heard and can highlight common concerns or innovative suggestions. Open forums or town hall meetings for idea sharing is tied for the second most common (50%) and they facilitate direct interaction and dialogue among community members. These gatherings can help build consensus and foster a sense of community involvement and ownership of initiatives. Also utilized by the same percentage of respondents is engaging with local schools, universities, or research institutions for innovative projects, where collaborating with educational and research institutions brings in fresh perspectives and expertise. Followed by brainstorming sessions and ideation workshops (42%) which encourage creative thinking and problem-solving. Collaborative problem-solving sessions or hackathons are used in a smaller scale (17%) as these intensive, collaborative events focus on developing solutions within a short time frame and with a lot of effort. Some of respondents indicated using other unspecified methods; meetings and small groups, where members exchange ideas and proposals, collectively developing initiatives that reflect our goals and values and exchange of ideas with civil society organisations and some local businesses. The least commonly used method are online platforms or forums for crowdsourcing ideas.

This reveals a preference for traditional and interactive methods such as community surveys, open forums, and partnerships with educational institutions for generating new ideas and

initiatives. While digital platforms are less commonly used, there is a significant reliance on direct, face-to-face interactions and structured ideation sessions. This suggests a community that values personal engagement and collaborative problem-solving.

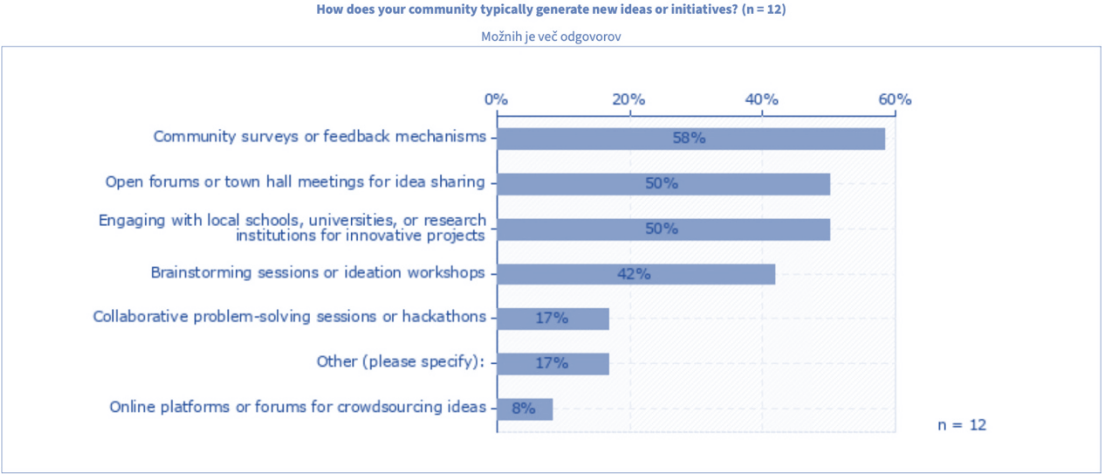


Table 4: Generating new ideas or initiatives in communities

Experiences with community engagement

Next set of questions on community engagement was dedicated to experiences on community engagement. Only one of the project partners didn't have the opportunity to engage or involve community in their events lately.

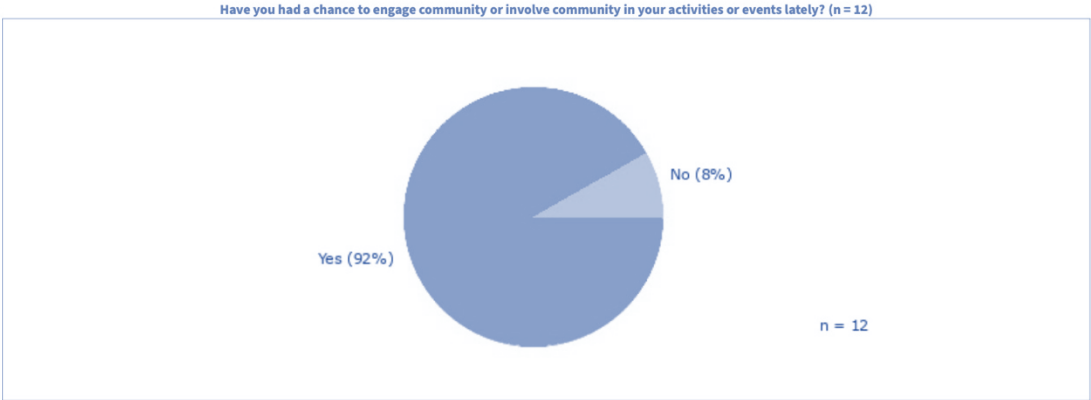


Table 5: Experience in engaging community in activities or events

Approaches

The majority who did involve community, the questionnaire aimed to understand the various ways that they have recently engaged with their communities and the methods used to increase

community involvement in the past. Organizing events and activities is the most frequently used method (75%) as they are effective in bringing people together and promoting a sense of community. The second most used method (used by 50%) are hosting workshops and training sessions that are effective in providing valuable information and skills to community members, thereby increasing their involvement.

Distributing surveys or feedback forms to gather input and open sessions with local council meetings are moderately used, as making surveys a useful tool for understanding community needs and preferences and on the other hand open sessions with local councils providing a direct channel for community members to engage with local governance.

Other means of involving community and ways to involve the community as the least utilized methods were the answers providing volunteer opportunities for community members, establishing advisory committees or focus groups (structured platforms for gathering detailed input and fostering community leadership, but their use is relatively limited), creating online forums or discussion groups (this could be due to a preference for in-person interactions or challenges in engaging people online), participatory budgeting (limited adoption, since it's a financial decision-making processes). None of the partners indicated the use of incentives or rewards, suggesting that this approach might not be considered effective or necessary in the community context, but should be put into consideration to use it as way to motivate or encourage residents within their community.

What sort of ways did you have to get involved with the community recently? How did you try to get more people involved in the past? (n = 11)

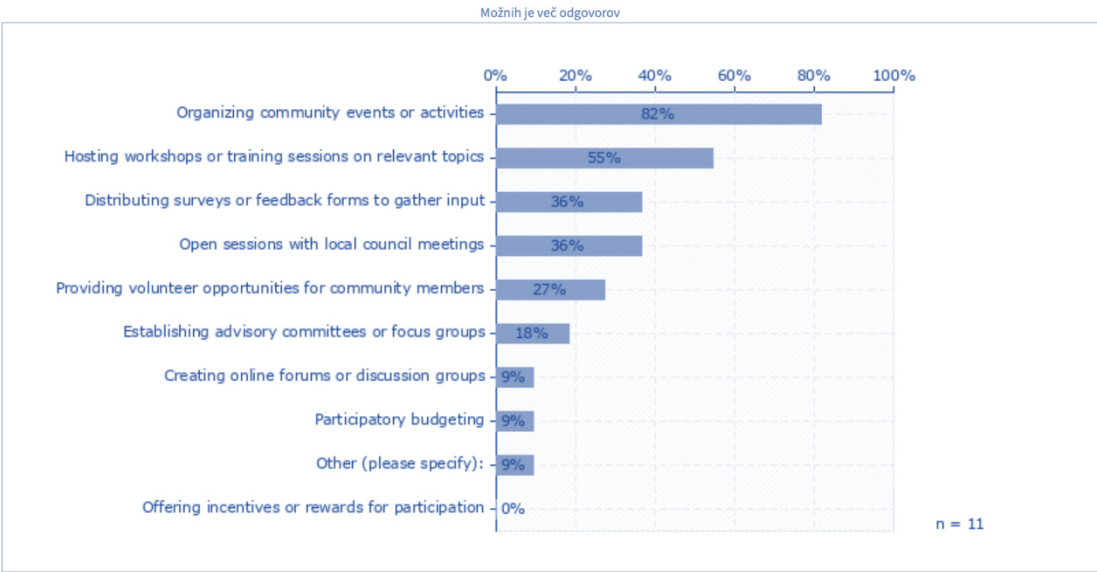


Table 6: Involving community

The analysis reveals a preference for direct, in-person engagement methods such as organizing community events and hosting workshops, which are seen as effective for fostering community involvement. Online methods and incentivization are less commonly used, indicating potential areas for further exploration and development.

Most of them have participated and organized activities within their communities. Yet, one has to consider the different scopes and application contexts of the approaches.

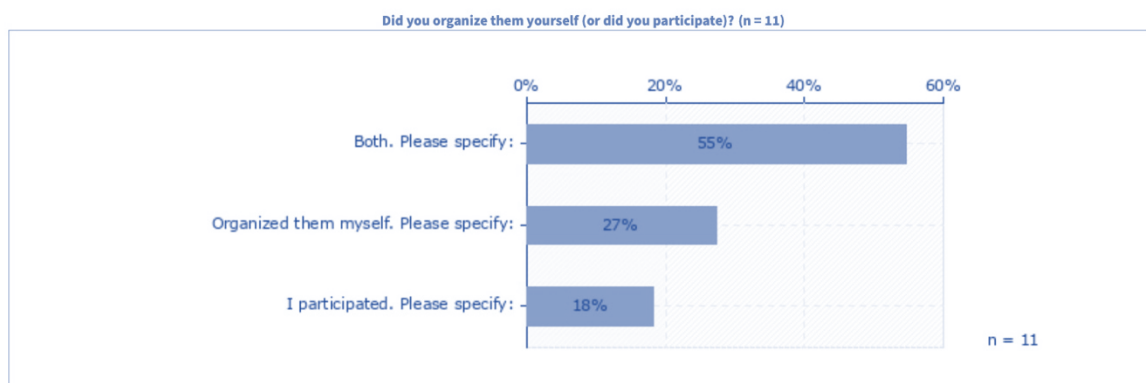


Table 7: Organizing and participation in community activities

Communication channels

By identifying the primary methods through which organizations interact with their community and stakeholders shows that the most of partners use events, happenings and community meetings as their primary channels. These events typically allow for direct interaction, real-time Q&A sessions, and collaborative decision-making processes.

Second most used channels are social media platforms that are widely used for their broad reach and the ability to disseminate information quickly to a large audience. Communication through these platforms is often informal, interactive, and can include multimedia content such as videos, images, and live streams. These platforms also support two-way communication through comments, messages, and live interactions.

The traditional form of communication via newsletters or local newspapers includes printed or digital publications that are distributed regularly to the community. They can offer detailed information and updates on various topics relevant to the community.

Combining multiple channels can create a more comprehensive and effective communication strategy. For example, using social media for immediate updates, newsletters for detailed information, and community meetings for direct engagement can ensure broad and effective community outreach. As other means of communication these channels were mentioned: cities app, website, web portal and television, organizations website.

Which communication channels do you usually use to connect with the community? How do you engage with people in your community and/or stakeholders? (n = 12)

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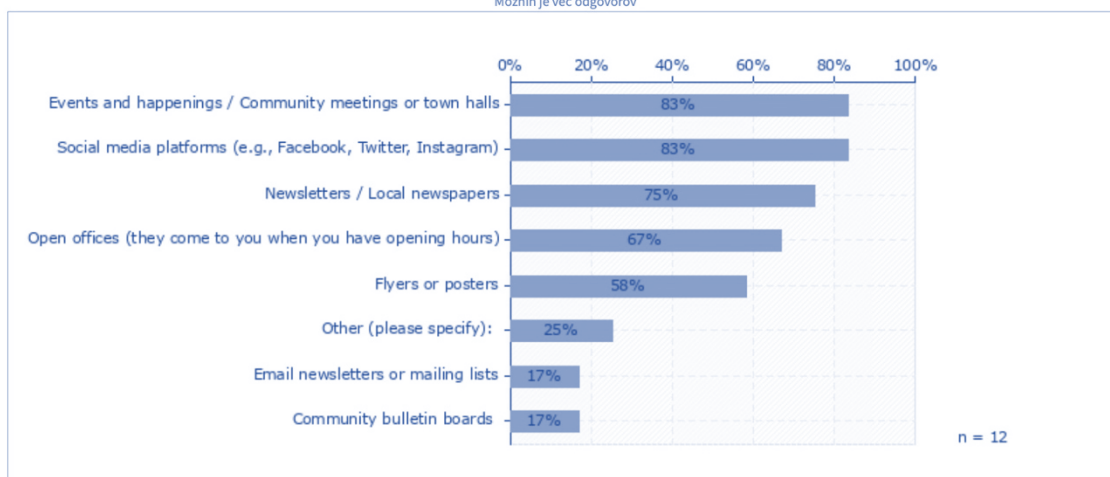


Table 8: Communication channels to connect and engage with people in community and/or stakeholders

Frequency

Most of community engagement activities happens more times a year or monthly (table below) on diverse topics which are listed and grouped by different filed sections, according to the answers in the questionnaires.

If you think about the community engagement activities listed before - How often do you/ does your organization or municipality organize community engagement activities? (n = 11)

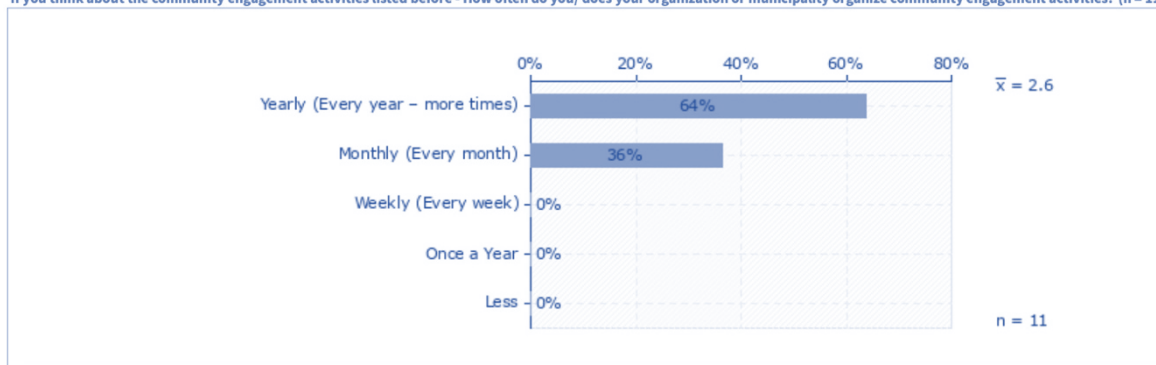


Table 9: Frequency of community engagement activities

Topics addressed by community engagement

We extracted four areas or fields; - community development, infrastructure and municipal development, local priorities and environmental planning and sustainability – of different topics that were addressed in community activities.

- **Community Development**

- Community projects
- Various events on particular topics (culture, economics, social, etc.)
- Identification of problems, development of solutions, launch of new initiatives
- Meetings with stakeholders to exchange ideas and discuss cultural events, agricultural support, and NGO support
- Weekly open office for discussions on relevant topics
- **Infrastructure and Municipal Development**
 - Goals and targets creation for EU calls
 - Infrastructure building/renovation plan of the municipality
 - Public transport
 - Participatory budgets
 - Community cleaning of the town
 - Signing workshop
 - IT skills workshop for pensioners
 - Public hearings on public space projects (square, main street, public swimming pool, community center)
- **Local Priorities**
 - Municipality development priorities: agriculture, culture, tourism, and ecology
 - Local issues related to culture and art, agriculture and rural development
 - Environment
 - Cultural heritage
 - Quality of life
 - Local food production and supply
 - Health
 - Local business development
- **Environmental Planning and Sustainability**
 - Environmental planning
 - Cultural events and community events with an environmental focus

Engagement methods

Partners were asked to indicate which engagement methods their organizations currently employ to involve people from the community; social media platforms, focus groups or community forums, and community advisory boards or committees are the most commonly used engagement methods among the partners. There is also a notable utilization of surveys or questionnaires, stakeholder interviews, and public comment periods or feedback mechanisms. A variety of other methods are being employed by the partners, showcasing a diverse approach to community engagement. The x-axis on Table 10 shows how many partners (participants) answered on average [more answers were possible], while methods used for involving people from the community are shown on the y-axis.

Which of these methods does your organization currently use to involve people from the community? (n = 12)

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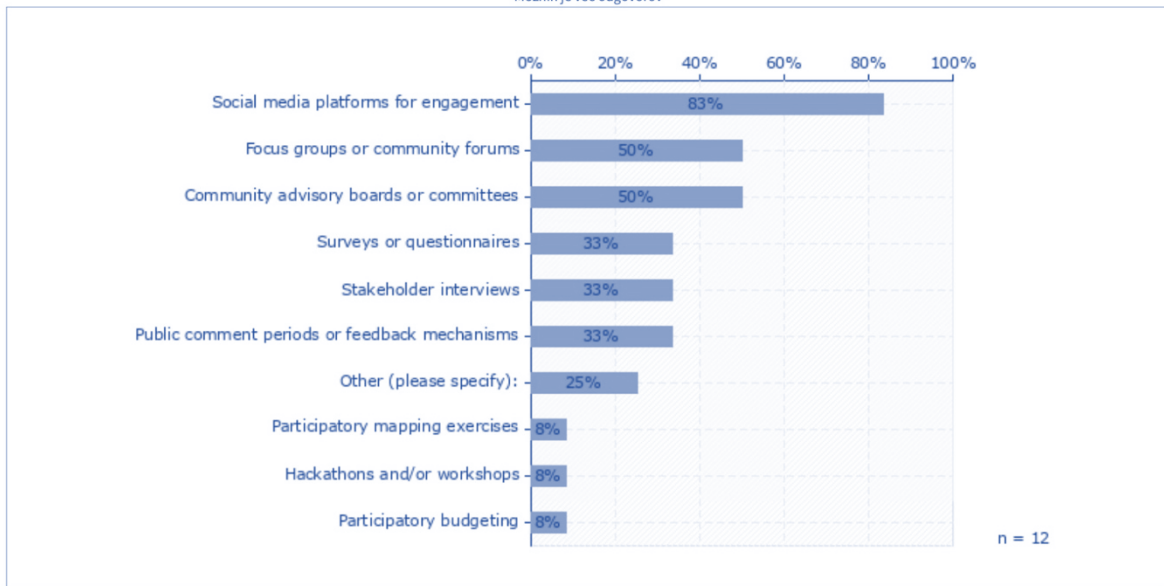


Table 10: Most used Community Engagement Methods

Perceived effectiveness of engagement methods

Then they were asked to rate the effectiveness of different engagement methods from their perspective. Social media platforms are rated as the most effective method, followed closely by focus groups or community forums and community advisory boards or committees. While surveys or questionnaires, stakeholder interviews, and public comment periods or feedback mechanisms are still considered somewhat effective, participatory mapping exercises, hackathons and workshops, and participatory budgeting received lower effectiveness ratings. The »other« category represents methods perceived as somewhat effective; traditional papers, cities app and mailbox, community meetings on the level of smaller communities and collecting ideas, requests and comments from the board representatives, highlighting the importance of tailoring engagement strategies to the specific context and needs of the community.

From your perspective, which engagement tool or method do you find most effective in your community? (please choose max. 3) (n = 12)

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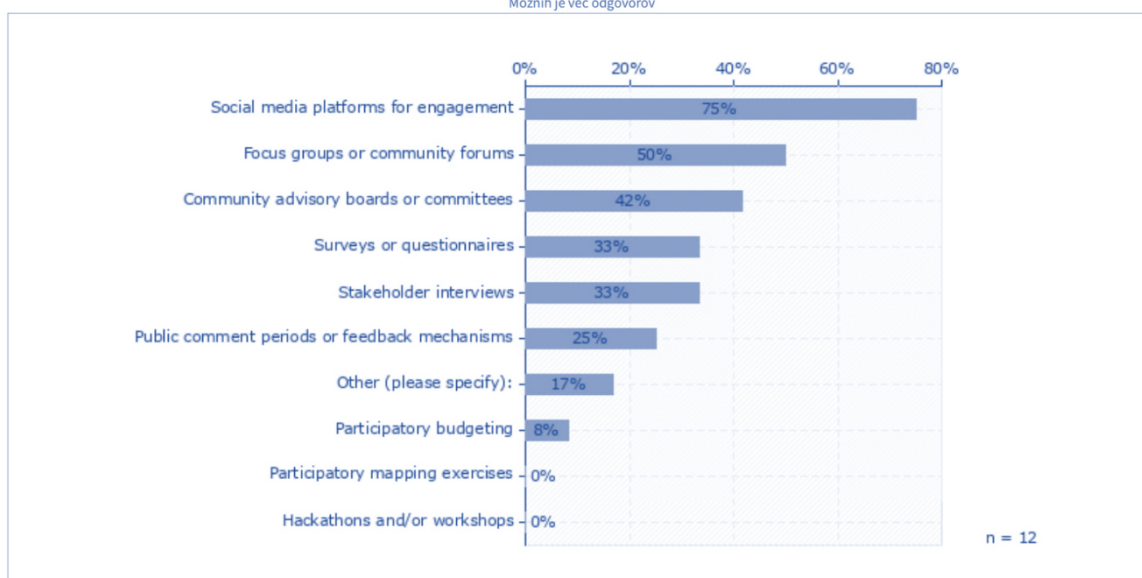


Table 11: Most effective engagement tool and method according to partners

Both sets of answers indicate a diverse range of engagement methods being used by partners. Social media platforms, focus groups or community forums, and community advisory boards or committees are consistently mentioned as commonly and most effective used methods. While there are some differences in the perceived effectiveness of certain methods, there is generally alignment between the methods used and those perceived as effective. In conclusion, the organization employs various engagement methods, with a focus on social media platforms, focus groups or community forums, and community advisory boards or committees. These methods are perceived as effective in engaging the community and gathering valuable input. However, there are slight differences in the perceived effectiveness of some methods, and the organizations should consider adjusting engagement approaches based on these insights. By incorporating additional methods into their community engagement activities, partners can enhance participation, inclusivity, and impact within their projects. It's essential to tailor engagement activities to the specific needs, preferences, and dynamics of the community to ensure meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Perceived benefits of community engagement

Benefits of community engagement activities according to their importance, the highest rating has the improved sense of belonging within the community, indicating that fostering a sense of belonging is viewed as the most important outcome of community engagement. It reflects a strong emphasis on social cohesion and the emotional well-being of community members, which are seen as fundamental to successful engagement efforts. Next benefit is indicating that transparency and trust are seen as critical outcomes of community engagement, as well as building and maintaining trust through open communication and accountability, which is essential for sustained collaboration. The primary importance of these two benefits indicates that partners prioritize emotional and relational aspects of community engagement, recognizing the

importance of creating a cohesive and trusting community. The benefit of enhanced relevance and effectiveness of project or policies is rated moderately important. It indicates that partners value community engagement for making projects and policies more relevant and effective. This suggests a recognition that involving the community leads to better-informed and more successful outcomes. Like the previous benefit, the next highlights the importance of tapping into local knowledge and expertise. It suggests that partners see community members as crucial sources of insights and information that can improve decision-making and project design. Both benefits reflect a practical focus on ensuring that community engagement leads to better project outcomes and leverages the community's unique insights. Increased community ownership and support for initiatives is rated as the least important benefit. While still valued, it appears to be less of a priority compared to the other benefits, possibly because it is seen as a byproduct of achieving the other, higher-rated benefits.

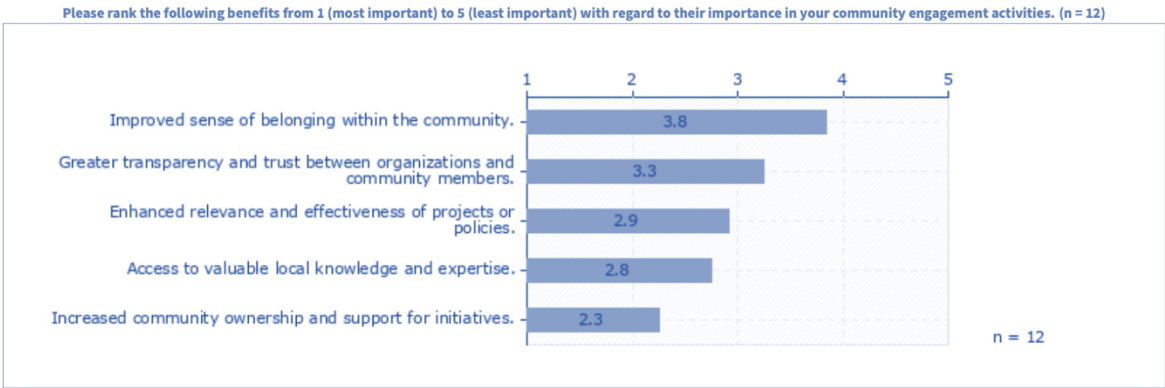


Table 12: Benefits of involvement in community engagement activities

Since the sense of belonging is rated the highest, partners should prioritize activities and initiatives that promote inclusivity, connection, and community spirit. This could involve organizing community events, fostering inter-generational activities, and creating spaces where community members can interact and build relationships.

Partners prioritize emotional and relational aspects of community engagement, recognizing the importance of creating a cohesive and trusting community.

While community ownership is rated lower, it remains an important goal. Partners should design engagement activities that not only foster emotional and relational benefits but also lead to practical outcomes that the community feels ownership over.

Perceived challenges of community engagement

To set the right approach for community engagement we have to understand the challenges the community faces in different local realities and we asked partners how challenges are affecting involvement in community activities, considering the given ratings. Each challenge is rated on a scale, from 1 to 5, the ones with higher numbers indicating greater challenges. Worrying that people might not get along and there could be arguments or big disagreements is the highest-

rated challenge, indicating that interpersonal conflicts and the potential for significant disagreements are major concerns for community engagement. It suggests that partners are highly aware of the risk of conflicts and view it as a substantial barrier to effective community involvement. Challenge that some people or groups in the community not wanting to join in or agreeing with what's happening has a higher rating, indicating that resistance or lack of consensus within the community is a notable issue. It highlights the difficulty of achieving broad participation and support for community initiatives, suggesting the need for more inclusive and engaging strategies to address diverse perspectives and concerns. This two are the primary concerns and suggest that managing relationships and fostering cooperation are critical challenges in community engagement. Financial and human resource constraints are significant challenges, with a rating close to the community resistance challenge. This suggests that funding limitations and insufficient staffing hinder the ability to involve all necessary stakeholders, pointing to a need for better resource allocation, focused and effective activities. The challenge projects/activities taking too long to get started because they need a lot of time has a moderate rating. It suggests that time constraints and lengthy planning or approval processes can delay the initiation of projects and activities. While it's a significant concern, it's not the highest-rated issue, indicating that partners might have developed some strategies to manage or mitigate these delays. These mentioned issues highlight the need for adequate funding, staffing, and efficient project planning processes. Difficulty in making everyone happy and reaching agreement remains a notable challenge, indicating the complexity of balancing diverse interests and achieving community-wide support.

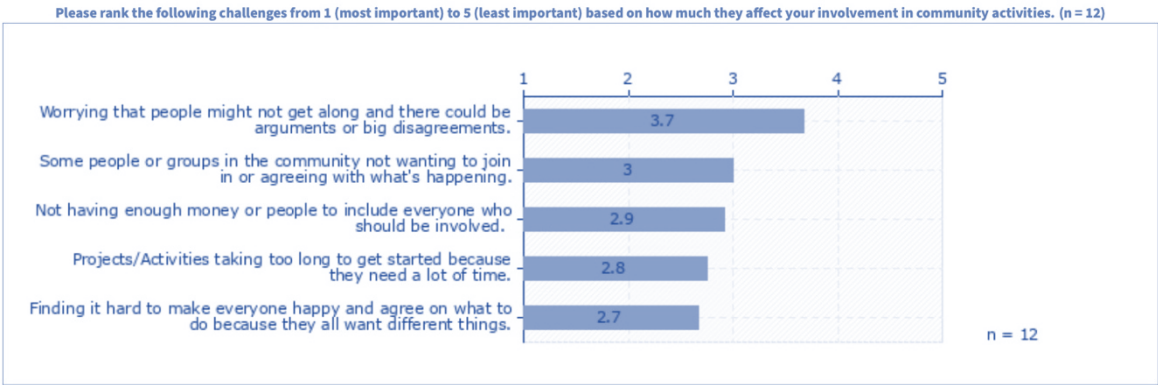


Table 13: Challenges of involvement in community engagement activities

Given the high concern about conflicts and disagreements, partners should invest in conflict resolution and mediation strategies. Training facilitators in these skills and creating forums for open dialogue can help manage and mitigate conflicts. To address resistance and lack of consensus, partners should adopt more inclusive engagement practices. This includes actively listening to and incorporating diverse perspectives, and ensuring transparent decision-making processes. Efficient resource management and creative solutions can help maximize involvement with limited resources. Managing varying interests requires clear communication and negotiation skills. Partners should work towards building a common vision and finding compromises that accommodate different priorities while aiming for the greater good of the community. By

addressing these challenges through targeted strategies, partners can enhance their involvement in community activities and improve the effectiveness of their engagement efforts.

Partners should work towards building a common vision and finding compromises that accommodate different priorities while aiming for the greater good of the community.

Factors hampering community engagement

The factors contributing to obstacles in past community engagement experiences is evaluated in terms of its impact and significance as perceived by the partners. Limited participation is recognized as an obstacle, with 16% of respondents viewing it as a major or significant challenge. This obstacle suggests a lack of engagement or interest from the broader community. It could indicate issues with communication, outreach, or perhaps a lack of understanding about the importance of the activities being proposed. However, the majority perceive it as a minor or small issue, indicating that while it is a barrier, it might not be the most critical one. Resource constraints are a considerable challenge, with 34% rating it as a major or significant obstacle. This highlights the importance of adequate funding, staffing, and material support in conducting successful engagement activities. The absence of small obstacle ratings indicates that this issue is universally recognized to some degree. Communication and consensus-building are significant hurdles, with 33% identifying them as major or significant obstacles. This suggests that differing opinions and difficulties in reaching agreements are prevalent issues that can hinder community engagement. Effective facilitation and conflict resolution are crucial in addressing these challenges. Lack of support from community leaders, while not viewed as a major obstacle, is still a notable issue with 50% considering it a moderate to significant challenge. This underscores the importance of securing buy-in from key influencers and leaders to ensure the success of engagement efforts. Misalignment between engagement activities and community needs is a significant concern, with 33% rating it as a major or significant obstacle. This indicates that for engagement to be effective, it must be relevant and resonate with the community's priorities and interests. Negative experiences with engagement tools in the past are recognized as a moderate to significant issue by 50% of respondents. This suggests that previous unsuccessful attempts or negative interactions can create scepticism or reluctance to participate in future engagements. The majority view »other challenges« as minor or small obstacles but are still an important input; wide territory and bad infrastructure, understanding the lack of financial support from the municipality, people involved with »no added value«, endless discussions.

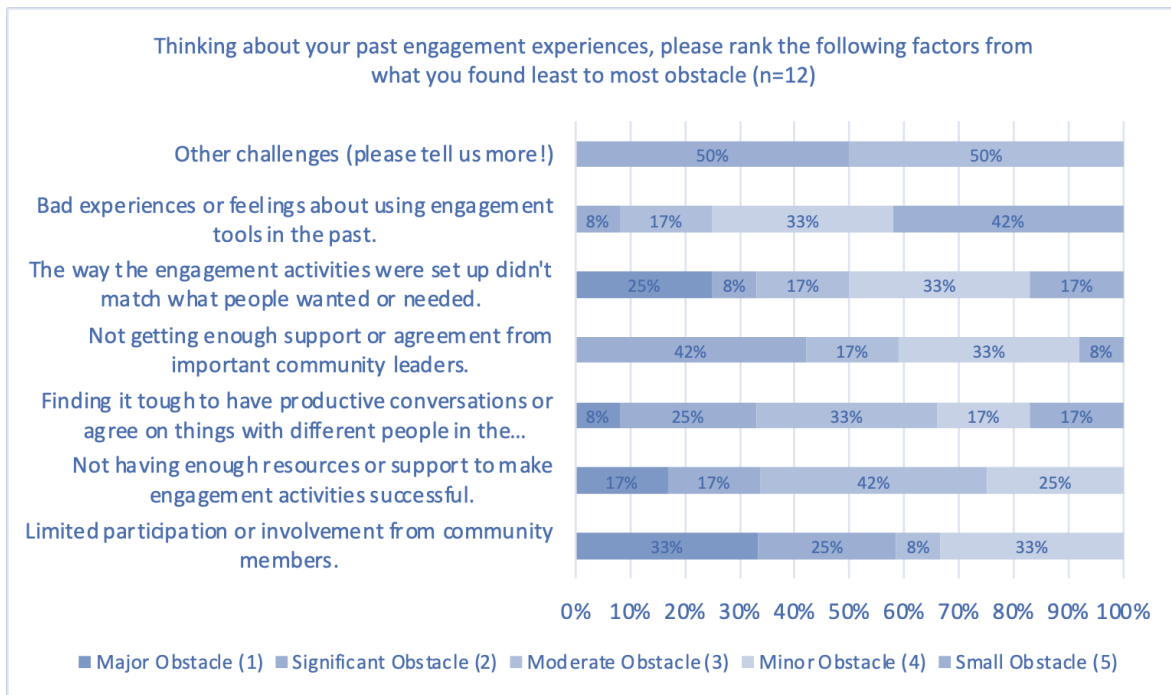


Table 14: Obstacle factors for community engagement

Tentative recommendations

The approach to community engagement must be strategic, well-thought-out, and tailored to the specific needs and interests of the community. This involves careful planning and the development of a clear, compelling message that resonates with community members. The message should clearly articulate the goals of the initiative (revitalization of older buildings) and the benefits to the community. Effective communication is crucial for gaining community buy-in and ensuring that residents understand the value and impact of their participation. People are more likely to participate when they see clear, practical benefits for themselves and their community. Identifying and leveraging what motivates the community is essential. This could be personal benefits, community improvement, or other incentives. Understanding these motivators can help in designing engagement activities that attract and retain residents. Involving residents in the process not only empowers them but also ensures that the initiatives are aligned with their needs and preferences. The later on proposed participatory approach can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members.

Keeping in mind that developing and communicating a clear plan that addresses community needs can help build trust in local institutions. Transparency about goals and resources demonstrates commitment and accountability. Also tailoring the approach to address the diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds within the community is crucial. This means creating inclusive opportunities for all groups to participate and benefit. Last, but not least we need to keep in mind that addressing the lack of interest and specific mindsets that hinder engagement

requires understanding the root causes and actively working to make participation more appealing and accessible.

Based on the responses which specific challenges make engaging people more difficult there are several challenges that can be grouped into thematic categories for better understanding. Under the challenges there are recommendations for addressing them.

- **socio-economic and political differences** among community members make engagement difficult – these differences can create divisions and hinder collaborative efforts.
 - Facilitate dialogues that bridge differences and find common ground. Use facilitators skilled in conflict resolution and inclusive practices.
- **convincing participants of tangible benefits** – convincing participants that their involvement will yield concrete results for the community and themselves, rather than abstract benefits. Without visible results, scepticism and disengagement can increase. Clear communication and demonstration of past successes can help address this challenge.
 - Showcase successful case studies and ensure transparency in project outcomes. Regularly update the community on progress and celebrate small wins.
- **lack of trust in local institutions** – trust is fundamental for effective community engagement. When people distrust local institutions, they are less likely to participate in initiatives. Building trust through transparency, accountability, and consistent positive interactions is crucial.
 - Enhance transparency and accountability. Engage trusted community leaders as intermediaries to build trust.
- **specific mindset and lack of interest** where mindset of people and a general lack of interest in engagement activities is occurred it's important to overcome apathy which requires understanding the root causes of disengagement and addressing them.
 - Before community engagement conduct focus groups to understand barriers to interest and tailor activities to meet community needs and preferences. Create more relevant and appealing activities or providing incentives for participation.
- **emotional engagement** which refers to connecting with people on a personal level. This can be challenging but is essential for fostering a sense of community and belonging.
 - Use storytelling and personal testimonials to create emotionally resonant experiences. Highlight how engagement positively impacts individuals and community.
- **geographic and infrastructure issues** – the territory is broad and scattered with a small population and poor internet and road infrastructure. Geographic dispersion and inadequate infrastructure pose logistical challenges.
 - Solutions might involve decentralized activities, mobile outreach units, or leveraging local hubs where people naturally gather. Utilize online platforms where feasible and consider partnering with local organizations to extend reach.
- **interactions with specific communities** – from the questionnaire: interactions with the Roma community are often challenging.

- Employ culturally sensitive approaches and engage community leaders from within these groups. Build long-term relationships through consistent and respectful engagement that respect and understand their unique context.
- **communication and feedback** – where residents are unable to articulate their opinions and comments publicly, making it difficult to get relevant feedback.
 - Implement varied and accessible feedback mechanisms (focus groups, informal community meetings) where people feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts. Ensure that community members know their input is valued and acted upon.

One of the comments from the survey respondents highlights a key insight:

»It will all depend on the right approach, especially when starting the mapping activity. We must develop a message that we want to revitalize older buildings by involving citizens and emphasize that we are devoting attention in finding financial resources for dwellings renovation. People have to find motivation and interest in participating.«

This comment encapsulates several critical points necessary for successful community engagement, particularly in the context of addressing socio-economic and infrastructural challenges.

By addressing key obstacles through the suggested approach, partners can enhance their community engagement efforts, leading to more successful and impactful outcomes. This approach must ensure that engagement activities are well-resourced, inclusive, and aligned with community needs, fostering stronger and more cohesive communities. Seeking additional partnerships is essential to ensure sufficient resources for engagement activities. Additionally, optimizing the use of existing resources and exploring innovative solutions to resource constraints will help maximize the impact of the available resources in creative ways.

Adequate resources are essential for the success of community engagement activities.

Improving and adapting communication and facilitation is a must, facilitators should be trained in conflict resolution and effective communication techniques, as well as in creating structured opportunities for dialogue and consensus-building. Creating spaces for open dialogue, promoting active listening, and finding common ground are all potential approaches to addressing disagreement and conflicts in communities.

Difficulty in having productive conversations and reaching agreements (consensus-building) is a major concern. Effective communication strategies, conflict resolution techniques and experienced facilitators are necessary to address this challenge.

We should learn from previous engagement efforts and make improvements to build trust and confidence in new initiatives and communicate transparently about how past feedback has been incorporated into current efforts.

ANNEX II:

Good/proven (known) practices and methods

At this point we are offering a diverse array of innovative methods designed to inspire participation and foster collaboration among community members. From the dynamic interactions of World Cafés to the fast-paced connections of speed dating, and the insightful dialogues of focus groups, each method offers unique opportunities for individuals to share their voices, experiences, and ideas. You will find a detailed exploration of these engagement methods, complete with practical insights and applications. This innovative practices are a possibility to create connections, spark dialogue, and unlock the potential within our communities.

Spatial analysis and imagination

This approach is used in various disciplines, including urban planning, geography, architecture, and environmental studies. It involves examining spatial relationships, patterns, and processes to understand the built environment and imagine potential interventions or developments of the space. This method is suitable for communities where there was already space selected for intervention.

Goal. To encourage analytical observation of the space to possibly transform the space.

Steps

1. Ask participants to do the following: Think about where they spend their free time and where they collaborate with their other community members.
2. Note down their first thoughts and feelings about it. They can write, draw or experiment with other creative means of expressing their thoughts and feelings. They can even record the sound of the space should they wish, or act out the experience as if they were on stage!
3. Discuss the representation(s) together. Guiding questions can include: is anything interesting emerging? Are they similar? Are they different? Is there anything you would agree requires some change? What is it about?
4. Look more closely at the different elements of the space. For example, the acoustics, the light, the time available to use the space, the people you engage with within the space, the furniture, the organization of the space. Ask participants to mention whatever is important to them.

Format. This exercise should be done in group with each participant bringing in their personal representation of the space and discussing with others. With some adaptation, it could take place online, provided that the activity is organized across two or three sessions.

Duration. Approximately 90 minutes.

Materials. Sticking papers, pens, flipchart.

Mapping the Space

The method aims to help community to map their spaces from chaos to calm by creating organised and functional spaces they want to come to or routines they can do. It provides better understanding and solutions that work for users of the space.

Goal. To stimulate a more engaged way of looking at the common space and the environment more generally by means of mapping.

Steps

Ask the participants to do the following.

1. Draw a map of the space giving a sense of the size of various elements (in other words, this map has to be realistic). If available, suggest they compare their drawings to the official layout, paying attention to differences.
2. Sketch an emotional map with description of the kinds of emotions they have experienced there. Examples could include fun moments.
3. Compare the realistic and emotional maps that they have individually created. The discussion can be organized in small groups and be dedicated to analysing differences and similarities.
4. Collectively make a new map, using their imagination and having in mind following questions: how can space be made more enjoyable? How can space be made more practical? How can space be made more inclusive? As a follow-up, they can identify precise ways to change the space where they spend time / work / free time ...

Format. This exercise needs to be done in group with each participant bringing their personal representation of the space and later discussing it with others. With some adaptation, it could take place online.

Duration. This activity might take several hours of work. It should be organized across different sessions. Depending on the participants, steps 1 and 2 might require a different amount of time. Steps 3 and 4 can occur during the same session.

Materials. Maps, markers or pens.

Open Space

The Open Space method is a participatory approach used for organizing and running meetings, conferences, or events. It is designed to facilitate self-organization and creativity among participants. This method provides a dynamic and inclusive framework for collaborative problem-solving and idea generation, making it suitable for a wide range of organizational or community contexts.

Goal. The goal of this approach is to enable participants to address complex issues, find solutions, and generate new ideas collaboratively. It aims to harness the collective wisdom and creativity of the group to tackle challenges or explore opportunities. This is suitable for

gathering new ideas or perspectives on how we imagine our communities, common spaces, local environment etc.

Steps

1. Define the overarching theme or issue that the participants will explore during the session. This theme should be broad enough to allow for diverse discussions but focused enough to provide direction.
2. Participants from various backgrounds and expertise levels are invited to join the event. The inclusivity of participants is crucial for fostering diverse perspectives and ideas.
3. At the beginning of the event, participants gather in a large space. This space is divided into sections, and each section represents a discussion topic or theme related to the main issue. Participants are encouraged to propose topics for discussion by writing them on large sheets of paper or sticky notes and posting them in the designated areas.
4. Participants then self-organize into small groups based on their interests and the topics they want to discuss. They choose which discussions they want to join and move freely between sessions throughout the event.
5. Each group conducts a discussion session focused on the chosen topic. Participants are encouraged to share their ideas, experiences, and insights related to the theme. Discussions are typically informal and driven by participant contributions rather than facilitator-led presentations.
6. During the discussions, participants may take notes, sketch diagrams, or record key points on flip charts or whiteboards. These visual aids help capture the collective wisdom generated during the event.
7. At the end of the event, participants gather in a closing circle to reflect on the discussions and insights gained. They may share key takeaways, action points, or commitments for further exploration or implementation.

Format. This method event typically follows a flexible format that allows participants to engage in discussions freely. It is characterized by a large, open meeting space, small group discussions, and self-organization around topics of interest.

Duration. The duration of an Open Space event can vary depending on the complexity of the issue being discussed and the number of participants involved. It can range from a few hours to multiple days. However, a typical duration is one to two days.

Materials. Flip charts or whiteboards, sticky notes or large sheets of paper for posting discussion topics, markers or pens, audiovisual equipment (optional) for presentations or recordings.

World Café

The World Café method is a participatory approach used to facilitate collaborative dialogue and idea exchange in a casual, café-style setting. It is designed to create an open, relaxed atmosphere where participants can engage in meaningful discussions, share knowledge, and explore solutions to complex issues. This method promotes inclusivity and encourages conversations that build on diverse perspectives, making it suitable for community, organizational, or strategic settings.

Goal. The goal of the World Café method is to create a space where participants can explore key issues collaboratively, exchanging ideas and insights to generate new perspectives and solutions. The approach leverages the collective wisdom of the group by fostering multiple rounds of discussion, enabling participants to build on each other's contributions. It is particularly well-

suited for generating innovative ideas around how we imagine our communities, shared spaces, or local environments.

Steps

1. Define the central topic or question that will guide the World Café session. This question should be thought-provoking and broad enough to encourage a variety of discussions.
2. Invite participants from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise to ensure a wide range of perspectives.
3. Set up the room to resemble a café, with small, round tables where participants will engage in conversations. Each table is assigned a discussion question related to the central theme.
4. Participants sit in small groups at each table and engage in focused discussions on the given question. After a set amount of time, participants rotate to a different table, carrying their insights with them to build on previous conversations.
5. At each rotation, a “table host” remains to summarize the key points from the previous group, ensuring continuity in the discussion and allowing new participants to contribute and expand on the ideas.
6. After several rounds of discussion, the group comes together to share key insights and themes that emerged during the conversations, capturing the collective knowledge of the participants.

Format. The World Café follows a flexible format that mirrors the informal nature of a café. Small group discussions are key, with participants moving between tables to engage in multiple conversations. This structure encourages the cross-pollination of ideas and deepens the collaborative process.

Duration. A World Café event typically lasts between two and four hours, depending on the complexity of the topic and the number of participants. However, longer sessions can be organized if needed.

Materials. Small tables, flip charts or large sheets of paper for capturing notes, markers, and sticky notes for recording ideas. Optional materials include tablecloths or decorations to create a relaxed café atmosphere, as well as audio-visual equipment for presentations or sharing insights at the end of the session.

Speed Dating

The Speed Dating method is a participatory approach designed to facilitate rapid idea exchange and collaboration between participants. It involves short, timed interactions where individuals discuss key topics, share insights, or brainstorm solutions. This method is particularly effective for gathering diverse perspectives in a limited amount of time, making it suitable for community consultations, brainstorming sessions, or team-building activities.

Goal. The goal of the Speed Dating method is to promote efficient and focused dialogue by giving participants the opportunity to exchange ideas and perspectives in brief, structured interactions. This method encourages participants to engage with multiple people, ensuring a broad range of insights and ideas are shared. It is especially useful for gathering quick feedback or generating multiple ideas on specific topics.

Steps

Ask the participants to follow these steps:

1. Prepare discussion prompts or topics that will be explored during the speed dating session. These should be short, clear questions or themes that encourage meaningful dialogue.
2. Organize participants into pairs. Set a time limit for each interaction (typically between 3 to 5 minutes), during which they will discuss the prompt or topic at hand.

3. After the time is up, participants rotate to a new partner and begin a new round of discussion with a different topic or the same topic from a new perspective. Continue this process until all participants have interacted with multiple people.

4. After the speed dating rounds, bring the group together to reflect on the discussions. Participants can share their key takeaways, ideas, or action points that emerged during their interactions.

Format. The Speed Dating method is highly structured and requires time limits for each interaction to maintain focus and momentum. The format encourages participants to engage in multiple rounds of brief discussions, making it a fast-paced, yet highly effective, way to gather ideas or feedback.

Duration. A Speed Dating session can last between 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the number of participants and the length of each round. Each round typically lasts 3 to 5 minutes, and the number of rounds will depend on how many interactions you want each participant to have.

Materials. Timers or a visible clock to manage the time for each round, a list of discussion prompts or topics, and a space where participants can easily rotate between partners. Optionally, participants may be provided with note cards to jot down key insights during each round.

Structured Interview(s)

The Structured Interviews method is a systematic approach used for collecting specific information from participants in a controlled and consistent manner. This method involves asking predetermined, standardized questions to all interviewees, allowing for the collection of comparable data across multiple respondents. It is useful for gathering in-depth insights while ensuring consistency and reducing interviewer bias.

Goal. The goal of structured interviews is to obtain clear, concise, and comparable responses on key issues or topics of interest. By asking each participant the same set of questions, it allows for easy analysis and identification of patterns or common themes. This method is particularly effective for gathering detailed feedback, opinions, or experiences in a way that maintains uniformity across all participants.

Steps

1. Prepare the interview guide. Develop a list of standardized questions focused on the specific topic or issue you want to explore. These questions should be open-ended enough to elicit detailed responses but specific enough to address the topic directly.

2. Select and invite participants. Ensure you choose a diverse range of participants relevant to the topic to gather various perspectives. Each participant should be interviewed individually to maintain the integrity of their responses.

3. Conduct the interviews. During each interview, follow the prepared guide strictly, asking each question in the same order for every participant. The interviewer should remain neutral, asking clarifying questions if necessary, but avoid deviating from the script.

4. Record responses. Take detailed notes or record the interviews (with permission) to capture every response accurately. Consistent data collection is key to the success of structured interviews.

5. Analyze data. After the interviews, analyze the responses by identifying common themes, patterns, or differences among participants. The structured nature of the interviews allows for a more straightforward comparison of responses.

Format. Structured interviews are typically one-on-one conversations that follow a strict format. They are highly controlled, ensuring that all participants are asked the same set of predetermined questions. This format allows for a more objective and uniform analysis of the collected data.

Duration. The duration of each interview can vary depending on the number and complexity of questions. On average, a structured interview lasts between 30 minutes to an hour. The overall process can take longer depending on the number of participants.

Materials. Interview guide with standardized questions, note-taking materials or recording devices (if interviews are to be recorded), and a quiet, private setting where interviews can be conducted without distractions.

Focus Group

The Focus Groups method is a qualitative approach used to gather diverse perspectives, opinions, and experiences on a specific topic from a small, pre-selected group of participants. It is characterized by facilitated group discussions that encourage interaction among participants, providing rich and detailed insights through collective dialogue. This method is highly effective for exploring perceptions, brainstorming ideas, or testing reactions to new concepts in a group setting.

Goal. The goal of focus groups is to foster dynamic group discussions that uncover collective views, ideas, and feelings about a particular subject. It aims to gather deep insights by allowing participants to interact with each other, building on each other's responses and generating more nuanced or comprehensive viewpoints. This method is particularly useful when exploring how individuals think and why they hold certain beliefs or attitudes.

Steps

1. Clearly identify the main issue or theme to be discussed and set specific goals for what you want to learn from the group. These should guide the discussion but remain open-ended enough to encourage broad participation.
2. Choose a diverse group of individuals who are relevant to the topic at hand. Focus groups typically consist of 6–12 participants to ensure a manageable yet diverse discussion. The participants should represent various viewpoints or demographic backgrounds to foster rich dialogue.
3. Develop a set of open-ended questions or prompts designed to steer the conversation. These questions should spark dialogue without directing participants to a particular answer. The facilitator uses this guide to maintain the flow of discussion.
4. A trained facilitator leads the discussion, ensuring that all participants contribute and that the conversation remains focused on the key themes. The facilitator encourages interaction between participants, allowing them to respond to one another's comments while also ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak.
5. Notes should be taken, or the session should be recorded (with permission) to capture key insights and specific quotes. The data collected from a focus group is qualitative, emphasizing patterns, emotions, and attitudes rather than statistical results.
6. After the session, review the discussion for themes, patterns, and differences in perspectives. This analysis is used to draw conclusions about the group's collective viewpoints, offering a deeper understanding of the topic in question.

Format. Focus groups are typically conducted in an informal group setting where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. The group dynamic is central to this method,

as interactions between participants help generate deeper insights than individual interviews might. Focus groups can take place in-person or virtually.

Duration. A typical focus group session lasts between 1 to 2 hours, allowing enough time for in-depth discussion while maintaining participants' attention. Multiple sessions may be conducted if needed, depending on the complexity of the topic and the variety of participants.

Materials. Discussion guide with key questions, note-taking materials or recording devices (if the session is to be recorded), comfortable seating arrangement to encourage interaction, and, if necessary, audiovisual equipment for virtual settings.

ANNEX III: Workshop Materials

Moderation sheet and reporting templates for Workshop 2 “Prototyping Solutions”

Design-Thinking Sprint

(© developed with Marie-Theres Zirm, cardamom; www.cardamom.at)

TIME (LENGTH)	WHAT (WHO)	HOW	NOTES / INFO	NOTES / PREPARATION
08:00 (60 min)	Preparations			Necessary materials: 3x Flipcharts/Pinwalls Eddings (40) Pens (20) Paper (CIS, cardamom) Moderation cards Post-It ... Clothespin Strings

09:00 (15 min)	Arrival, Check-in, assigning participants to groups (Main facilitator)	Poster with three 3 groups (or let people choose their own groups) if set menu: decision for lunch		List of participants Poster with 3 Groups (if applicable)
09:15 (25 min)	Welcome in Plenary (Main facilitator)	<p>Welcome CLARIFY the ROLE of participants (e.g., house owners, community) --> emphasize the (serious) game character of today</p> <p>Introduction territorial partner: Name - Organization - one keyword on the project - why am I here?</p> <p>Background & agenda of the day Aim and questions of the process Roles, Rules and Location</p>	<p>Pictures symbolizing rules</p> <p><i>Objections are helps --> they are important to further the process</i></p>	<p>Voluntariness, transparency, confidentiality and data security</p> <p>Eye level, feedback rules</p> <p>Design thinking: all are non-experts // instant experts By people for people -> EMPATHY</p>
09:40 (40 min)	1. Understanding the Problem (Team)	<p>1. What is the question at stake?</p> <p>Understanding the problem Using our own associations/ideas and</p>	<p>"A quick hello to everyone.</p> <p>You are the development team working on this question for one day. [insert question]</p> <p>The first step is to understand the question</p>	<p>Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What are hypotheses and basic assumptions? * What do we want to know? * What assessments do we need?

		<p>build hypothesis >> Formulate questions</p>	<p>and to formulate and exchange your own images and theses. If anyone has already an answer to the problem, we will store it for now. We will put the seemingly "quick answers" into the idea repository, so we remain open to new approaches and at the same time know that we have "secured" our own.</p> <p>What questions do we have for others (groups affected by the question)? You can now spend half an hour asking the others and will also be asked. It doesn't have to be many, but diversity is relevant. You can also search online or ask questions by phone. Write everything down in keywords, you will then report your results to each other in the development team!"</p>	<p>Development of questions * Open questions (how, why, what, ...) * Do you have problem XY? * When did the problem last occur, tell us about it? * When was the last time you solved problem XY? * Why do you do that? * What happened then? * What should an ideal solution be able to do?</p>
10:20 (30 min)	2. Asking people (Team)	Interviews beyond our circle/ group in pairs; one person asks, the other one takes notes (post its)	Info for trainer: Everyone buzzes out and is interviewed or asked questions. Or you could use the time to exchange within the facilitation team	
10:50 (30 min)	3. Define common ground - starting point for developing ideas (Team)	Collecting & Focusing Results of interviews are presented in the small group and clustered (post its)	Everyone comes back to the group and tells what they have learned (through interviews or research). Another person writes down the most important aspects in keywords on post its. All results are clustered.	<p>FORMULATING QUESTIONS</p> <p>Architecture of the question * How could something ... (an object, service, business model) for persona ... (the target group)</p>

Then a PERSONA is generated, the prototypical person affected. Fill in the poster! The needs-oriented statement in the context of the question is important! This then becomes the:

POINT OF VIEW

"How could ... be developed/changed for ... so that is influenced/changed?"

be changed / developed / adapted so that ... (framework conditions, problems, changes) are influenced or fulfilled?

How could/should something work so that the persona changes something, becomes active, etc.?

POINT OF VIEW

The insights gained are now brought together in a common point of view. The team members exchange views on this. Through so-called storytelling, the team members share their insights and experiences. Through questions and dialog, the insights are linked to form a common overall picture. Visualizations and abstraction are then used to summarize information and identify patterns. Sketches are used to explicitly visualize the existing knowledge and thus make it communicable. Contradictory observations by team members can also emerge. The aim is to achieve a common level of knowledge.

11:20 (40 min)	4. Find ideas (Team)	From POINT OF VIEW to IDEAS	<p>Each person has 10 minutes to write all their ideas on a post-it and keep them with them. The ideas are then presented and similar ideas are clustered.</p> <p>Now the task is to find the MOST VALUABLE idea. This can be done either by awarding 3 points per person (an idea may not receive more than one point from one person) or by using a grid. Number line upwards EFFECTIVENESS, number line to the right FEASIBILITY. The most valuable ideas should end up at the top right.</p> <p>most valuable = attractive, feasible, economical</p>	<p>Ideate</p> <p>The next step is to generate ideas. In principle, any creativity technique such as brainstorming can be used for this. The aim is to produce as many ideas as possible. The ideas are then structured and summarized as much as possible. The most promising ideas in terms of attractiveness, feasibility and cost-effectiveness are selected from this quantity of ideas. Due to the focus on people, attractiveness is weighted somewhat more heavily than feasibility and cost-effectiveness.</p>
12:00 (60 min)	LUNCH			POSTERS WITH MAPPING DWELLINGS
13:00 (60 min)	5. Prototype >> 1. Prototype (Team)	The PROTOTYPE develops	<p>The most valuable idea is now "built" as a prototype. This can be a model or a scene or an interactive "game" with others. It is important that the idea can be grasped by the others in 3-5 minutes:</p> <p>Who is the target customer/user? What is his/her problem to be addressed? What is the idea called? How does the idea</p>	<p>IN THE ROOM BASIC MATERIAL</p> <p>LEGO</p> <p>Paper, cardboard, fabrics, wool, scissors, glue, materials from nature</p>

			work? What is the main advantage? What makes the idea so special?	
14:00 (40 min)	6. Pitching ideas Presentation and feedback (Main facilitator)	How do others (the market) react? TESTING!	<i>GROUND AND TIME for CRITICAL ISSUES ... DISCUSS "What concerns do you have ... not solutions, but resistance" Objections are support -> basis for important further developments</i>	
14:40 (20 min)	COFFEE		maybe skipped if participants can arrange their own coffee and refreshments during session 6	
15:00 (60 min)	7. Integrate Feedback >> 2. Prototyp Preparation to present the prototype	Develop further!	maybe they are faster; adopt accordingly	
16:00 (30 min)	8. Testing the prototype Presentation of the result	Testing	Info for facilitation: WHO IS THE USER that I give it to!	
16:30 (30 min)	OUTLOOK (Main facilitator)	How do we proceed?	presentation on the next steps --> how does this feed into the overall process	

17:00

End of event

Checklists

	Think about..	To do
Invitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define (a) clear strategy(ies) for your engagement groups: highlight the mutual benefit of the engagement process • Set aside time and resources to communicate with your target group • Carefully choose the right language! • Use suitable methods and communication channels (social media, local newspaper etc) • Use personal contacts, invite visionaries and creative people • Invite well ahead and send reminders • Engagement is also about listening • Think of any special needs to allow participation, f.ex. childcare or accessibility in case of limited mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send invites & reminders <input type="checkbox"/> Find appropriate venues and times for workshops and meetings
Personnel The more, the merrier!	<p>The facilitator²¹ is: responsible for carrying out a well-planned facilitation of group sessions, capable in addressing group dynamics, with experience in multi stakeholder processes and with heterogeneous groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving the efficiency and quality of the outcomes and the well-being of participants • create the necessary conditions for equitable and free speaking 	<p>IF face-2-face:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> one main facilitator (skilled for the method you chose, e.g., design thinking), <input type="checkbox"/> break out group facilitators (one per group) <input type="checkbox"/> one organizing person (who addresses all questions that may come up) <input type="checkbox"/> technical support <p>IF online:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> one main facilitator hosting the event

²¹ Marschalek, Ilse. (2017). From Invited to Hosted Public Engagement in Responsible Research and Innovation. In The Politics and Situatedness of Emerging Technologies (pp. 51–66). Berlin: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take care of the different knowledge levels • support collective decision-making mechanisms • mediate between different perspectives, without bringing in own opinion • Compelling formats of participation • Informal encounters – unstructured, not steered discussion • Enrich processes with emotions • Provide space for ideas & appropriate information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> territorial partners accompanying the ideas of 'their' local core groups <input type="checkbox"/> technical support
Room	<p>Create an atmosphere in which participants can feel good and invited²²</p> <p>Consider: Pleasant acoustics, Avoid walk-through rooms, Enough space! Room for walking around</p> <p>Provide an agreeable supply of refreshments, including a good but not oversized buffet</p> <p>Choose alternative rooms rather than sterile seminar rooms and pleasant locations, nicely decorated, pleasingly prepared</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Light (preferably day light) <input type="checkbox"/> Refreshments & food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make room comfortable (Plants, flowers, warm colours) <input type="checkbox"/> Wardrobe outside <input type="checkbox"/> Light and flexible structure of furniture <input type="checkbox"/> Islands rather than one big table <input type="checkbox"/> Smaller rooms for break out sessions, or: room dividers
Materials	Flipchart, Post its, pens etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Make your own list based on your activities <input type="checkbox"/> Bring leaflets or other physical reminder to invite participants to the next event <input type="checkbox"/> Reporting materials for yourself <input type="checkbox"/> Agenda <input type="checkbox"/> Name tags

²² ibid

Time Plan

Based on the overall project plan, we suggest the following time plan. Of course, there is some flexibility; however, as you can easily see, 2025 will require quite a lot of preparation and continuous engagement in our communities. Therefore, make sure to assign enough time resources to the tasks!

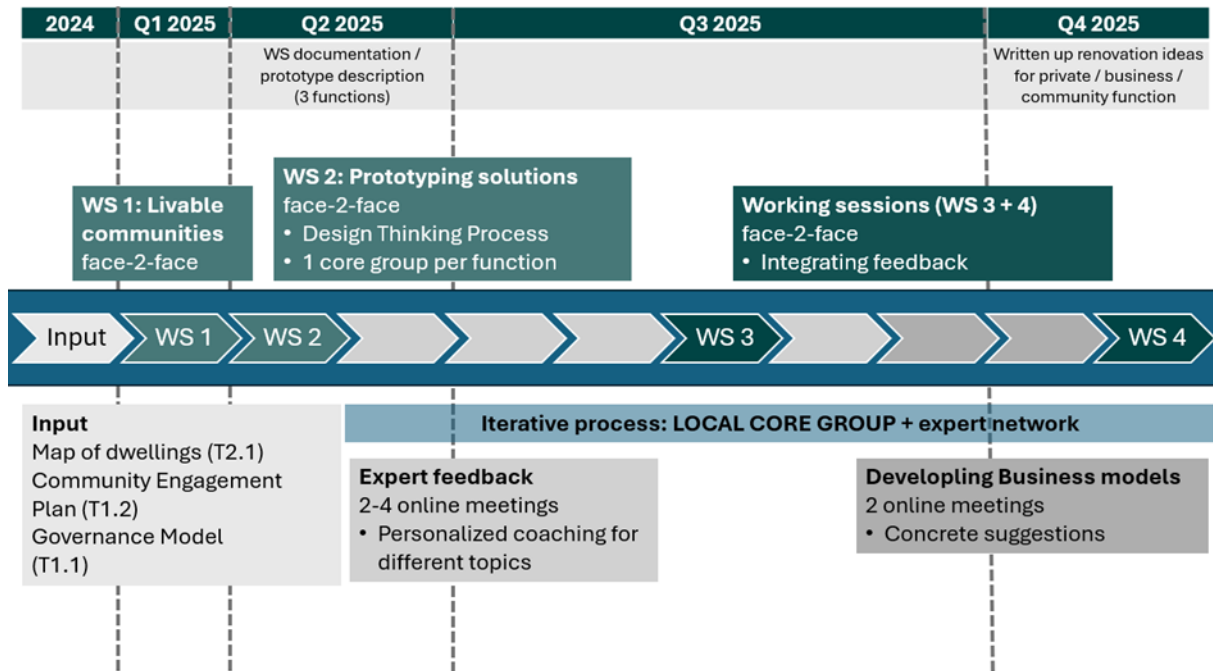


Figure 1: Overview on RurALL community engagement process

Time	Step	What to do	Think about... Make sure that...
2024: Preparation			
Nov- Dec		Set date with main stakeholders you would like to involve in engagement process (ASPs/project partners)	What are other important events in my municipality? Can I use them (create synergies by aligning my workshops to them)? Should I avoid them (to get more people to come)?

		Reserve locations and catering for WS 1+2	Make sure that the location is welcoming, and people are taken care for (see check list)
		Communicate what you are going to do (internet, community newspaper etc.)	Think about the easiest access for ALL groups you would like to get to participate
		Send out 'save the dates'	Make sure to invite broadly! Think about potential 'innovative minds' with the potential to take on the process
January - June 2025: Gathering Ideas			
Jan - March	Conduct Workshop 1	Use our suggested process or use what you consider best for your municipality	Make sure to have skilled facilitators and notetakers!
	Establishing continuity	Invite participants to 2 nd workshop & to take on ideas they like	Make sure that local people are familiarising themselves with the proposed ideas → form local core group
April	Harvesting	Report Results of Workshop 1	Make sure to report carefully!
April - June	Conduct Workshop 2	Use our suggested process or use what you consider best for your municipality	Make sure to have skilled facilitators and notetakers!
	Establishing continuity	Invite participants to 2 nd workshop & to take on ideas they like	Make sure that local people are taking over the proposed ideas → form local core group
July - November 2025: Ideas are gaining traction			
July 2025	Harvesting	Report Results of Workshop 2	Make sure to report carefully!
	Preparation WS 3+4	Reserve locations and catering for WS 3+4	Could be a table at a local restaurant or diner, in a coffee house, in a community

			building etc. Just ensure that they have a welcoming place to gather and further develop their ideas. As there are 3 ideas to be developed, at least 3 tables should be available.
	Expert feedback		Prepare proposals accordingly (see templates)
		Core group integrates feedback in draft	
August	Expert feedback		Prepare proposals accordingly (see templates)
		Core group integrates feedback in draft	
	Business model meeting		Prepare proposals accordingly (see templates)
		Core group integrates feedback in draft	
	Workshop 3	Local core group integrates feedback into their draft	Self-organized meeting (no facilitation)
September	Expert feedback		Prepare proposals accordingly (see templates)
		Core group integrates feedback in draft	
October	Business model meeting		Prepare proposals accordingly (see templates)
		Core group integrates feedback in draft	
November	Workshop 4	Local core group finalizes their draft	Self-organized meeting (no facilitation)

December 2025: Writing up Deliverable

December	Harvesting	Partners collect all drafts and integrating deliverable	
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Do Not Forget: Pre-Planning Checklist

This checklist for pre-planning a learning event is derived from the guidelines outlined by Hope and Timmel (1984). It serves as a concise reference to ensure that essential considerations—such as the workshop's purpose, participant demographics, staff roles, and logistical details—are addressed effectively, facilitating a successful and impactful event.

Broad Aim

- Define the workshop's purpose and long-term goals. Align it with the RurALL project and proposed Design Thinking process and workshops.

Participants

- Identify target demographics (age, gender, background).
- Decide on invitation type (open or selective, targeted).
- Determine participant numbers and individual/team preferences.
- Clarify RSVP requirements.

Data Collection

- Plan methods for assessing participant needs and interests – use the proposed and provided methods and workshops.

Staff Team

- Identify required staff roles and numbers.
- Designate a coordinator and outline their responsibilities.
- Consider special resource people and potential fees.
- Estimate planning time and commitment needed from staff.

Place

- Choose a location accessible yet conducive to focus.
- Ensure space suitability and availability for overnight needs.
- Confirm booking details.

Time

- Decide on event duration and session structure – consider proposed workshops and methods with advised timelines.
- Check convenience for participants' schedules.

Publicity

- Plan methods for outreach (leaflets, posters, word of mouth, social media, etc.) – use what best works in your community.

Housekeeping Details

- Address cost, food requirements, attire, and provide a venue map.

Consent form Film and Photography at RurALL Workshops

We, (_____) would like to take photos and/or film footage at this event / **project number** (_____), during the date of the activity: (____/____/____). It shall be held by the organization in accordance and in compliance with the GDPR guidelines (the General Data Protection Regulation). Material will be stored securely and will not be kept for longer than they are needed for the purposes listed below.

I understand the following:

- The photos/videos may be used on the **requesting organization's** website, social media and other communication channels, including offline publication(s);
- My photos/videos may be used for promotional materials, publications, in articles and potentially for publicity/marketing purposes;
- Photos/videos shared with this group shall only be used by participants for personal purposes only (unless permission is asked of the organisation);
- Photos/videos may be shared with third party organisations (direct partners of this project, or of the requesting organisation) for use in their printed and online publicity;
- I can withdraw my consent for this at any time. By sending an email to _____, if I change my mind.

*Note: this will not apply to material already published. We cannot control already published material or recall it.

Copyright: Photos, films and other media can only be used with the permission of the person who created them. That means if someone takes photos at this event, they should only be used with their permission. Hereby we ask permission to use all the shared footage for the purposes stated above.

I am giving this consent in my own free will, and not under duress or in any form of threat.

By signing I state I read and understand all the above.

Hereby I give my consent.

Reporting Template Workshop 1 “Liveable Communities”

Country report of [country]

Date:	DD.MM.YYYY
Place, Country:	
Notetaker name and e-mail address:	
No of participants/stakeholder group:	
Overview of who is here – Warm up <i>Participants introduce themselves: Why did you come here today?</i>	

Find your topic (group work)

Please make sure to document per group. Each group discusses both questions below. Facilitator + notetaker recommended. Please make sure to document the discussions in detail. Integrate pictures of flip charts. Translate to English afterwards and take notes during the presentations. Facilitators will have to translate this into concrete ideas (design templates) - think about the 20 ideas we need!

How can my community remain livable and worth living in?

How can we use unused resources, in particular abandoned dwellings, to achieve this aim?

Presentation and feedback

Every group presents their ideas to the plenary.

Please make sure to document the discussions in detail as well as objections. Integrate pictures of the flipcharts..

Reporting Template Workshop 2 “Prototyping solutions”

Country report of [country]

Date:	DD.MM.YYYY
Place, Country:	
Notetaker name and e-mail address:	
No of participants/stakeholder group:	

Overview of who is here - Warm up

Take minutes of the introduction of territorial partner: Name - Organization - one keyword on the project - why am I here? If questions arise, note them too.

Understanding the problem (Step 1)

Please make sure to document per group. Group defines issue at stake and defines relevant questions for the issue at stake to ask others in step 2. Please make sure to take notes of the discussion and to document the final set of questions.

Asking people (Step 2)

Every participant takes notes individually and will present results in the next step.

Define common ground (step 3)

Participants present results of interviews to the group and cluster them (post its). Please make sure to document the discussions in detail. Integrate picture of post its. Translate to English afterwards and take notes during the presentations.

*Group creates persona. The needs-oriented statement is important because it becomes the POINT OF VIEW: "How could ... be developed/changed for ... so that is influenced/changed?"
Collect posters afterwards.*

Find ideas (step 4)

Every participant writes down IDEAS to solve the problem on post its. Participants present their ideas to the group and cluster them (post its).

Please make sure to document the discussions in detail. Integrate pictures of post its and ranking of ideas. Translate to English afterwards and take notes during the presentations.

Protoyping (step 5)

Take pictures during the work process if participants agree.

Pitching ideas, presentation and feedback (step 6)

Every group presents their prototype to the plenary.

Please make sure to document the discussions in detail as well as objections. Integrate pictures of the prototype.

Integrating feedback (step 7)

Take pictures during the work process if participants agree.

Testing the prototype (step 8)

Every group presents their prototype to the plenary.

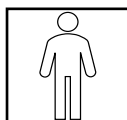
Please make sure to document the discussions in detail. Integrate pictures of the prototype.

Name _____

Occupation _____

Age _____

Family status _____



Biography

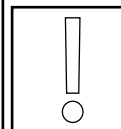
- sociodemographic details
- job
- hobbies

Problems & Obstacles to engage with community



Relation to engagement

Motives to engage in community



Context-related quote

Reporting Template Alternative Format (Workshop 2)

Country report of [country]

Date:	DD.MM.YYYY
Place, Country:	
Notetaker name and e-mail address:	
No of participants/stakeholder group:	
<p>Documentation of the process (1-2 pages, depending on the format) <i>Please make sure to document the discussions in detail & summarize at the end. Integrate pictures of post its, whisper groups and in the plenary (clustering). Translate to English afterwards and take notes during the presentations.</i></p>	

Background information (1-2 pages)

Why did we choose this method? (justification, if not RurALL project)

Method – What did we do?

ANNEX IV: Good Practice Catalogue

The *Good Practice Catalogue On the reuse of deteriorating buildings* was developed as part of the RurALL project, which focuses on creating livable rural communities and addressing the challenge of depopulation. The catalogue compiles global examples of repurposed structures, showcasing innovative methods to transform neglected spaces into active community hubs and economic opportunities. Through case studies, RurALL demonstrates how adaptive reuse can revitalize rural areas, from converting old factories into cultural centers to transforming farm buildings into coworking spaces. By recognizing deteriorating buildings as opportunities for renewal, the project aims to empower rural communities to attract new residents and foster vibrant environments.

We are linking this document that could serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for anyone looking to approach the challenge of repurposing deteriorating dwellings. By showcasing successful examples from around the world, it opens up a world of possibilities for transforming neglected spaces into thriving community hubs. The ideas and strategies presented here can spark your creativity and motivate you to take action. Each example illustrates that with vision and collaboration, we can breathe new life into our communities. This document encourages you to think outside the box, embrace innovative solutions, and consider how we can all play a role in revitalizing our neighborhoods and fostering sustainable, livable environments for everyone.

You can find the document on the following pages.

**Interreg
Danube Region**



Co-funded by
the European Union



RurALL

Good practice catalogue

On the reuse of deteriorating buildings

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Introduction

This Good Practice Catalogue on the reuse of deteriorating buildings is prepared the frames of the project “RurALL – Liveable rural communities of the future – new integrated governance model to address depopulation of rural areas” which aims to collect, process and present worldwide examples of how deteriorating buildings have been repurposed. The current Study is carried out as part of the activities within the 1st Work Package of the project. RurALL presents a comprehensive study that not only addresses the pressing issue of depopulation in rural areas but also introduces innovative approaches to revitalizing deteriorating buildings. By highlighting several examples of repurposing these structures, the study showcases the potential for transforming neglected spaces into vibrant hubs of community activity and economic opportunity. From old factories turned cultural centres to former farm buildings converted into coworking spaces, each example demonstrates the power of adaptive reuse in fostering sustainable rural development. Through the exploration of these case studies, RurALL aims to inspire and inform stakeholders about the possibilities inherent in leveraging deteriorating dwellings as catalysts for positive change in rural communities. By combining theoretical insights with practical examples, the study offers valuable insights into the potential of repurposing buildings to address the challenges of depopulation and create thriving, resilient rural environments for generations to come. RurALL aims to tackle the significant challenge of depopulation in rural areas, a pressing issue that spans the Danube region and beyond. The depopulation trend has far-reaching consequences, including a shortage of highly skilled labour, economic decline, an aging population, reduced access to services, and overall diminished quality of life in rural communities. These challenges are exacerbated by limited resources and capacity within rural areas to develop and implement effective policy responses. To address this complex issue, RurALL proposes the development of a multi-stakeholder governance model, supported by cross-sectoral collaboration and community engagement activities.

At the core of RurALL's approach is the recognition of deteriorating dwellings as both a challenge and an opportunity in the fight against depopulation. By harnessing the potential of these neglected structures, the project seeks to empower rural communities to revitalize their areas and attract new residents. Inspired by the principles of the New European Bauhaus initiative, RurALL aims to foster a transnational dialogue among experts, policymakers, and citizens to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and co-create innovative solutions. The urgency of addressing depopulation in rural areas cannot be overstated, especially as urban-rural disparities continue to widen. By mobilizing a diverse network of stakeholders and leveraging the potential of deteriorating dwellings, RurALL aims to catalyze positive change and foster vibrant, resilient rural communities across the Danube region and beyond.

Good practices for the reuse of deteriorating buildings

Cube house to innovative smart home - Hungary

At the 2019 Solar Decathlon, a university innovation competition held in Szentendre, Hungary, a consortium consisting of the University of Pécs, the University of Miskolc, and the Algerian Blida Saad Dahlad University received four awards for their exemplary project, the Hungarian Nest+ (Magyar Fészek+) project, which involved the transformation of a cube house. The project, reimagined by students from Pécs and Miskolc universities, secured the second place in the architectural category and the third place in the energy efficiency category. It focused on the renovation of a cube house, resulting in a low-budget passive building incorporating vernacular elements for energy-efficient integration, alongside the design of an additional energy-producing structure. Among the innovative features of the Hungarian Nest+ were solutions such as the Venturi tower installed beneath the building, facilitating passive air exchange, summer cooling, and winter sunlight exposure. Additionally, a mobile sunroom located on the southern side provided energy to the building during winters through its polycarbonate sliding walls. Mobile living spaces allowed for flexible combinations suitable for various family sizes and structural needs, while "smart" furniture made from recycled materials and automation controlling the building's functions garnered recognition. This exemplar model served as an innovative initiative for the renewal of the domestic building type known as the "Kádár cube," of which over 800,000 were built in Hungary, making their renovation increasingly relevant due to aging.



Picture 1: Cube house to innovative smart home.

Source: <https://univpecs.com/egyetemi-élet/komoly-elismerest-kapott-magyar-feszek-mintahaz>

The new life of an old farmhouse -Tésenfa, Hungary

In the rural landscapes of Hungary, one often encounters old-fashioned farmhouses whose structures remain suitable even in contemporary times. These buildings are frequently designated as cultural heritage sites, thereby preserving their architectural characteristics in accordance with

regional traditions. Consequently, the greatest challenge during renovation lies in both the significant investment required and the necessity to adhere to traditional building materials and methods mandated by local preservation regulations, all while meeting the demands of 21st-century inhabitants. To support the restoration of heritage buildings, the Folk Architecture Program was established, providing state-level assistance for their authentic refurbishment and adaptive reuse. Abandoned and decaying buildings of this nature, found in rural areas, harbour vast, untapped potential, as they can be acquired relatively inexpensively due to their enduring structures. Although renovating such a house entails considerable costs, it proves worthwhile on multiple fronts. Firstly, by refurbishing it, the owner preserves a fragment of the past; secondly, they reintroduce into use a building that has likely stood vacant for some time, thereby not encroaching further upon undeveloped land but rather reintegrating an existing structure into the cycle. In Tésenfa, the current owners stumbled upon a typical Ormánság farmhouse, constructed of adobe, featuring a three-part layout with a porch and accompanied by a 4700 square meter plot of land. This house, under local protection, was built around the mid-19th century with a central hall, a room, and a kitchen, later augmented with a pantry, a carriage house, a cellar, and a stable. At the turn of the century, a room was added, along with a neoclassical facade extension that elongated the building towards the courtyard. An intriguing feature of the house is its rarely seen side porch. These old houses in Ormánság have stood for over a hundred years. Left untouched since the war, they don't have modern comforts like electricity or running water. But their history



remains intact, reminding us of the past and the resilience of our heritage.

Picture 2: The new life of an old farmhouse. Source: <http://okosvaros.lechnerkozpont.hu/hu/peldatar/egy-paraszthaz-uj-elete>

Kabelwerk – Wien, Austria

For a century, the "Kabelwerk" (formerly known as "Kabel- und Drahtwerke AG") stood as an iconic symbol of industrial prowess in the district, serving as both a cornerstone of employment and a pivotal player in the local economy. However, the closure of this honoured establishment in December 1997 marked the end of an era, prompting a concerted effort by the city of Vienna and the Meidling district to reimagine the site's future. Recognizing the importance of community involvement from the outset, local residents were invited to participate in a workshop as early as May 30, 1996. This collaborative effort, known as the "Millennium Workshop," sought to harness the collective wisdom and creativity of residents in shaping the destiny of the former industrial hub. The workshop's outcomes were later showcased in an exhibition that not only documented the process but also served as a catalyst for broader community engagement and discussion. Fostered by the initial success of participatory planning, the project gained momentum. In 1998, an urban planning competition was launched to solicit innovative design proposals for the site's redevelopment. The ensuing years saw a series of "experimental projects" evaluated by a consortium comprising urban planning experts and representatives of the local community. This iterative process terminated in the formulation of a comprehensive land use and development plan in June 2002, laying the foundation for the site's transformation. Since September 2002, the reins of the project have been held by "Kabelwerk" Bauträger GmbH, marking a pivotal transition towards implementation. Leveraging the insights gathered from participatory planning and guided by a commitment to innovation and sustainability, the project embarked on a journey to redefine urban living in the district.



Picture 3:Kabelwerk. Source: <https://smartcity.wien.gv.at/kabelwerk/>

Central to the project's principles is a commitment to architectural diversity and inclusivity. To this end, six accredited architectural teams were tasked with conceptualizing a range of housing options that catered to the diverse needs and aspirations of future residents. From cozy houses with private gardens to contemporary maisonettes and innovative home offices, the resulting

designs reflected a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity. Moreover, the project's emphasis on green spaces and recreational amenities underscores its commitment to fostering a vibrant and livable community. In addition to precisely landscaped parks and playgrounds, the site boasts a network of car-free walkways, inviting squares, and dedicated play areas for children of all ages. These amenities not only enhance quality of life but also promote social interaction and community cohesion. As construction progressed between 2004 and 2010, the site gradually took shape, transforming into a dynamic and inclusive residential enclave that embodies the spirit of urban renewal. In recognition of its transformative impact on the urban fabric, the project was honoured with the prestigious "Otto Wagner Städtebaupreis" (urban planning award) in 2004, affirming its status as a pioneering model of sustainable urban development. In summary, the Cable Factory project stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, innovation, and community engagement in revitalizing historic industrial sites and reimagining them as vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive urban neighbourhoods.

Alte Schule – Generations living together – Karlshorst, Germany

The Alte Schule Karlshorst, formerly known as the Old Karlshorst School, was purchased by the trias Foundation with support from the SelbstBau e.G. foundation and leased to the cooperative for a period of 99 years through a perpetual lease agreement. The building now belongs to the tenants' cooperative, SelbstBau e.G. The fundamental principle of the residential project undertaken in the historic community school in Karlshorst is cohabitation and mutual support. Since 2007, new life has been infused into the premises, accommodating young families, singles, individuals with disabilities, spirited seniors - essentially anyone who can envision living in a school that's



Picture 4: Alte Schule. Source: <https://www.cohousing-berlin.de/projekte/alte-schule-karlshorst>

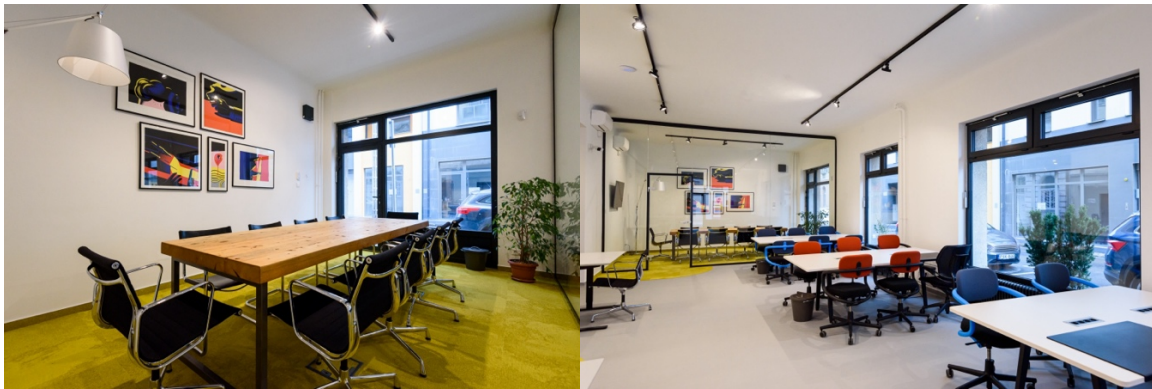
over 100 years old. Thanks to the architectural structure of the old Karlshorst school, conducive conditions are offered for realizing intergenerational cohabitation. The bright, expansive former classrooms have been individually transformed into various-sized apartments tailored to the needs of the new residents, without compromising the grand impression and character of the former community school. Out of the 21 apartments, six are specifically designed for accessibility, with the entire property and building being made accessible. Occupancy of the apartments is subject to housing eligibility certification. The Mark Brandenburg Association rents rooms and operates a children's house within the building. Ten children reside there who, for various reasons, are unable to live with their parents.

Loffice – Budapest, Hungary

Hungary's inaugural coworking office offered a preview of ongoing developments in the 8th district. Loffice's new 3000 m² base, slated to open officially in the second quarter of 2020, will encompass coworking spaces, family-friendly coworking zones, and coliving accommodations. Designed to integrate work, life, and creativity, the facility spans seven levels, featuring personalized offices, furnished apartments, and event venues. Coliving spaces provide stylish living quarters and foster a sense of community for nomadic freelancers. Participants also toured Loffice's loft at Rákóczi Square, blending industrial heritage with contemporary design. Led by local civil organizations and experts, the tour delved into cultural-led urban development and district history. Until recently, Salétrom Street was infamous for its association with prostitution and crime. Insights were shared by Mindspace's Adam Kobrizsa and criminologist Tamás Bezsenyi, highlighting the challenges of fostering intergenerational inclusivity and community engagement. Mindspace has spearheaded revitalization efforts at the Rákóczi Square Market Hall. The tour underscored the importance of well-functioning community spaces in facilitating dialogue and cooperation. The district's transition from vice hub to vibrant community nexus was evident. The multifunctional complex aims to cater to diverse needs while nurturing a sense of belonging. It marries contemporary design with community-centric values. Coworking spaces offer flexibility and customization for modern professionals. Coliving arrangements extend beyond housing, offering avenues for social connection. Integration of workspace, living space, and communal areas encourages collaboration and interaction. The tour provided invaluable insights into the district's past, present, and future. It showcased the potential for cultural-led urban revitalization and inclusive community development. The tour participants gained a deeper understanding of the district's transformation.

Mindspace's efforts have played a pivotal role in the district's rejuvenation. The district's rich history adds depth and character to its evolving identity. Collaborative efforts between local organizations and experts drive positive change. The complex represents a shift towards holistic urban planning and community-centric design. The tour emphasized the importance of preserving heritage while embracing innovation. Mindspace's initiatives reflect a commitment to sustainable urban development. The district's revival serves as a model for cultural-led regeneration in urban

settings. Overall, the tour highlighted the district's journey towards becoming a dynamic, inclusive, and vibrant community hub. In addition to revitalizing physical spaces, the tour emphasized the importance of fostering social connections and community cohesion. Mindspace's initiatives have not only transformed the district's physical landscape but have also created opportunities for residents to engage in meaningful interactions and collaborative endeavors. By promoting a culture of inclusivity and collaboration, the multifunctional complex aims to break down barriers and cultivate a sense of belonging among diverse groups of people. Through curated events, workshops, and networking opportunities, the complex serves as a catalyst for creativity, innovation, and social empowerment. By nurturing a vibrant and interconnected community, the district's revival extends beyond mere infrastructure development to encompass a thriving ecosystem where individuals can flourish and contribute to the collective well-being of the neighbourhood.



Picture 5 and 6: Loffice. Source: <https://loffice.hu/budapest/hu/hirek/hir/index.php?s=egykori-voroslampas-hazbol-szuletik-ujja-2020-legujabb-kozossegi-talalkozohelye>

PortusHome – Vászoly, Hungary

Located in the picturesque Balaton-felvidék, Hungary's first coliving-coworking space was established by Antal Csaba. This innovative project transformed a former stable into a hub for remote IT project teams, replacing cows with collaborative workspaces. The initiative sparked vibrant discussions about coliving, digital nomadism, and the dynamics of remote work, blending tradition with innovation.

Situated on a sprawling 5,000 square meter expanse of a former agricultural cooperative farm on the outskirts of the village, the project breathed new life into an old cowshed. Acquired three years ago with the vision of creating a coliving space, the former stable now stands as the central building of this transformative endeavour. The project represents a response to the evolving nature of work, particularly in light of the increasing prevalence of remote work arrangements. By repurposing the cowshed into a coworking space, the initiative aimed to provide a conducive environment for collaboration, creativity, and productivity. This initiative addresses the challenges and opportunities associated with remote work, offering a solution for individuals seeking a balance between work and lifestyle. By fostering a sense of community and providing essential

amenities, the project aims to support individuals and teams in their professional endeavours while embracing the freedom and flexibility of remote work.

The project's significance extends beyond its physical infrastructure; it embodies a cultural shift towards more flexible and collaborative work environments. By leveraging existing structures and embracing modern technology, the initiative demonstrates how traditional spaces can be repurposed to meet the needs of the contemporary workforce. PortusHome, as the project is known, represents a pioneering effort to create a multifunctional space that accommodates diverse work styles and preferences. Through strategic planning and collaboration with architects and industry professionals, the project has been designed to facilitate productivity, creativity, and community engagement.



Picture 7 and 8: Portushome in Vászoly. Source: <https://freelancerblog.hu/ahova-a-nomadok-is-hazajarnak-megnyitott-a-vaszolyi-portushome-coworking-coliving/>

The coliving-coworking concept is poised to redefine traditional notions of work and living, offering a compelling alternative to conventional office spaces and residential arrangements. By providing a platform for remote teams, digital nomads, and independent travellers to connect and collaborate, the project aims to foster innovation and cultural exchange. As Hungary's first venture of its kind, PortusHome serves as a beacon of innovation and entrepreneurship in the region. By embracing the principles of coliving and coworking, the project embodies a vision of work and lifestyle integration that resonates with the evolving needs of today's workforce. Furthermore, PortusHome represents a holistic approach to community building and sustainable living. Beyond its function as a coworking space, the project incorporates elements of environmental responsibility and social engagement. Through initiatives such as recycling programs, community gardens, and cultural events, PortusHome fosters a sense of belonging and stewardship among its residents and visitors. By integrating sustainability practices into its operations and promoting local engagement, the project contributes to the long-term well-being of both its inhabitants and the surrounding environment. Through these efforts, PortusHome strives to be more than just a

workspace—it aims to be a catalyst for positive change and collective action in the Balaton-felvidék region and beyond.

Casa Netural – Matera, Italy

Casa Netural stands as an inclusive hub of culture and connection, drawing together individuals and innovators from diverse corners of the globe. Serving as the central hub for the Netural Coop Social Enterprise and Associazione Casa Netural, it offers not only a coliving space but a fertile ground for the cultivation of fresh relationships and the nurturing of new skills and visions. Since its inception in 2012, Casa Netural has been at the forefront of the coliving movement, gathering digital nomads, inquisitive travellers, social change-makers, and creative minds to coexist alongside the local community. It goes beyond mere communal living, embracing a collaborative ethos that encourages residents to share professional endeavours and personal transformations, sparking inspiration and fostering growth.

With locations in Basilicata and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Casa Netural has spearheaded numerous projects aimed at catalysing social innovation. From its pioneering coliving initiative in Matera, which facilitated meaningful exchanges between locals and global guests, to the transformative Wonder Grottole project, revitalizing the historic heart of Grottole through the adaptive reuse of derelict structures, Casa Netural continues to leave an indelible mark on the cultural landscape. As Casa Netural embarks on its next chapter, with the restoration of its Matera residence and the imminent opening of a second house in Gorizia, its commitment to community building and civic engagement remains unwavering. Every day, its coliving spaces buzz with activity, welcoming not only remote workers utilizing the coworking facilities but also social activists orchestrating cultural initiatives and local residents eager to partake in scheduled events and forge connections with visiting guests. In essence, Casa Netural's coliving ethos transcends geographical boundaries, serving as a conduit for social impact and cultural exchange. It offers a respite from the routine, a platform for professional and personal growth, and above all, a vibrant tapestry of shared experiences and newfound friendships, enriching lives and communities alike.

Casa Netural stands as an inclusive cultural center nestled in the captivating landscape of Matera, Italy. The mission revolves around fostering connections between citizens and innovators worldwide. Serving as the headquarters for the Netural Coop Social Enterprise and Associazione Casa Netural, the coliving spaces have been facilitating the birth of new relationships and the nurturing of fresh skills and visions since 2012. These spaces attract a diverse array of individuals, including digital nomads, curious travellers, social innovators, and creatives, all seeking to live harmoniously alongside the local community. The coliving ethos transcends traditional house-sharing; it embodies a collaborative lifestyle where individuals can disconnect from the mundane and find inspiration through shared experiences. With locations spanning Basilicata and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Casa Netural is committed to driving social innovation and revitalizing historic town centers like Grottole. Through dedication to building networks, promoting civic engagement, and

fostering social impact, Casa Netural remains a beacon of positive change and cultural enrichment. Dive into the spaces, engage with fellow visionaries, and become part of the journey towards a more vibrant and interconnected global community.

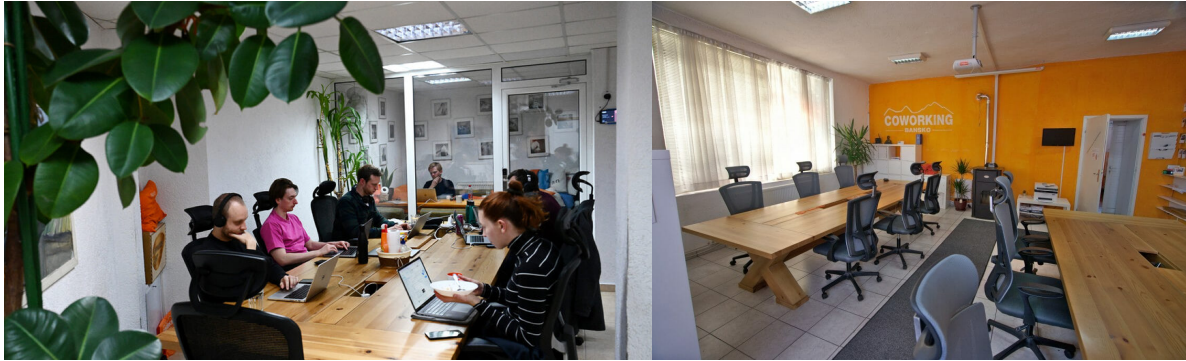


Picture 9 and 10: Casa Netural. Source: <https://www.benetural.com>

Coworking Bansko – Bansko, Bulgaria

The genesis of this project traces back to Matthias Zeitler's quest for companionship in a world of board games. A pioneer digital nomad from Germany, Zeitler's journey began in 2009 when he bid farewell to corporate life and embarked on a global adventure as a software developer. Seeking a home base, he settled in Bansko, Bulgaria, drawn by its EU membership, favourable tax regime, and Mediterranean climate. Yet, solitude loomed until he took a leap of faith, establishing Coworking Bansko in 2012, defying sceptics who doubted the town's potential as a digital nomad hub. Today, Bansko stands as a haven for remote workers, boasting a thriving community with numerous coworking spaces and events like the Bansko Nomad Fest, attracting hundreds of nomads worldwide. Amidst the picturesque backdrop of Pirin mountains, digital nomads find solace, forming bonds over shared experiences and aspirations. Bansko's transformation into a nomadic village mirrors a broader global trend, challenging conventional notions of work and lifestyle. While debates over its societal impact persist, Bansko exemplifies the allure and complexities of the digital nomad phenomenon, epitomized by Zeitler's vision for Coliving Semkovo, a sprawling co-living space set to redefine communal living in the heart of Bulgaria's natural beauty. As Bansko evolves into a digital nomad mecca, the community grapples with its newfound identity and responsibilities. While some locals embrace the influx of remote workers as a boon to the economy, others voice concerns about gentrification and cultural erosion. Nevertheless, Bansko's rise underscores the transformative power of grassroots initiatives like Coworking Bansko, catalysing economic revitalization and social cohesion. As digital nomadism transcends niche status to become a global phenomenon, Bansko's story serves as a microcosm of broader societal shifts towards remote work and borderless living. Amidst the backdrop of Pirin's majestic peaks, a new chapter unfolds in the saga of Bansko, blending tradition with

innovation, and embracing the promise of a digital future. As the allure of Bansko spreads, fuelled by its vibrant nomadic community and entrepreneurial spirit, the town finds itself at a crossroads of tradition and modernity. With each passing season, Bansko's streets echo with the footsteps of adventurers drawn by the promise of remote work and shared experiences. In Bansko, the convergence of past and present offers a glimpse into the evolving landscape of global mobility, where ancient traditions harmonize with contemporary aspirations, creating a tapestry of diversity and dynamism.



Picture 11 and 12: Bansko coworking space. Source: <https://www.novo-monde.com/en/bansko-bulgaria-digital-nomad/>

Hof van Cartesius – Utrecht, Netherlands

In a city where stable and affordable spaces for small creative entrepreneurs are scarce, the transformation of a neglected plot of land into Hof van Cartesius, a dynamic co-creative space on the outskirts of Utrecht, the Netherlands, emerged as a beacon of innovation. Overcoming bureaucratic hurdles and leveraging a bottom-up approach, the project aimed to empower creative makers with limited incomes. Recognized for its commitment to sustainability and community engagement, Hof van Cartesius has become a model for grassroots initiatives driving positive change. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders and embracing circular design principles, the project not only addresses the need for affordable workspaces but also revitalizes neglected urban areas. With a thriving community and growing recognition, the future holds promise for further expansion and impact, demonstrating the potential of inclusive, sustainable development in modern cities. It all began with an 'Open Call' from the Municipality of Utrecht, inviting proposals for an affordable, modular working space for creative entrepreneurs. Responding to this call, urban planner Charlotte Ernst conceptualized Hof van Cartesius with four core principles: a bottom-up community, a regenerative garden, circular and material-driven design, and a catalyst for neighborhood redevelopment. The project won the call, addressing a pressing need for affordable workspaces in Utrecht's rapidly urbanizing landscape.

The construction of Hof van Cartesius was not merely architectural; it was a collaborative endeavour involving the municipality, inventors, entrepreneurs, and creative makers. Through a cooperative association, stakeholders united to create a financially viable grassroots organization. Circular design principles guided the construction, with makers building their workspaces from

waste or second-hand materials. This approach not only optimized financial resources but also empowered makers to personalize their spaces, fostering a sense of ownership and community.

The success of Hof van Cartesius lies in its empowered community's grassroots efforts. Despite challenges and scepticism, a diverse array of individuals, including pioneers, passers-by, refugees, retirees, and neighbours, contributed tirelessly to realize the project's vision. Inclusiveness is a cornerstone, evident in the workspace's architecture, featuring a central, publicly accessible courtyard and transparent facades. Since its inauguration, Hof van Cartesius has evolved into a thriving community hub, attracting individuals from various backgrounds to a once desolate industrial terrain. Its success has garnered national and regional recognition, positioning it as a leader in Utrecht's circular economy and sustainable community-building efforts. Looking ahead, the project aims to continue expanding, with plans to accommodate new participants and further promote inclusivity and sustainability. As the demand for affordable and green workspace continues to grow, Hof van Cartesius stands as a testament to the power of bottom-up initiatives in addressing urban challenges. With its collaborative ethos and commitment to sustainability, it exemplifies how communities can transform neglected spaces into vibrant hubs of creativity and innovation, shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future for cities.



[Picture 13 and 14: Hof van Cartesius. Source: Hof van Cartesius: our Affordable Place where Small Businesses and Creative Local Entrepreneurs thrive - The City at Eye Level](#)

The Commons -Melbourne, Australia

At the heart of The Commons lies a vibrant community of members, carefully considered in every decision made within our spaces. Recognizing that personal and professional success thrives within a diverse and supportive environment, The Commons is dedicated to fostering connections, collaborations, and growth. Born from the vision of Australian schoolmates Cliff and Tom in Melbourne, The Commons emerged as a B Corp Certified membership-based creative workspace, aiming to redefine traditional notions of work and office culture.

The journey began in 2016 with the opening of the inaugural location in Collingwood, Melbourne. Constructed from repurposed shipping containers and filled with simple yet functional materials, this space symbolized the commitment to sustainability and innovation. From day one, the unique differences among members and spaces were embraced, valuing diversity as a cornerstone of the community. As The Commons continues to expand, offering a range of brands tailored to diverse needs, the commitment to providing a consistent, high-quality experience remains unwavering. Explore the brands and discover the perfect space for your business within the Commons Group ecosystem. The Commons stands as a beacon of innovation and collaboration in the realm of workspace design and management. Embracing sustainability and functionality, the spaces are not merely places to work but vibrant ecosystems where ideas flourish and connections thrive. With a commitment to providing a consistent experience across all locations, The Commons offers a diverse range of brands within the Commons Group, each catering to unique needs and preferences. As the community continues to grow and evolve, dedication to fostering a supportive environment remains unwavering, ensuring that every member finds inspiration, support, and success within the shared spaces.



Picture 15: The Commons. Source: [About Us | The Commons - Creative Workspace in Melbourne & Sydney](#)

The Cape Town Office - Cape Town, South Africa

The Cape Town Office (CTO) story began in 2010, with a return to Cape Town after more than a decade abroad. Seeking a suitable workspace for remote work, the founder discovered a surprising lack of coworking spaces in the city. Determined to create a collaborative environment, a small office space was secured at 62 Roeland Street in 2011, marking the humble beginnings of CTO. Over the years, the space has expanded to accommodate a growing community of remote workers, small businesses, and individuals seeking a structured environment away from the isolation of working alone. As the world of work evolves, especially in the wake of the Covid pandemic, CTO remains committed to providing a supportive and vibrant workspace where connections are fostered, and mental well-being is prioritized. With a range of amenities and a focus on community, CTO invites those ready to embrace coworking to join their thriving space.

In the midst of changing work dynamics catalysed by the Covid pandemic, the essence of CTO's mission rings truer than ever: "Community is better than isolation." With employers increasingly embracing remote work options, CTO provides a haven for those seeking the benefits of structure, camaraderie, and mental well-being that come from working alongside like-minded individuals. Whether it's the allure of reliable WiFi, a break from home distractions, or the desire to cultivate connections in a shared space, CTO offers a welcoming environment for teams, small companies, and individuals alike. As the demand for flexible work arrangements continues to surge, CTO stands as a beacon of support, ready to empower individuals to thrive in their professional pursuits within a vibrant coworking community.



Picture 16 and 17: The Cape Town Office. Source: <https://capetownoffice.com/>

Hubsy - Paris, France

Hubsy in Paris offers a unique concept that blends the functionality of a coworking space with the inviting ambiance of a café. Whether you're looking for a temporary office for a few hours or a dedicated workspace for an extended period, Hubsy provides a warm, tranquil, and productive environment. The streamlined pricing, efficient check-in/check-out process, locally roasted coffee, unlimited beverages, and self-service snack buffet all contribute to an enhanced experience. With supersonic wifi, ample electrical outlets, and printing and scanning capabilities, Hubsy ensures that you have everything you need to maximize your productivity while enjoying your favorite drink. Additionally, private spaces are available for conference calls and meetings, offering a conducive setting for efficient collaboration. For moments requiring privacy, telephone booths are accessible for calls or video conferences, allowing individuals to focus without distractions. Hubsy's flexible booking options and thoughtful amenities make it the ideal destination for remote work or team gatherings in the heart of Paris. Nestled in the heart of Paris, Hubsy redefines the traditional workspace with its innovative coworking café concept. As a sanctuary for productivity seekers, it offers a haven where individuals can escape the confines of conventional offices and embrace flexibility in their work routines. The carefully curated environment balances tranquillity with efficiency, providing a serene backdrop for focused work sessions.



Picture 18: The Hubsy, Source: <https://www.hubsy.fr/>

The Ministry - London, United Kingdom

Once an old building, Ministry London has undergone a remarkable transformation into a dynamic coworking space that offers private offices with lockable doors and an abundance of natural light streaming in through opening windows. Ministry London offers a haven for productivity and creativity, where individuals and teams alike can thrive in a meticulously designed space. Featuring private offices tailored to accommodate small teams or enterprises of 100 or more, each unit boasts a lockable door and abundant natural light streaming in through opening windows. The

flexibility to decorate and style according to personal taste ensures a personalized touch, while fully furnished layouts offer adaptable configurations to suit varying needs. With individual temperature control, occupants can create an optimal working environment conducive to focus and comfort. In addition to private offices, Ministry London provides the best of both worlds with access to inspiring communal areas alongside dedicated desk spaces. Enjoy the freedom to work anytime with 24/7 access, ensuring flexibility for individuals with diverse schedules. Each desk comes equipped with lockable storage for essential supplies, promoting organization and security. Access to communal breakout spaces fosters collaboration and networking opportunities, enriching the overall work experience. Regular exposure to natural light throughout the workspace contributes to a refreshing atmosphere, enhancing productivity and well-being. Throughout Ministry London, the emphasis is on functionality, comfort, and aesthetic appeal, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of its occupants. Whether seeking solitude for focused work or seeking opportunities for interaction and collaboration, the space offers a dynamic environment to support professional growth and success. With thoughtful amenities and flexible arrangements, Ministry London sets the stage for innovation and achievement, empowering individuals and teams to reach their full potential in a welcoming and inspiring setting.

At Ministry London, the experience extends beyond the workspace, offering opportunities for networking, collaboration, and enrichment. With drinks available at the bar and the option to enjoy masterclasses or lunch on the terrace, members can engage in meaningful interactions in a relaxed setting. Rub shoulders with fellow members from a diverse range of industries, each bringing their own unique perspectives and expertise to the table. Whether you're seeking potential business partners, collaborators, or simply like-minded individuals, Ministry London provides the ideal platform to forge connections and cultivate relationships. Amidst the vibrant atmosphere, members have the opportunity to strategize and plan for future endeavours, whether it's launching a start-up, expanding an existing business, or pursuing new ventures. The space serves as a hub for innovation and ambition, where ideas are exchanged, partnerships are formed, and dreams of world domination are nurtured. With a community of like-minded professionals at your fingertips, Ministry London empowers individuals to turn their aspirations into reality, offering the support and resources needed to thrive in today's competitive landscape.



Picture 19 and 20: The Ministry London. Source: <https://theministry.com/>

The Hive, Singapore

Situated in the bustling city of Singapore, The Hive stands out as a beacon of innovation and creativity. Housed within a renovated traditional Chinese building, The Hive preserves the architectural heritage of the past while embracing the spirit of modern coworking culture. With its unique blend of historical charm and contemporary amenities, The Hive offers a one-of-a-kind workspace experience. Step inside, and you'll find a dynamic environment buzzing with activity. From entrepreneurs and freelancers to start-ups and established businesses, The Hive attracts a diverse community of professionals from various industries.

This eclectic mix of talents creates opportunities for networking, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. The interior design of The Hive reflects its ethos of blending tradition with modernity. Elegant touches inspired by Chinese architecture mingle seamlessly with sleek, contemporary furnishings. Natural light floods the space, creating an inviting atmosphere conducive to productivity and creativity. In addition to its coworking facilities, The Hive offers a range of amenities designed to enhance the work experience. Members have access to high-speed internet, printing services, meeting rooms, and more. The Hive also hosts a variety of events, from networking sessions to workshops and seminars, providing opportunities for skill development and community building. Beyond work, The Hive fosters a sense of community through social activities and gatherings. Whether it's grabbing a drink at the onsite bar, enjoying a masterclass, or having lunch on the terrace, members can forge connections and unwind in a relaxed setting. Overall, The Hive in Singapore is not just a workspace—it's a vibrant ecosystem where ideas flourish, collaborations thrive, and individuals come together to shape the future.



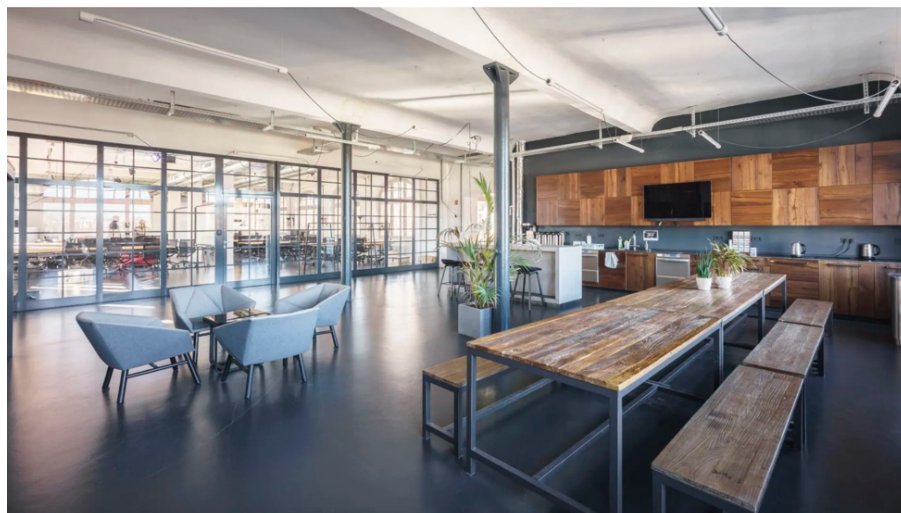
Picture 21: The Hive. Source: <https://thehive.sg/>

Factory Berlin Görlitzer Park – Berlin, Germany

Factory Berlin Görlitzer Park, located in the heart of Berlin, Germany, is a coworking hub housed within a historic residential building. Situated in the vibrant area surrounding Görlitzer Park, this workspace embodies a fusion of old-world charm and contemporary innovation. The building's transformation into a hub of creativity and collaboration speaks to Berlin's reputation as a hub for start-ups, entrepreneurs, and creatives.

Once a residential dwelling, the building has been revitalized into a dynamic space that caters to the needs of modern professionals. Innovative offices, communal areas, and state-of-the-art facilities create an environment where ideas flourish and connections are made. Factory Berlin Görlitzer Park is more than just a place to work—it's a thriving ecosystem where individuals and businesses come together to exchange ideas, collaborate on projects, and support one another's growth. With a diverse community of members representing various industries and disciplines, the coworking centre fosters a spirit of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. The transformation of this old residential building into a hub of innovation is a testament to Berlin's dynamic spirit and its ability to reinvent itself. By repurposing existing structures and breathing new life into them, Factory Berlin Görlitzer Park celebrates the city's rich history while embracing its future as a leading destination for start-ups and innovators.

Established in 2011, the company operates coworking spaces in Berlin and Hamburg, serving a vibrant community of 5,000 members and hosting 150 start-ups. Among its esteemed clientele are renowned companies such as Freeletics, GoButler, Lufthansa Innovation Hub, The New Motion, SoundCloud, Uber, and Zendesk. These innovative enterprises choose the company's coworking spaces for their dynamic environments, state-of-the-art facilities, and opportunities for collaboration and networking. By providing a supportive ecosystem for start-ups and established businesses alike, the company plays a pivotal role in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in Germany's thriving tech scene.



Picture 22: Factory Berlin. Source <https://factoryberlin.com/de/spaces/#factory-berlin-goerlitzer-park>

The Spaces Zuidas – Amsterdam, the Netherlands

The Spaces Zuidas in Amsterdam, Netherlands, repurposed an old residential building into modern offices. This facility offers spacious office areas, conference rooms, and communal spaces, providing a versatile environment for businesses to thrive. Situated in the bustling city of Amsterdam, Spaces Zuidas caters to the needs of professionals and entrepreneurs, offering a blend of functionality and aesthetic appeal. With its strategic location and contemporary amenities, the space serves as a hub for innovation, collaboration, and productivity in the heart of Amsterdam's business district. At Spaces Zuidas in Amsterdam, Netherlands, work is centred around people and ideas. The spaces attract forward thinkers, innovators, and game changers who are confident in achieving their goals. Whether one is a small business owner, entrepreneur, or corporate intrapreneur, the environment helps in expanding horizons. The vibrant atmosphere is conducive to meeting new people and networking.

With a full program of professional events and hospitality services, coupled with sophisticated European design, the business clubs immerse individuals in the buzz and energy of Spaces, making them feel right at home. The dynamic workspaces with a unique and entrepreneurial spirit are designed to inspire creativity, collaboration, and innovation. The friendly team handles all the background logistics and services, allowing the community to focus solely on driving their businesses forward. At Spaces Zuidas, the aim is to foster an environment where individuals can thrive and achieve their goals. Moreover, Spaces Zuidas goes beyond providing physical workspace; it offers a holistic experience designed to enhance productivity and well-being. From ergonomic furniture and state-of-the-art facilities to wellness programs and social activities, every aspect is thoughtfully curated to promote work-life balance and personal development. By nurturing a supportive and inclusive community, Spaces Zuidas empowers individuals to thrive professionally and personally, making it more than just a coworking space—it's a catalyst for growth and success.



Picture 23 and 24: The Spaces Zuidas. Source: <https://www.spacesworks.com/nl/amsterdam-nl/zuidas/>

B. Amsterdam - Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Nestled in the vibrant city of Amsterdam, B. Amsterdam stands as a testament to the transformative potential of repurposed spaces. Originally an old school building and office complex, this innovative hub has evolved into a dynamic coworking community since its inception in 2014. At the heart of B. lies its coworking area, a bustling epicentre where professionals from diverse backgrounds converge, collaborate, and innovate.

Beyond merely offering desk space, B. Amsterdam provides a comprehensive suite of amenities designed to enhance the work experience. With a parking deck boasting 800 spaces, members and guests enjoy hassle-free access to the premises. Complimentary coffee and tea fuel productivity, while off-peak hours offer the chance to unwind with a game of paddle, further fostering a sense of community. Moreover, B. fosters a supportive ecosystem by extending discounts on services and products from trusted partners to its members. Regular community events, numbering over ten per year, serve as catalysts for networking and knowledge sharing, enriching the professional journey of every participant. Additionally, access to discounted in-house event spaces and meeting units facilitates seamless collaboration and business development. In essence, B. Amsterdam epitomizes the spirit of innovation and reinvention, breathing new life into old spaces and reshaping the traditional workspace paradigm. By combining state-of-the-art facilities with a vibrant community ethos, B. empowers individuals and enterprises to thrive in an environment conducive to growth, creativity, and success.



Picture 25 and 26: B. Amsterdam. Source: <https://b-amsterdam.com/en/work/cowork/>

The Engine Shed – Edinburgh, Scotland

The Engine Shed in Edinburgh is more than just a workspace; it's a thriving community hub where innovation and collaboration converge. Within its historic walls, you'll find a diverse array of offerings designed to support entrepreneurs, startups, and established businesses alike. From state-of-the-art conference facilities to flexible office spaces and creative workshops, The Engine Shed caters to the needs of modern professionals in a variety of industries.

One of the standout features of The Engine Shed is its commitment to preserving the building's rich heritage while embracing contemporary design and functionality. The juxtaposition of original architectural elements with modern amenities creates a unique and inspiring atmosphere that fosters creativity and productivity. Additionally, the location of The Engine Shed within Edinburgh's vibrant city center ensures easy access to a wealth of resources, including transportation options, dining establishments, and cultural attractions.

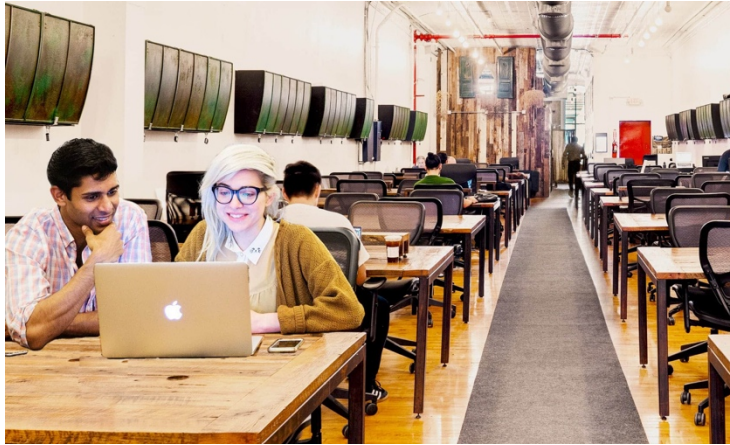
Moreover, The Engine Shed serves as a catalyst for innovation and economic development in the region. Through its programs, events, and partnerships, the space actively engages with the local community, driving forward initiatives that promote entrepreneurship, technology, and sustainability. Whether you're a freelancer looking for a quiet place to work or a start-up seeking networking opportunities and mentorship, The Engine Shed offers a supportive ecosystem where ideas can thrive and businesses can grow.



Picture 27: The Engine Shed. Source: <https://engine-shed.co.uk/>

The Farm Soho – New York City, the United States

Nestled within the vibrant streets of New York City, The Farm Soho stands as a testament to the seamless blend of urban sophistication and rustic charm. Once a humble dairy farm, this historic landmark has been thoughtfully transformed into a dynamic coworking space that captures the essence of the American heartland. From its century-old reclaimed wood tables to its meticulously curated organic rustic Americana design, every detail evokes a sense of warmth and authenticity. Strategically located in some of the city's most desirable neighbourhoods, The Farm Soho offers a haven for entrepreneurs, start-ups, and freelancers seeking refuge from the bustling city streets. Here, amidst the tranquility of the countryside-inspired surroundings, individuals are invited to immerse themselves in their work, fuelled by the solid, fast Wi-Fi connectivity that powers the space. With easy access to major subway lines and an array of dining and entertainment options nearby, The Farm Soho promises an unparalleled coworking experience where productivity meets serenity in the heart of New York City.



Picture 28. The Farm Soho. Source: <https://www.thefarmsoho.com/>

Fumbally Exchange – Waterford, Ireland

Located in Waterford, Ireland, Fumbally Exchange is a prime example of rural transformation. Once a traditional farm building, the structure has been repurposed into a vibrant hub for entrepreneurs, designers, and other professionals seeking a collaborative workspace. Fumbally Exchange Waterford offers a range of amenities and services designed to support its diverse community of members. From high-speed internet access and printing facilities to meeting rooms and event spaces, the facility is equipped with everything needed to facilitate productivity and collaboration. Additionally, members benefit from access to professional development opportunities, including workshops, training sessions, and mentorship programs.



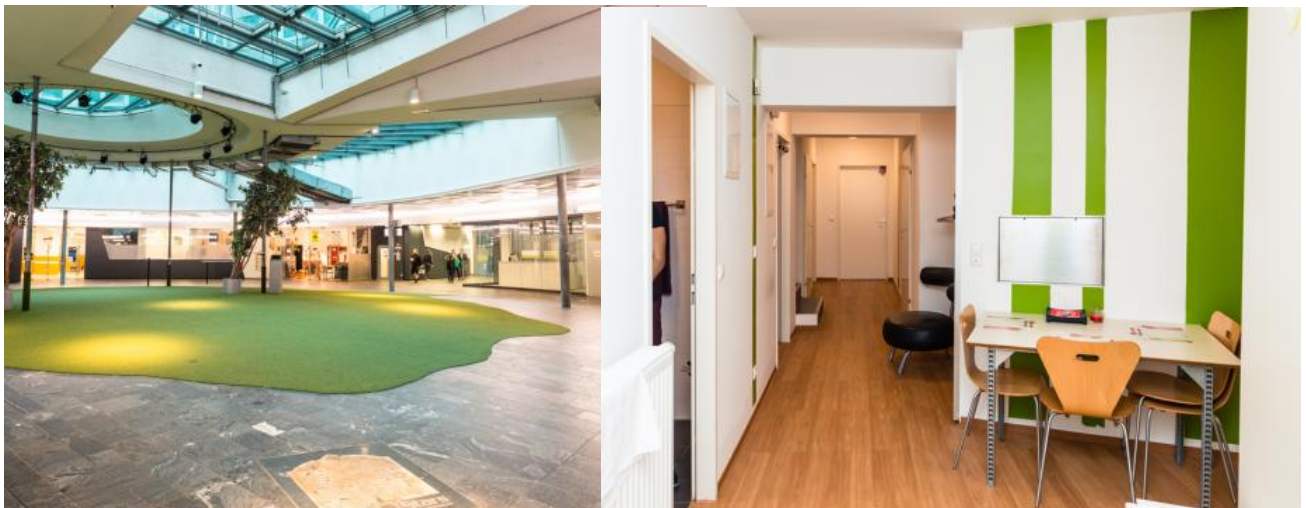
Picture 29: Fumbally Exchange. Source: <https://www.fumballyexchange.com/>

The exchange also fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie among its members, with regular social events, networking opportunities, and community-building initiatives. Whether it's a casual chat over coffee or a structured networking event, members have ample opportunities to connect with fellow professionals, share ideas, and forge meaningful relationships. Furthermore, Fumbally

Exchange is committed to sustainability and environmental stewardship, incorporating eco-friendly practices into its operations wherever possible. From energy-efficient lighting and recycling programs to green cleaning products and waste reduction initiatives, the exchange strives to minimize its environmental impact and promote sustainability within the community. Overall, Fumbally Exchange serves as a hub of creativity, collaboration, and innovation in rural Ireland, providing a supportive and inspiring environment for entrepreneurs, creatives, and professionals to thrive. With its focus on community, sustainability, and professional development, the exchange is more than just a workspace—it's a dynamic ecosystem where ideas flourish and connections are made.

Gasometer building – Vienna, Austria

The Gasometer Building in Vienna stands as a testament to the power of adaptive reuse in transforming industrial relics into vibrant communities. Once towering structures used for storing coal gas, these gasometers fell into disuse following their decommissioning in the 1980s. However, a decade ago, visionary architects such as Jean Nouvel, Coop Himmelb(l)au, Manfred Wehdorn, and Wilhelm Holzbauer, responding to local initiative, embarked on an ambitious project to repurpose these historic landmarks. Through meticulous renovation, the gasometers were transformed into mixed-use complexes featuring residential apartments for students, shops, offices, and cultural amenities. Today, these towering brick-clad structures house not only 615 apartments and various commercial spaces but also serve as home to a student dormitory, daycare center, and the Vienna National Archive. Registered as heritage sites to preserve their historical significance, the Gasometers have evolved into self-contained communities within the city, each boasting its own distinct character and charm. This remarkable transformation has garnered international acclaim, with architects, urban planners, and sociologists worldwide viewing the Gasometers as a model of successful adaptive reuse and community planning.



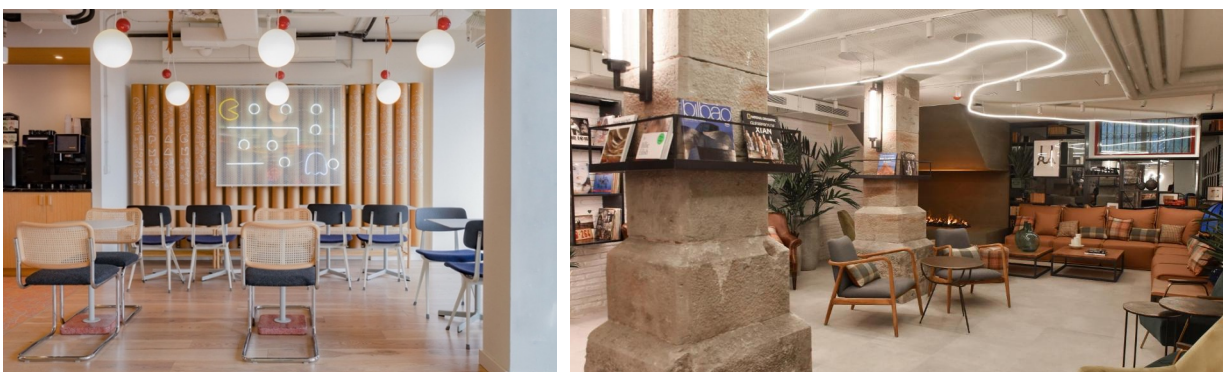
Picture 30 and 31: Gasometer Building. Source: <https://www.studentenwohnen.at/de/standorte/gasometer/>

The revitalization of the Gasometer Building in Vienna represents more than just architectural ingenuity; it embodies a shift towards sustainable urban development and community-centric design. By repurposing existing infrastructure rather than resorting to new construction, the project exemplifies a commitment to environmental conservation and resource efficiency. Moreover, the transformation of these industrial relics into vibrant living spaces has fostered social cohesion and economic revitalization within the surrounding neighbourhoods. Through thoughtful design and adaptive reuse, the Gasometer Building stands as a beacon of urban renewal, inspiring cities worldwide to embrace the potential of their neglected industrial heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

LaTroupe – Bilbao, Spain

LaTroupe in Bilbao presents a unique blend of modernity and heritage, situated within the charming ambiance of La Granja Hostel. This dynamic space offers a range of versatile areas designed to inspire creativity and collaboration. From cosy lounges adorned with traditional Basque décor to contemporary meeting rooms equipped with state-of-the-art technology, LaTroupe provides a diverse array of environments tailored to meet the needs of its diverse clientele. Whether seeking a tranquil setting for focused work or a lively backdrop for networking and socializing, guests at LaTroupe have access to a variety of spaces thoughtfully curated to enhance productivity and engagement. With its seamless integration of historical charm and contemporary amenities, LaTroupe invites visitors to experience the vibrant spirit of Bilbao while fostering connections and innovation in a dynamic coworking environment.

The repurposing of La Granja Hostel into LaTroupe in Bilbao exemplifies the transformative potential of adaptive reuse in urban environments. Once an old farmhouse, La Granja has been carefully renovated and repurposed into a vibrant coworking and community space, breathing new life into its historic walls. By preserving the architectural heritage and character of the original building while integrating modern amenities and functionality, LaTroupe honours the rich history of the site while meeting the evolving needs of today's workforce. This innovative approach to repurposing old structures not only revitalizes neglected spaces but also fosters sustainable development by minimizing environmental impact and maximizing the utility of existing resources.



Picture 32 and 33: LaTroupe. Source: <https://www.latroupe.com/en/hostel-la-granja/spaces/>

As a result, LaTroupe serves as a shining example of how thoughtful adaptation and creative design can create thriving hubs of activity within the heart of urban centres.

Icklesham Windmill – Icklesham, the United Kingdom

The transformation of historical structures into functional modern spaces exemplifies the innovative potential of adaptive reuse. In the tranquil village of Icklesham, East Sussex, a remarkable example of this practice can be found in Paul McCartney's windmill recording studio. This windmill, which has stood in its serene rural setting for 230 years, highlights the region's rich cultural heritage and its attraction to music legends. Notable residents include The Who's Roger Daltrey and Rolling Stones' Keith Richards, underscoring Sussex's allure for iconic musicians. Paul McCartney, formerly a resident of Hove Lagoon, has chosen a quieter life in East Sussex. He owns Blossom Wood Farm in Peasmarsh and has increasingly spent his time there, particularly during the pandemic. The High Weald's picturesque landscape offers an idyllic setting for isolation and creativity. Despite the lockdowns, McCartney continued to pursue his passion for music, utilizing his unique recording studio in Icklesham to produce the album 'McCartney III.'

The windmill, originally built in Pett in 1781 and relocated to Icklesham in 1790, boasts a fascinating history. Its distinctive structure includes a two-storey roundhouse with four spring sails carried on a cast iron windshaft, and a roof-mounted fantail, making it one of only two surviving post mills in England with this feature. The mill operated for 130 years before ceasing operation in 1920. Today, this historic windmill has been ingeniously repurposed. The original grinding millstones have been transformed into a state-of-the-art recording studio, blending historical architecture with modern functionality. This adaptation not only preserves the windmill's historical significance but also breathes new life into the structure, demonstrating how old buildings can be effectively reused to serve contemporary needs. The Icklesham windmill stands as a testament to the creative potential inherent in the adaptive reuse of historical buildings.

Sende – Senderiz, Spain

Sende, one of the oldest rural coliving spaces in the world, exemplifies the innovative reuse of historical structures to foster a vibrant and creative community. Located in a quaint village, Sende has hosted over 4,000 individuals from more than 60 countries, offering a unique blend of spectacular views, cozy accommodations, and creative workspaces. The space includes a bar within the office and charming corners filled with birds and flowers, creating an inviting atmosphere for work and collaboration. Visitors to Sende are often drawn by its ideal setting for outdoor activities such as hiking, running, and biking. The proximity to the Portuguese border allows for scenic mountain trail adventures, where one can encounter wild horses and explore the natural beauty of the region. Additionally, Sende organizes various work breaks, including trips to Spanish islands

and camping excursions along the Portuguese coast, enhancing the community experience with memorable adventures. The transformation of Sende involved reviving forgotten houses in a small village with only 20 inhabitants, turning abandoned barns into inspiring spaces adorned with flowers. This effort has created a place reminiscent of childhood memories, where people now come to build social businesses, apps, and robots, as well as toys and games. The inclusive and diverse community at Sende comprises social entrepreneurs, educators, digital nomads, designers, illustrators, architects, programmers, data analysts, artisans, and many more, all contributing to a dynamic and supportive environment. Sende has become a hub for creativity and innovation, where visitors engage in activities such as creating educational programs, drawing illustrations and comics, producing videos and animations, writing books, and organizing events. The space offers an ideal setting for meeting deadlines, developing new projects, and fostering change-makers who make a significant impact in their communities. The success of Sende illustrates the potential of adaptive reuse in revitalizing rural areas and transforming them into centers of creativity and collaboration. By repurposing historical buildings and integrating them into the modern fabric of the community, Sende provides an exemplary model of how rural coliving spaces can thrive. The initiative not only preserves the architectural heritage of the village but also breathes new life into it by attracting a global community of innovators and creators. Sende stands as a testament to the power of adaptive reuse in addressing contemporary challenges and building a sustainable future for rural areas.



Picture 34: Group dinner at Sende. Source: <https://www.sende.co/>

Treballu - Laconi, Italy

Treballu serves as a prime example of how rural spaces can be repurposed into thriving community hubs. Situated in a typical Italian village in central Sardinia, Treballu offers a serene refuge from urban chaos, providing a tranquil work environment for remote workers and digital nomads. Surrounded by beautiful nature and stunning waterfalls, this community space harmonizes the

slow rhythm of old habits with the authentic flavors of good food, creating a unique blend of tradition and modernity. Treballu was born out of a passionate and tenacious dream to foster a community where people live and collaborate in an inspiring, creative, and inclusive environment. This vision was driven by the belief that social, cultural, and entrepreneurial innovation can flourish even in the heart of Sardinia. As a project factory and a place of exchange, Treballu brings together individuals who share skills and expertise, creating a dynamic and collaborative atmosphere. Functioning as a permanent workshop of social and rural innovation, Treballu places people at the center of its inclusive and engaging processes. It serves as a meeting point for individuals, start-ups, and associations that seek to share opportunities, initiatives, and ideas. This collaborative space is where projects are born, often starting with a simple coffee together, fostering a sense of community and collective growth. Treballu attracts a diverse group of digital nomads, remote workers, creatives, and artists from around the world, who become temporary residents of this picturesque Sardinian village. The space has an international scope, emphasizing mutual care and support among its members. Treballu is more than just a coworking space; it is the foundation for building a vibrant, active, and rejuvenated village. This innovative project emerged from the shared vision of a group of friends with varied experiences and backgrounds, who chose to return to Sardinia to create something new and dynamic. Each individual involved in Treballu’s development has followed a unique personal and professional growth path. However, they are united by a common goal: to foster community, build relationships and collaborations, and engage people from around the world. Through Treballu, the founders plan and work towards building their village of the future—a continuous workshop for regional development, attracting professionals, artists, and creatives who become true temporary inhabitants of the community. Treballu exemplifies how rural spaces can be transformed into innovative and vibrant community centers. By repurposing traditional structures and infusing them with modern amenities and a collaborative spirit, Treballu has created a space where innovation thrives. This project demonstrates the potential for rural areas to attract global talent, foster creativity, and build sustainable, dynamic communities. Through such initiatives, rural regions can combat depopulation and enhance their economic and social vitality.



Picture 35: Common activities at Treballu. Source: <https://treballu.com/>

Public housing – Orense, Spain

The rehabilitation of abandoned buildings in the historic centers of Galicia represents a significant initiative by the public administration aimed at urban recovery. These projects focus on acquiring and rehabilitating properties in some of the most degraded historical areas of various Galician towns, transforming them into publicly-developed rental housing. This approach not only revitalizes these neglected urban spaces but also addresses the need for affordable housing in these regions.

A notable example of this initiative is the rehabilitation project in one of the oldest and most degraded areas of the historic center of Ourense. The rehabilitation plan involved transforming the building into a single house with functional spaces distributed across three levels. The ground floor accommodates the house's access points, storage room, laundry room, and facilities room. The first floor is designated for the living area, which primarily faces the courtyard, while the second floor houses the bedrooms and a bathroom. This design maximizes the use of space and light, creating a comfortable and functional living environment.

In terms of construction solutions, the project emphasizes the use of traditional and local materials. Pinewood is used extensively in the structure and the light framework system of the enclosures, while chestnut wood is used for the exterior carpentry and pavement. The building also incorporates high thermal insulation, airtight construction, low-consumption aérothermal heating, underfloor heating, and controlled mechanical ventilation. A distinctive feature of the rehabilitation is the wooden lattice designed for the rear facade, which acts as a mobile solar control system. This allows residents to regulate solar radiation and prevent overheating, enhancing the building's energy efficiency. Such measures are essential, given that the rehabilitated building will serve as social rental housing, where reducing energy costs for tenants is a priority. The project aims to deliver a low-consumption building with very low energy demand, exceeding regulatory standards for efficiency. Overall, this rehabilitation project in Ourense exemplifies how abandoned and degraded buildings in historic centers can be transformed into vibrant, functional, and sustainable living spaces. The approach taken in Galicia not only preserves the architectural heritage of these areas but also breathes new life into them, providing much-needed affordable housing and contributing to urban renewal.

Mãe Terra Office – Sao Paulo, Brasil

In the bustling district of Vila Madalena, São Paulo, an old bar has been transformed into the vibrant headquarters of Mãe Terra, a company dedicated to the food business. This adaptive reuse project aimed to unite various functional areas - administration, innovation, and product development - while also providing spaces for food sampling and embodying the company's philosophy. From the project's inception, the concept of "terra" (earth in Portuguese) was central, symbolizing the company's values of receptivity and connection to nature. The architectural materiality of the headquarters reflects this, using variants of earth such as rammed earth and

fired bricks. This approach not only reinforces the brand's identity, Mãe Terra (Mother Earth), but also creates a warm, inviting environment open to employees, consumers, and local visitors.

Despite maintaining the building's original footprint, the project involved significant renovation and expansion. The interior was completely redesigned: dividing walls were eliminated, coatings removed, vertical accesses rebuilt, and the entire infrastructure and roof revamped. The redesign also included structural reinforcements and new installations, transforming the space into a functional and aesthetically pleasing workplace. A key innovation in the project was the development of a unique type of brick, chosen for its broader ribs. Collaborating with the manufacturer, the design team enhanced the brick's load-bearing capacity, allowing it to be used naturally and exposed, without additional coatings. This distinctive brick, laid in an alternating running bond pattern with larger-than-usual expansion joints, became a defining element of the building's aesthetic. New windows and doors replaced the old ones, with frames designed to bring the outside in, bridging the gap between the building's occupants and the surrounding greenery. The first-floor office spaces feature these windows, made of pine wood, which provide ample natural light and create cozy nooks for social activities and contemplation. Natural light floods the building, thanks to the new windows and a perforated metallic staircase at the back of the building. The top floor, dedicated to meetings and events, features glass facades set back to accommodate planters with dense landscaping, further blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces. The ground floor houses a café, a kitchen for culinary courses, and spaces for innovation and product development. The back patio, visible through a large stair hall window, connects old and new materials and components, creating a cohesive and harmonious environment.

This project not only revitalizes an old bar but also exemplifies how thoughtful design can transform heritage buildings into functional, inspiring spaces that reflect a company's values and mission. Through adaptive reuse, the Mãe Terra headquarters stands as a testament to innovation, sustainability, and the seamless integration of nature and architecture.



Picture 36: Mãe Terra. Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/984601/mae-terra-office-memola-estudio-plus-vitor-penha>

Casa dos Pátios – Porto, Portugal

The Casa dos Pátios project focuses on the rehabilitation of an 18th-century building located on Rua de Santo Ildefonso, Porto. The building, which has served various purposes over its lifetime - from residential and service spaces to a school - had been abandoned for decades, falling into a state of disrepair. The project's goal was to create a harmonious blend of apartments and commercial spaces while preserving the building's historical structure and spatial concept. Despite its outward appearance of having only two floors, the building boasts a unique internal organization with four habitable floors. This intricate layout provided a fascinating foundation for the renovation. Despite its advanced state of decay, the interior still retained elements of its Baroque origins, notably the staircase leading to the first floor. These historical features became the cornerstone of the new design, which sought to maintain a simple and rigorous organization. A significant addition to the project was the introduction of a new common stairway providing access to the second floor. The result of this meticulous renovation is a collection of eleven apartments of varying sizes. Each apartment embodies a peaceful dialogue between past and present, offering restrained and elegant spaces that come alive with the play of natural light. The thoughtful integration of contemporary design elements with historical features provides a serene living environment that honors the building's rich history while catering to modern needs. Casa dos Pátios stands as a testament to the potential of historical rehabilitation projects. By preserving the essence of the original 18th-century structure and infusing it with contemporary design elements, the project successfully revitalizes a once-ruined building into a vibrant, functional space. This harmonious blend of old and new not only restores the building's former glory but also injects new life into the urban fabric of Porto.



Picture 37: Casa dos Pátios in Porto. Source: <https://archello.com/project/casa-dos-patios-2>

Summary

The examples presented in this study showcase a diverse array of approaches to repurposing deteriorating buildings in rural areas, offering valuable insights into the potential for revitalizing these spaces. From coworking spaces in former agricultural buildings to cultural centers in old factory sites, each case study demonstrates the transformative power of adaptive reuse. These projects not only breathe new life into neglected structures but also foster vibrant communities, economic growth, and cultural enrichment. By leveraging the existing built heritage, rural areas can overcome the challenges of depopulation and create sustainable, resilient environments for the future. The innovative solutions highlighted in this study offer inspiration and guidance for stakeholders seeking to revitalize rural communities through strategic redevelopment of deteriorating buildings. Through thoughtful planning, collaboration, and community engagement, these examples illustrate how abandoned spaces can be reimagined as engines of progress and prosperity, ensuring a brighter future for rural areas across the globe.

The transformative potential of repurposing deteriorating buildings is exemplified by projects like The Engine Shed in Edinburgh, Scotland, where an old railway building has been transformed into a bustling community hub and entrepreneurial centre. Another compelling instance is The Hive in Singapore, where a former industrial building has been transformed into a vibrant coworking space and community hub. This project showcases the adaptive reuse of deteriorating buildings to meet the evolving needs of urban populations. By repurposing the existing structure, The Hive provides a dynamic environment for entrepreneurs, freelancers, and small businesses to collaborate and innovate.

In addition to providing functional spaces for work, collaboration, and cultural activities, these projects also serve as catalysts for community engagement and revitalization efforts. By repurposing deteriorating buildings, these initiatives breathe new life into neglected spaces, fostering a sense of pride and ownership among local residents. Moreover, they contribute to the preservation of architectural heritage and promote sustainable development practices, ensuring a more resilient future for rural areas. Through strategic planning, innovative design, and inclusive community participation, these examples offer valuable lessons for addressing the challenges of depopulation and building thriving, resilient rural communities.

Rural depopulation presents a significant challenge across the Danube area, characterized by a decline in highly educated labor, economic competitiveness, and quality public services. The aging population further exacerbates these issues, highlighting the urgent need for effective policy responses. However, rural communities often lack the resources and capacity to address this multifaceted challenge comprehensively. RurALL seeks to address this gap by developing a multi-stakeholder governance model that leverages cross-sectoral collaboration and community engagement to unlock the potential of deteriorating dwellings in rural areas. Through intensive knowledge exchange and the pooling of resources, the project aims to empower rural communities to strengthen their governance capacities and revitalize their localities.

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