

45th SESSION

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Summary of projects drawn up and implemented by youth delegates

“Small Steps, A More Solid Future”**Selina Çomo**

Tirana, Albania

The project I organised was divided into two parts. The first part was an online meeting to inform interested young people about the rejuvenating politics initiative and prepare them with some tips and tricks for the next open call for the youth delegates from Albania. The meeting was organised with Google Meet and a presentation was shown; where it had information regarding the Congress and its work and also the benefits of the youth delegate by participating into the initiative.

The second part and the main product of the project was the creation of a report with the topic of “Importance of the Engagement of the Young People on Decision-Making Processes”. The report collected recommendations from 105 young people all over Albania (more than 10 municipalities mentioned), that were directly addressed to the Municipality of Tirana and also the State Minister of Youth and Children. The report was created by sharing a questionnaire/form beforehand with high school students and mostly university students from different degrees and faculties. The questions of the form and also the report were both based on Congress working documents such as the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and the European Social Charter, but also national laws and strategies such as the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 of the Republic of Albania and Law no. 75/2019 “For Youth” of the Republic of Albania.

Youth participation in decision-making processes is essential for Albania's democratic development and social progress. Addressing the challenges and implementing the recommended measures will contribute to a more inclusive and vibrant Albanian society where young people can actively shape their future. It is important that both the government and civil society work together to create an environment where youth voices are heard and valued in the decision-making process.

Youth and Intolerance in Andorra in 2023**Cezara Demetra Corduneanu**

Andorra

As the rise of populism is still spreading in Europe, I wanted to focus on topic populist groups tend to stigmatize intolerance. Given that the Council of Europe has clearly defined this term and has led several activities it, I decided to bring it in my hometown in the Principality of Andorra.

I wanted to know the view of Andorra's youth on intolerance, starting from the most basic: what is tolerance for us? So, I came up with a quiz that could help understand better its definition, and its difference with similar terms such as racism and discrimination.

After understanding what intolerance is, I wanted to go further in Andorra's youth perception of intolerance: what do they think about the different shapes intolerance takes? I raised concrete questions with Yes/No answer around five groups of people suffering from intolerance. Have Andorran youth ever been told they are incompetent because they are young and « still have lots of things to learn »? Do they think migrants contribute « enough » in the country they moved to? How many stereotypes based on religion do they know - and foremost, do they believe in them? Could a company made only by people with disabilities be successful? Is there a physical difference between people with different sexual orientations?

I did all this in a cheerful event celebrating the International Youth Day, surrounded by music and food! I was allowed to participate in the event thanks to my hometown town-hall, toward which I feel very grateful.

I was delighted that young people's responses were positive and open-minded. The data is not representative enough, so I cannot draw from it any conclusion on Andorra's society nor Andorra's Youth in general, but it was definitely a good experience which allowed me to connect with my hometown and the core values of the Council of Europe.

Communication as a Solution

Edvard Grigoryan

Yerevan, Armenia

Project Overview: The project's primary aim was to empower young individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Through a one-day seminar in various regional centres, the initiative provided a comprehensive understanding of the conflict's historical context, root causes and complex dynamics. Beyond just providing knowledge, the project went a step further by encouraging critical thinking, empathy and proactive problem-solving among participants. It culminated in a simulation game where these young negotiators assumed the roles of key stakeholders in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, striving to find peaceful and cooperative solutions.

Main Achievements: Empowered Youth: The project succeeded in empowering young individuals to become active contributors to conflict resolution. These participants left the project with a deep understanding of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the skills necessary for peaceful negotiation and diplomacy.

Enhanced Critical Thinking: The initiative fostered critical thinking skills, encouraging participants to approach complex issues with open minds. This skill is invaluable not only in conflict resolution but in various aspects of life.

Promoted Empathy: Through discussions, debates, and role-playing scenarios, the project successfully promoted empathy among participants. They gained a more compassionate perspective, recognising the human cost of conflicts.

Developed Negotiation Skills: The simulation game was a highlight of the project, offering a hands-on experience in negotiation. Participants honed their negotiation skills, which are vital in diplomacy and international cooperation.

Concrete Action Plans: The project inspired participants to develop action plans aimed at promoting peace and cooperation in their communities and beyond. These plans have become a tangible and proactive response to the project's objectives.

Open Dialogue and Forums: The project facilitated open forums for participants to express their opinions and engage in constructive dialogue. This created a safe space for sharing ideas and experiences.

Continuous Engagement: Even after the project's conclusion, participants remain actively engaged. Ongoing community engagement events and online discussion forums ensure that the project's impact endures.

Collaboration and Flexibility: The project demonstrated the importance of flexibility and collaboration. It adapted to unforeseen circumstances, reallocated resources, and collaborated with local organizations and experts to enrich the project's content and impact.

The Legacy: This project's legacy extends beyond its completion. It has left a lasting imprint on the minds and hearts of the young participants, who are now equipped to champion peace, dialogue and

cooperation. They carry the torch of understanding and empathy into their communities, working to break down the barriers of conflict and build bridges of cooperation.

In a world often overshadowed by strife, this project stands as a beacon of hope. It has empowered the next generation to be the architects of a more harmonious and cooperative future, where the power of dialogue and understanding triumphs over discord. The project's remarkable achievements serve as a testament to the potential of education, empathy and action in resolving complex conflicts and fostering international cooperation.

Rejuvenating politics podcast

Hannah Sattlecker, Austria

Simon Golombek, Norway

The idea to implement this project was primarily to create an interesting podcast for and with young people that gives space for a critical discussion on meaningful youth participation. We saw this as crucial as firstly, we believe there are not enough well-made podcasts on this topic and secondly, youth engagement is often still not taken seriously enough and deserves more space. Through this podcast, we want to highlight real youth engagement from various countries and areas and let young people speak about their (political) engagement and visions. Additionally, we want to promote the Rejuvenating politics initiative.

In total, three podcast episodes were created in the course of this project (trial podcast included). The audio-files were the main output of this project. The final podcast-"product" resulted from a longer process, including a training-session on podcast-producing, several tutorials and step-by-step guides for podcast-making, contacting different potential guests and, most of all, familiarising ourselves with the challenging technicalities around producing a podcast.

This process led to the decision to create a trial-podcast before the first podcast-episode. For this, our fellow youth delegates were of great help: we asked Ioanna from Cyprus and Zacchaeus from Wales if they would be available for a test-episode which they were. Their participation in this trial helped us plan our first episode, made us more aware of certain pitfalls and showed us that producing a podcast was not as simple as we had imagined.

With our first podcast-episode, we aimed, first at contributing to knowledge on the Rejuvenating politics-initiative and second, addressing the relevance and implications of meaningful youth participation. The title of the first podcast-episode is: Rejuvenating politics: from tokenism to reality.

Our first guests were Gianluca Rossino (former Italian youth delegate for the Congress, now member of the Advisory Council on Youth) and Véronique Bertholle (vice-mayor of Strasbourg, spokesperson on youth in the Congress).

For the second episode, Hannah spoke with Noah Kramer, who is also part of the Advisory Council on Youth and comes from the Scouts. The title of the second episode is: Rejuvenating politics: the role and meaning of youth organisations. The main topics of the podcast were the role of youth organisations, particularly the Scouts, for youth participation, and youth participation in Austria.

There is also a third episode in the planning stages, with the topic of national minorities, who are protected through a Council of Europe framework. Simon will talk to different national minorities from various countries and discuss their history and the challenges they face.

The podcast outcome not only consisted of the recording with our guests but also included a sound-file that was created for the podcast as well as a self-designed image that was produced as a logo of the podcast. One of the most time-consuming tasks was the editing process after recording the podcast,

which consisted of small refinements as well as re-recording certain parts due to insufficient sound-quality as well as verbal errors.

After publishing the podcast, it was shared on different social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram and sent to the podcast-guests as well as other interested people.

Youth participation in our democracy

Charlotte Schoefs

Brussels, Belgium

The objective was to educate young people about democracy and social participation, introducing them to the Congress and the Council of Europe and emphasising their significance. The aim was to empower these young individuals to express their opinions and actively engage in their communities, making them realise the value of their voices and votes. This was achieved through interactive classes at their schools.

I organised interactive lessons in three different classes at two different schools, focusing specifically on 17-18-year-old students who would be participating in their first elections at the federal and regional levels in June 2024 and subsequently at the local level in October. This provided the perfect opportunity to give them insight into how democracy works.

The course was divided into three key segments: democracy, the role of the Council of Europe, and youth participation. The first part involved a brainstorming session about democracy. It became evident that the students possessed a basic understanding, but often underestimated the full extent of democracy. I then briefly explained the Council of Europe's role in the democratic process. To acquaint the students with the history, function, ... of the Council of Europe, I organised a quiz. We then translated this theoretical knowledge into practice by simulating the decision-making process. The students were divided into different political parties and given the task of discussing a legislative proposal. This exercise illustrated how democracy takes into consideration the concerns of minority groups but can also lead to protracted processes and occasional frustrations.

Next, we studied the opposite of democracy: authoritarian regimes. Together with the students, I discussed what this entails and conducted a brief simulation. This was done intentionally, as studies have shown that Belgian and Brussels youth would be willing to choose an authoritarian regime because they believe it simplifies the decision-making process. We also discussed countries under totalitarian regimes, underlining the importance of upholding our democratic values.

To conclude, I encouraged the students to actively participate in local civic and youth engagement. I also provided them with information about the Youth Delegation program, along with relevant materials and brochures.

The outcome of my project:

- Understanding of what democracy is and why it is important;
- Insight into the role of the Council of Europe in promoting democratic values;
- Understanding how individual voices can influence the democratic process;
- Awareness of the contrast between democracy and authoritarian;
- Encouragement of political engagement and participation.

“BiH Country Consults “Innovative Approaches to Youth Engagement and Participation”

Željko Vukša-Fejzić

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The country consults on the topic of innovative approaches to youth engagement and participation was a grass roots project carried out in cooperation with the International Republican Institute, the Youth and Democracy Cohort and Hub Homework with the goal of facilitating dialogue with key stakeholders from the government institution and civil society organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The need for an inclusive direct dialogue between these two sides was prioritised on the grounds of an extremely polarised and volatile political climate, which prohibited the development of youth-friendly policies across the country.

This project managed to include key regional and local stakeholders from across the political spectrum, which include the three biggest political parties in the Federation of BiH as well as key civil society organisations and international benefactors. Some of the attendees included the mayor of Sarajevo Benjamina Karić (Vice President of the Social Democratic Party BiH) the chief advisor to the Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Čubela (Croat Democratic Community BiH), Aida Obuća MP in the Bosniak Caucus of the House of the People (Vice President of the Party of Democratic Action), MPs and youth wing chairs from the Democratic Front and People and Justice party, representatives from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Regional Cooperation Council as well as the National Democratic Institute, the Hungarian Embassy to BiH, the Japanese Embassy to BiH and the PanEuropean Union of BiH.

In a three-hour event these representatives engaged in open dialogue and networking with over 30 attendees, ages from 18-30, which resulted in several recommendations now part of a White Letter delivered to the Secretariat of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe for future use and the U.S. State Department for consideration in the upcoming Summit for Democracy 3 in Korea.

Sustainable Streets

Vanya Grivova

Plovdiv, Bulgaria

This project that took very sharp turn but managed to connect with youth and interested NGOs and local citizen organisations.

The initial plan of the grassroots project was to create an event that popularises the Council of Europe, the SDGs and youth involvement in decision-making on a local level. However, the event was cancelled at the last minute. It had to be moved online – an Instagram account that shares information on the topics mentioned above was created. With the help of information materials provided by the Council and the know-how of the NGOs and local citizen organisations, the account was able to reach thousands of people. In addition, a survey that studied the attitudes of (mainly young) citizens towards their local environment, city management and political participation was created.

The survey was sent to NGOs and local citizen organisations that will be able to use the findings for future purposes (e.g., being more accessible to youth and better catering to their interests and needs). There was also the opportunity for people to engage with the account and ask questions about the Council and the role of the youth delegates, which provided the chance to have one-to-one discussions on topics which are not really suitable for covering in social media account posts (too long, historical, etc.). Sadly, the account had to be suspended due to attacks by interested groups. However, the legacy of the established connections lives on and the initially planned project is hopefully about to be implemented in the spring of 2024.

"The Role of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Opportunities for Youth"

Tea Babić

Croatia

The participation of young people in projects, especially international ones, is influenced by their awareness of the opportunities available to them. Those who are not already actively involved in organisations (e.g., student councils, NGOs, student associations) have a difficult time receiving information. Information scarcity especially applies to high school students.

Project starting point, and main goal was to address information scarcity and to introduce the "Rejuvenating politics" initiative to two target groups: 1) high-school students; 2) university students. Key project activities consisted of live workshops and article in student magazine. Since information scarcity is especially present among high-school students, main workshop was made for them. Workshop participants were mostly final-year students who had the opportunity to attend a presentation on the topic of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. They were presented with the opportunity to apply for the youth delegates program within the "Rejuvenating politics" initiative, which sparked quite an interest among the audience. In addition to presenting the initiative itself and sharing personal experiences of participating as a youth delegate of the Congress from Croatia, participants had the chance to learn about the functioning of the Congress. This helped them demystify the role of youth delegate and to make it more accessible to apply for the upcoming term. It is important to point out the role of the teacher, who showed quite the interest and engagement in sharing all the upcoming news and project deadlines inside the school, and also to spread the word about the project to other colleagues. Finally, a workshop ended with a short knowledge quiz to summarise the key points discussed during the lecture, and award those who paid the most attention.

Additionally, a similar workshop was held for college students with the aim of introducing the initiative. Second activity was publishing an article in the student magazine of the University of Zagreb Faculty of Law, focusing on personal experiences of participation in the program. The mentioned magazine has a circulation of 200 copies, primarily available in physical form to students of the Faculty of Law, while the online edition of the journal is also freely accessible to everyone.

"Voices for Change on Social Media"

Ioanna Xenophontos

Nicosia, Cyprus

When I met the delegates from Cyprus, one of the things that they told me is that not many young people from Cyprus apply for the Rejuvenating Politics Initiatives. We all commented that it is a pity because they would have a lot to gain from it. Therefore, I asked what is the reason why not many people from Cyprus apply? And they told me that they believe it is because they are not aware of this initiative.

Therefore, my next thought was how young people from Cyprus can get informed and inspired so that they can apply and learn. Also, another point that I had in mind is that many people when they hear Council of Europe and they are not involved in politics, they get discouraged. My next step was to do a short search on the social media that young people turn to. My results showed that it depends on the country, and in Cyprus it was Instagram and TikTok; however, I was not familiar with TikTok, therefore I didn't attempt to use it.

Then, I looked for different questions that would intrigue and inform young people about the initiative; however, based on my feedback, they advised me not to post exclusively for the initiative because people would think that I'm advertising the initiative and that would discourage them. Therefore, I emailed different NGOs, initiatives, and organisations (e.g., Urban Gorillas, Fashion Heritage, Women of Cyprus, CARDET, last year's youth delegate, and Cyprus Youth Council) which they are involved

with the youth, and they have big platforms where they would disseminate my posts. Also, I made sure that each organisation can engage people with different interests.

Furthermore, a representative of each organisation contacted me, and we arranged for a date and place to meet to videorecord their answer for each question (they had 4 questions which were about what their motive was to become activists, what they have achieved, what they are proud of, and lastly, a message that they would give to the youth). Then, I used canvas to beautify the videos and create short reels with pictures of my experience so far with Rejuvenating Politics and each week I would post one video of each participant. I also shared those videos on my Instagram and one on LinkedIn.

We planned to merge all the videos into one and the present it to one of the events that CARDET planned to have. Unfortunately, due to the high temperatures, the event was postponed to October where I wouldn't be able to attend. Nonetheless, the videos reached a high number of dissemination because other people were reposting the videos. Some young people were curious to learn more about the initiative and others were curious to learn more about the activists who took part.

Empowering Youth Proposing a Project for U25

Štěpánka Slámová

Říčany, Czech Republic

My project aimed to empower young people from the town of Říčany to propose and facilitate specific projects for the town's first youth-specific participative budget of 40,000€. Conversations with the decision-makers of Říčany revealed to me that the opportunity to benefit from the youth participation budget is not solely dependent on the funding, but also on efforts to inform young people on how to even propose a project and give them a platform to experiment with it.

The goal of the workshops was to enable young people who spend their time in the Říčany municipality to learn how to propose a project, get a chance to present it to their peers, and assist them in the future management of a youth participative budget.

I hosted workshops at a local scout club and at my former school involving pupils between the ages of 12 and 18. First, the pupils were introduced to the idea of youth participation and its various forms, drawing inspiration from the Rejuvenating Politics initiative. Second, they were guided through the process of planning, presenting, and selecting a project. Ultimately, they attempted to create their own project, addressed questions regarding its implementation, and collectively selected one. Following this, I supported the youth organisers in navigating the participatory budgeting process by providing materials translated into Czech that were inspired by the European RMSOS framework and developing educational content on "how to propose your own project" for social media.

Several pupils reported they were pleasantly surprised and appreciated that decision-makers care about their opinions, and that they now feel more confident and ready to propose an actual project. In addition, I received feedback from the youth organisers stating that just providing a budget without any guidance on how to distribute it, implement the projects, or promote it was not enough and they appreciated the provided assistance.

Debate on youth engagement in civil society at the Youth Democracy Festival of Copenhagen

Eline Thor Eliassen

Copenhagen, Denmark

When initiating the process of my project, I wanted to work with something that included different groups of youth. I wanted to welcome diversity.

In Denmark, there is an annual event called the Youth Democracy Festival of Copenhagen. The festival invites 30,000 young Danes who get the opportunity to engage in democracy by actively participating in a range of activities organised by different stakeholders, such as NGOs and political institutions. The great thing about this event is that there are young people with numerous different backgrounds, ethnicities, and interests. I couldn't think of a better place for a youth engagement project to take place.

I am a part of the American Embassy to the Kingdom of Denmark's Youth Council, where we advise the US ambassador on how to best engage with Danish youth. The Embassy had a tent at the festival, and together with the other young people in the Council, we organised a debate at their location.

The debate was centered around the subject of youth engagement in civil society, and the aim was to encourage more youth to actively make a difference in their local communities. We introduced ways to gain influence and tried to create an understanding of the importance of participating in representative democracy.

We, the panellists, shared our stories of success and challenges in our work in civil society. We talked about how easily democracy becomes a hollow concept if not enough people participate. We also discussed how engagement doesn't necessarily entail running for office or founding an organisation. It can involve participating in activism, trying to solve small problems locally, or joining a political party, or an interest group, all of which have a crucial impact on influencing political priorities. We promoted the concept of volunteering, voting, or simply engaging in a dialogue with other citizens about our issues of concern. I placed significant importance on highlighting that a democracy should represent the entire population, which underscores the vitality of including youth in decision-making processes.

The debate was supported by a lot of great questions from the audience. Afterward, we engaged in dialogue with many youths who, in different ways, saw flaws or possibilities for improvements in their local society. I am happy that our debate was well received and that the audience consisted of a diverse youth group. Hopefully, the message of the importance of democratic participation inspired them to do something to improve their local community.

Henry Kask

Estonia

The aim of the project was to engage with youth of different backgrounds, motivate and inspire, engage with the local community. I planned on collecting sincere feedback from local youth and using the input to start a dialogue between the local municipality, the youth council and young people themselves, all with the goal of creating a more youth-friendly Tartu. The objectives were also clear and simple: engage with diverse youth groups, including students from schools and youth centres, gather important and honest feedback on topics like the school system, youth engagement, and city infrastructure, and then forward this information to the municipality and the youth councils to motivate them to voice meaningful change.

To achieve the aim and objectives, I led multiple workshops, in the form of interactive seminars, focusing on the work of the Council of Europe, specifically the Congress, what the Youth Delegates do and finally, how to make one's voice heard on a local level, but also to gather ideas on what could be improved in the local community. The interactive workshops helped build a connection with the

youth, allowing open discussions on the youth experience in Tartu. Additionally, post-it notes were a creative and very useful tool for building an impromptu sticky-note wall, where the participants could post ideas and proposals from a youth perspective, on what could be improved locally and how. A pleasant surprise was additional positive feedback on what is already sufficient and good in their local community, which turned out to be good motivating words to forward to the local authorities.

There were multiple outcomes for the workshops: young people gained insights into various European institutions, with a focus on the Council of Europe and the Congress. They learned about the Coe's youth delegate, additionally about the other Estonian Youth Delegates and their work. Youth in Tartu became familiar with the concept of a youth participatory budget and learned to give feedback on their community and surroundings. Our participants were young people aged 15-18 from various backgrounds, including those from youth centres and students who didn't regularly visit. As a result of the workshops, I have contacted the local youth council with the information I received, aiming to initiate a dialogue rather than imposing mandatory youth involvement.

Essi Pekonen

Finland

Finnish youth engagement over the years has continuously been low at international institutions, including at the Council of Europe. As recently as last year, there was no Finnish youth delegate present at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, highlighting a problem regarding the lack of representation of Finnish youth interests and perspectives. As such, the grassroots project took on the objective to raise awareness about the Council of Europe and its Congress as well as promoting the opportunities available to young people at the institution.

The main method of fulfilling this objective was to directly target young people by encouraging them to claim their 'seat at the table'. The initiatives were taken during the summer and early autumn of 2023. First, the grassroots project targeted young adults in high schools within the Helsinki municipality. This included presenting the foundation and objectives of the Council of Europe and the role of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to students. The young adults were very receptive of the opportunities available to them within the Council, particularly the role of a youth delegate, and shared their eagerness to explore the opportunities further and apply for the youth delegate position. The second initiative entailed the promotion of the youth delegate role as well as of the Council and Congress on a national scale.

This entailed a three-day media campaign with a Finnish daily newspaper called Hufvudstadsbladet, which included an interview about the role of being a youth delegate for the Congress and expert knowledge on the (lack of) participation of young people by a researcher from Åbo Akademi in Finland. The initiative was available digitally and in print and took place during a time when the low levels of Finnish as well as Nordic representation in European and international institutions was a highly salient topic in the national media. Overall, the goal of this project was to inspire more young adults in Finland to explore the opportunities available to them at the Council of Europe and encourage them to take chances that they may not otherwise have been aware of or been empowered to take.

Ana Egutidze

Georgia

A youth delegate from Georgia hosted a public meeting with youth in Tbilisi, with the discussion theme centered on "Youth Work and International Youth Projects", as a highlight of the celebration of International Youth Day. The event was implemented in collaboration with the Youth Agency of Georgia and the International Law Institute of Tbilisi State University. The primary aim of the meeting was to promote youth work and the importance of youth engagement in decision-making processes

at the national, regional, and local levels, as well as to share information regarding the “Rejuvenating Politics” initiative and Congress’s work.

The Youth Delegate comprehensively covered the youth delegate’s role in the Congress's work and presented the Congress’s mission and core functions. Ana also introduced various international and national online platforms dedicated to gathering sources of youth-related projects and funding opportunities focused on youth-driven initiatives. A notable highlight of this event was the inclusion of a guest speaker from the Youth Agency of Georgia, which operates as a governmental institution under the oversight of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth of Georgia. The representative discussed the Youth Agency's work, Georgia's National Youth Strategy for 2023-2026, and national funding opportunities for youth-led initiatives, as well as the Youth Platform, an online national hub designed to centralise local and regional youth opportunities. The meeting concluded with a thorough discussion of the attendees' submitted youth-related issues on Menti.

Ana Egutidze also organised a meeting with youth residing in [Baghdati municipality](#), in collaboration with local entrepreneurs, notably Cafe Glitsnia. The meeting was focused on promoting active citizenship and emphasising the role of youth in the community development process by sharing success stories of youth participation. In addition to presenting the “Rejuvenating Politics” initiative and the Congress’s work, the major goal of the meeting was to inspire youth to create youth opportunities on their own through collaboration with local authorities and utilising local resources to address youth-related challenges they face, as well as to equip them with valuable information regarding local funding opportunities for youth initiatives and national and international youth projects to gain more expertise in youth work. Following the discussion of these key topics, the meeting was concluded with a Kahoot game covering questions on Congress and the "Rejuvenating Politics" project, with winners receiving Congress-branded gifts.

The feedback from the meetings' participants was very positive. The information shared through these sessions was considered beneficial for youth, as it was mostly mentioned in their feedback statements. The youth-related problems named by the participants and subsequent discussions contributed to the establishment of connections between participants for future collaboration in youth-led initiatives as well as to the youth delegate's deep understanding of current youth challenges in Georgia.

“Empowering Democracy: The Crucial Role of Local and Regional Governments”

Leon Stauffer

Germany

The presentation and workshop titled “Empowering Democracy: The Crucial Role of Local and Regional Governments” raised awareness of the pivotal significance of local and regional governments in shaping and strengthening democratic systems. The primary objectives were to educate students about local governance, inspire civic engagement, and promote inclusivity and participation in local and regional government activities.

The activities used during the event included a presentation that provided an overview of democracy and governance, explained the roles of local and regional governments, showcased case studies, and emphasized the importance of grassroots democracy. Following the presentation, a workshop and Q&A session encouraged group discussions on local issues, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The extensive Q&A and feedback sessions fostered open dialogue, allowing students to ask questions, share thoughts, and reflect on the workshop content.

The primary outcomes of the presentation and workshop were significant shifts in students' attitudes toward local and regional governments. They began to perceive these government bodies as more relevant and influential in their daily lives and communities, which translated into a greater sense of civic responsibility. Students developed an understanding of how their active participation could make

a meaningful difference in their communities, laying the groundwork for increased civic engagement and a more informed and proactive citizenry.

The outputs of the project included increased recognition of the importance of local and regional governments, heightened civic engagement among students, access to valuable resources, and the establishment of an informal network for students to collaborate and engage in local and regional projects. Several participants have since taken on active roles in local student organisations, illustrating the tangible impact of the project on fostering a more engaged and participatory youth community.

**Arts and participation: Exploring youth participation on a local and regional level through arts.
Despoina Panteli**

Thessaloniki, Greece

Youth participation is a term that is broadly defined, and most young people do not know where to start with participating and expressing themselves. A lot of young people have opinions and ideas about socio-political topics but do not know how to express themselves in order to have an impact. This project aimed at providing them with a concrete form of expression: through arts.

Youth participation is interdisciplinary. The more disciplines you can have accompanying the more political aspect of it, the more impact you can have. This is why Despoina Panteli collaborated with the arts, media and culture graduate Marianna Damaskinidou in order to create a project where two disciplines get interconnected.

In the beginning, a presentation about youth participation on a local and regional level was given by Despoina, presenting the plethora of opportunities that there are for being actively involved in the community (starting from volunteering in local NGOs to being a member of the school parliament or participating in international conferences). This was followed by tips and tricks about how to successfully make applications and requests for the needed material. Then Marianna gave a presentation about the possibilities of art to convey and present socio-political messages.

Via this project, 32 fourteen-year-olds from multiple socioeconomic backgrounds unlocked the possibilities of art and artistic expression by capturing their current socio-political concerns through artistic formats. Those formats included creating posters, writing lyrics, writing texts, composing songs, playing sketches etc. In the end, the individual artistic projects were discussed among the participants. According to them, they left feeling empowered and like they already had made a contribution to the selected socio-political topics, which gave them more motivation to continue engaging actively.

The results of the project showed that: the youth have a lot to say, they need to feel like they are being heard, and once the expression format is narrowed down, they can translate their message into action, have an impact and be inspired to engage even more actively.

Giulio Bernasconi

Italy

I strongly believe in the importance of youth participation in politics. Young people must find ways to participate actively, all with the shared goal of making positive changes in our communities. We live when many young people are disappointed by the political system, which can seem overly complex and far removed from their daily lives. My project is born from this idea - to provide young people with practical tools to help them better understand local government and foster a sense of connection.

For this purpose, I developed a three-day workshop to engage young participants and help them better understand local and regional powers. The workshop employs non-formal teaching methods, taking inspiration from the Council of Europe Compass website, ensuring the content is easy to grasp and relatable. The activities are structured across three days, each with a distinct focus: day one is about critical thinking and debate, day two delves into how democracy works, and on the third day, we explore the various opportunities available for young people to get involved in their communities.

The central activity takes place on the second day, allowing students to actively simulate the workings of their municipal council to propose new regulations. During this exercise, students will assume roles representing diverse interest groups, gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges involved in cooperation. The primary audience is high school students, providing them with a hands-on experience to understand the workings of local democracy.

To increase the project's outreach, I decided to develop a comprehensive plan for the workshop. I will start carrying it out personally to involve the young people in my area!

Empowering young people in this way benefits them and contributes to building a stronger, more informed, and involved society. By fostering a sense of connection and understanding of the political system, we are working towards creating a more engaged citizenry who actively shape their communities' future.

Youth engagement and challenge comparison in Liepaja and Daugavpils local municipalities

Janis Ievins

Latvia

The project “Youth engagement and challenge comparison in Liepaja and Daugavpils local municipalities” attempts to shed light on potential differences in challenges regional youth face in different parts of Latvia. Within the framework of the set project, a research paper was developed on youth engagement in the municipalities of Liepaja and Daugavpils.

The research aims to examine and compare the effectiveness of the implementation of youth policies in the local municipalities of Liepaja and Daugavpils to pinpoint both the strong and weak points of youth policies in set municipalities. Using “[The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life](#)” as a theoretical base, a poll was made on youth participation and challenges, which was given to around 100 youngsters aged 16-19. The results were analysed and laid out in a 23-page long research paper. It was concluded that both municipalities share vital flaws in youth engagement such as communication, civic education, and lack of opportunity in engaging local youth.

The project had three phases: engagement, research, and communication. During the engagement phase, educational events were conducted in each municipality – Erudition games around the time of day of Europe with a European theme, including question themes about the Council of Europe. The events served as an outlet for polling a diverse group of youth and in total each event had participants from around 15 schools from each municipality (Liepaja and Daugavpils) participating.

During the research phase, research on Youth engagement and challenges was conducted, including setting recommendations for each municipality. Although only 100 event participants decided to fill out the poll and contribute to the research, the polled youth come from diverse schools and parts of the city municipality. In this regard, polling compensates for the lack of polled contestants with diversity.

During the communication phase, based on the research results, infographics were created to visualise the project results. Afterwards, both the research paper and the infographics were shared with the relevant actors such as the Latvian national delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional authorities via e-mail.

All in all, three important conclusions can be taken from the project:

Youth in Liepaja and Daugavpils largely share similar challenges to their engagement such as lack of information, civic education, and lack of opportunity. Information is the most relevant barrier to youth engagement in both municipalities, with 60% of youth respondents in Liepaja and Daugavpils considering lack of information as the main barrier to their participation.

Only 32% of respondents in Daugavpils are fully satisfied with their engagement opportunities in their municipality, in contrast to Liepaja with 57%.

However, the topic of youth engagement challenges in different municipalities in Latvia deserves further investigation as polling had a limited number of participants and thus is subject to inaccuracies. Furthermore, youth polling is just one piece of the picture and exploration of the topic from the perspective of youth workers and municipalities is required for the full picture.

The Role of Local Authorities in the Process of Democratisation

Manoli Oxana

Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

Many international institutions face the issue of being virtually unknown outside specific professional circles. Unfortunately, the Congress and the Council of Europe are confronting this problem in Moldova, especially in the case of youth. In order to provide more visibility, I reached out to the administration of the Faculty of International Relations, Political and Administrative Sciences from the University of Moldova, in order to organise a conference dedicated to the Role of Local Authorities in the Process of Democratisation. The goal was to ensure that as many future specialists in the domain of Public Administration would be informed of the Congress's existence and work.

The speaker at the conference, Mr. Viorel Furdui, part of the national delegation, with the help of one of the secretaries, Mr. Alexandru Osadci, provided the perspective of local authorities on the importance of the Congress and the work of the national delegation. The conference allowed more than 100 future specialists to get acquainted with the structure and results of the Congress, as well as an encouragement to get more involved in local politics.

Catarina OLIVEIRA

Portugal

“Isto É Política” [the equivalent to “Make it Political”, in English], is a digital-based project created aiming for three main goals:

- to contribute to a greater understanding of the concept of active citizenship, by creating a space that gives visibility to institutions and people who actively contribute to strengthening the democratic system in their local communities and abroad;
- to deconstruct the meaning of “politics/political” for young people, building up to the idea that politics are not necessarily something “distant/formal/boring”, they are rather present in every big or small action of our daily lives;
- to stimulate the participation of young people in local politics and/or instigate active citizenship habits in their local communities.

To achieve these goals, a series of short videos were created and then published on social media. Each video was about a person or organization which, on a bigger or smaller scale, works for the improvement of their community on a regular basis.

One example was a dynamic interview with the mayor of the municipality of Ílhavo, who explained how and why he had got into the “world of politics”. One other was about a non-profit football academy that gives financially disadvantaged youngsters the opportunity to develop their football skills and, consequently, gives them access to both formal and non-formal quality education.

To ensure the appropriateness and appeal of the videos to the project’s target audience, meetings with local students took place to get their feedback/ideas/participation in the final videos. This resulted in truly relevant, inspiring, yet applicable in the audience’s context, videos for our generation, expectations which the more than 18,000 views, nationally spread, confirmed.

Cluj Youth Mapping

Francesca Cristea

Romania

Everything started with the idea that the youth community is not defined in the same way at international levels or in every state and few understand specifically how much we invest in terms of hours, ideas, projects, and resources in our society. We see Youth Mapping as an inclusive youth-centred participatory process within the community that would help us better understand the importance and contribution of young people to shaping the Cluj Metropolitan Area. We have mapped the youth organizations, youth workers and informal groups of young people in the metropolitan area of Cluj Napoca.

The project was supported by the Cluj Napoca County Council and the Botnar Foundation. Youth Cluj Federation was in charge of the interviews and focus groups and I was in charge of the policy research. In my role as a youth delegate, I found it appropriate to get involved and conduct the research component in the first youth mapping initiative in Europe in identifying the needs and the capacity of the youth organisations.

We conducted desk research into good practices for youth friendly cities, held interviews with youth organisations, youth workers and organisations that work with young people, but also with institutions that work with young people (not limited to). From what we have observed while looking into these components, is that at the local level it is easier to establish a partnership relation between local authorities and the youth ecosystem. At the local level, we have observed a more flexible approach to offering opportunities and support. The funding possibilities are diverse, offering the space to private actors (companies, foundations, etc.) or other national institutions (universities) to find a proactive way to support young people’s ideas. Let us not forget that following the legacy of Cluj-Napoca European Youth Capital 2015, Cluj-Napoca was the first city in Romania that applied budgetary participation, therefore the institutional framework was already set. During the pandemic, due to the restriction measures, we observed a decline in youth organisations and young people that submitted proposals to the local projects’ contest, but also to other programmes. At the same time, the finance for this specific pandemic was drastically reduced (some institutions even cut the budget) for youth activities. When talking about young people’s interest regarding the types of activities they would like to implement in their community, one might also observe that young people use both formal and non-formal education to develop their personal and professional skills, but the most frequent were community meet-ups under different forms. We succeeded in establishing this process annually to better understand how the community develops.

I believe that youth are the present, not the future, and they should be actively involved in shaping the community and this is what we are doing through the Youth Mapping. We challenged the community to better understand youth needs and capacity.

We have created a visual instrument for the youth that we have mapped in the metropolitan area <https://mapping.clujforyouth.ro/youth-mapping-visualization>. Discover the power of the youth community.

Rejuvenating Survey**Sara Mussoni**

San Marino

The primary goal of the survey I created, which is focused on understanding how young people from San Marino are interested in politics, is to provide a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the political engagement and interests of the younger demographic in the country. Understanding young people's political attitudes, motivations, and barriers has the aim of promoting greater civic engagement and strengthening democracy by actively involving youth in the political process.

The survey is divided into 12 questions related to the interest in getting informed about Sammarinese and European political matters.

- 1 - Perception that many young people have no interest in knowing about their own country's politics, as well as the sense of disinterest in traditional, political institutions and processes.
- 2 - Disconnection between politics and the daily lives of young individuals
- 3 - Disillusionment with the existing political landscape
- 4 - The disinterest does not apply to all young Sammarinese, as many are actively engaged in political issues through grassroots movements, activism and digital platforms.

There are several common factors that may decrease the interest among young Sammarinese individuals in politics, such as digital distractions, cynicism or lack of civic education. Not involving youth in municipal initiatives can be problematic for several reasons, especially the leading to policies and projects that are not aligned with the needs and aspirations of young residents, and they usually constitute a significant portion of these communities. It is also important to remark that young people often have fresh ideas, innovative way of thinking, and a different point of view that includes a stronger open-mindedness.

To address these issues, municipalities should actively seek to involve young people in decision-making processes, encourage their participation in local government, and create opportunities for youth to contribute their ideas and expertise to the development of their communities. By doing so, municipalities can foster more inclusive, responsive and forward-thinking governance that benefits all residents, both now and in the future.

Democracy, Freedom, Europe**František Brezo**

Slovak Republic

The main goals of my project were to boost youth turnout in the upcoming parliamentary elections, to inform students about the results of the work of the Council of Europe and to strengthen the participation of Hungarian minority youth in the public affairs of Slovakia.

The first action carried out was the making of short videos for the social media sites of the Youth Delegate from Slovakia. I made 4 short videos on September 3 in Slovak and 1 in Hungarian, in which young people explained why they are going to participate in the national elections. On Facebook and Instagram, I reached approximately 3000 people until the deadline of the transmission of the project, without paid ads.

In parallel with the social media campaign, I visited schools in the Košice Region and gave them lectures. I talked about the work of the Council of Europe, the results of the European unification process, and the importance of participation in public life. At the end of my presentations, we had debates, where they could ask me about my work, or anything related to the above-mentioned topics.

However, my most important event was the Student Parliament, organised in cooperation with the Alliance of Hungarian High School Students of Slovakia and financed by the National Institute for Youth and Education. We had a 3-day long program located in Senec. During the session, we were able to hear different lectures and debates. Mathieu Mori, the Secretary General of the Congress, Pál Csáky, former Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia and former MEP, Benjamin Cohen, a Senior Foreign Officer, journalists Zsolt Kolek and Gábor Czímer, Attila Fodor, the Director of the Comenius Pedagogy Institute, Zsófia Voda, the Director of the Hungarian College in Bratislava, and historian Szabolcs Czáboczky all made presentations and after them held discussions with the students. The level of the Student Parliament was raised by debating activities provided by the Mathias Corvinus Collegium, a diplomacy simulation game based on the State Departments' instructions, and my introduction into the Councils' work. By the end of the event the participants agreed on working closer together and activating themselves in public life.

To sum up with, I can firmly state that thanks to my work, I got positive feedback from young people that now, they understand the importance of voting. Also, many students learned about the Council of Europe, and they became able to differentiate it from the European Union. However, I consider the Student Parliament as my biggest achievement, because I made it possible for a lot of active students to find a community, to learn about successful individuals and to have the chance to talk to an important diplomatic figure, Mr Mori. I hope that with my activities I motivated students for the better, and the fruits of this labour will be seen in a few years, in form of a better society.

Towards the improvement of avenues for youth input and participation in local decision-making

Andrés Rodríguez Pérez

Spain

The central objective of the project is improving the communication of the needs and opinions of the young people of Alcorcón (my hometown, at the south of Madrid) at the institutional level. This would achieve a more direct inclusion of youth, and a better representation of their interests, in local decision-making processes.

The proposals made to the Youth Council, as well as the institutional responses and measures thereto, are presented below:

1. The creation of a "popular youth inbox", to allow a more direct transmission of requests, complaints and proposals from the local youth to the Town Hall and/or the Youth Council of Alcorcón.

Two inter-complementary proposals were made: in-person, the establishment of a permanent mailbox at the at the "Yolanda González" Youth Centre of Alcorcón, to receive complaints, suggestions or requests to be forwarded to the Youth Council; online, the creation of new channels or renovation of existing ones (e.g., the Youth Council website and/or social media accounts) to act as an "online mailbox" open to receiving any such contributions from local youth.

As part of the Youth Council's new yearly plan, the Council and the Youth Centre's social media pages are undergoing changes to enhance their outreach to young people, provide better and more frequent information about local opportunities for youth engagement, leisure, employment, etc., and devising more stable means for the reception of questions and requests. A physical mailbox has also already been installed at the entrance of the "Yolanda González" Youth Centre of Alcorcón.

2. The improvement of direct contact between youth organisations and associations and the Youth Council.

The creation of more permanent mechanisms or channels for mutual cooperation, for example a council, platform, or network of youth organisations, can harness the enormous potential for youth engagement through their collective partnership.

This is likely the most far-reaching proposal, and one towards which the Youth Council is eager to make an effort to advance. As explained to me in our most recent meeting, the Youth Council is seeking to continue in a trajectory towards the revival of youth engagement actions through cooperation with our local youth entities, as both the dismissive approach to local youth taken by past Town Hall governance bodies and the pandemic and post-pandemic stages have brought about a significant degradation in the interrelation and visibility of such youth entities.

- The Youth Council is currently working on an initial 'diagnostic' stage, focused on reaching out to all youth organisations so as to get a more accurate idea of their needs, problems, and proposals for action. Through the compilation of this more specific case-by-case information, as well as the progressive organisation of youth-centred activities around which to promote inter-entity cooperation, the Youth Council seeks to strengthen ties between it and these entities, and amongst all entities.
- The Council also looks favourably upon the idea of systematising collective partnership, its definitive format to be defined at the end of the diagnostic stage, in order to foster interrelation and synergies in the generation of youth-led initiatives, whether Council-adjacent or completely independent from it.

3. Allowing the participation of young people in the municipal plenary sessions held every month.

This is the most open and participatory arena that the citizens of Alcorcón may access to participate in decision making at the local level, and it could benefit from the participation of young people, whether as individual citizens or as Council-appointed youth representatives (e.g., due to their importance regarding certain issues or to their membership in a relevant association). Optimising the participation of young people through such means may be a very positive contribution to the democratic quality of our local governance.

Unfortunately, as per City Hall regulations, citizens cannot directly take part in the debates held within the municipal plenaries. Subjects on the plenary agenda related to youth are normally managed by the Youth Council, although there may be exceptional opportunities in which representatives of youth-led or youth-related entities may be called upon to discuss a topic associated to their area of activity.

"Teaching Participation? High School Student Clubs as Cultivators of Civic Engagement: The Swedish Case"

Henning Bollmark

Sweden

In a time of global democratic backsliding, far-sighted investments in coming generations are more urgent than ever. Experiences from Swedish traditions of community organising show that small efforts at an early stage can make a great difference for future generations. Democratic high school student clubs, based in schools but run by students independently from school faculty, can be found in high schools all over Sweden and pursue activities in areas such as sports, science, literature, theatre, music, literature and politics. Such clubs have taught the principles and practices of democratic engagement to young Swedes for decades, functioning as a practical and more engaging alternative to the theoretical instruction given by teachers in civics class.

How does the adult world work in the Swedish case to encourage high school students to form and participate in independent clubs in their everyday school environments? What can local political and civil leaders do to support schools and faculty, while they in turn support students? This short report presents the perspectives of three stakeholders in the matter – principals of Swedish high schools with successful student club cultures, the Swedish Federation of Student Unions and, of course, the students themselves.

Read the report here: [Teaching Participation \(PDF\)](#)

From post to reality

Darleen Pfister

Switzerland

"What would you change in your municipality if you could?" In my project called "Post it", this question became serious: around 200 pupils of three municipalities aged between 10 and 15 years got the opportunity to post their ideas on a digital pinboard called "Padlet". To ensure that everyone heard about this campaign, I presented the pinboard in every single class.

But these ideas shouldn't remain imaginary, I wanted to realise a few. To make this possible, I collaborated with politicians and school directors from all three municipalities from the very beginning. I didn't want to start a participation project without having their support - after all, the implementation of the ideas depends on them. So, we discussed several options and chose the one that is low threshold, fits into the time frame of the communities and schools, and is close to the pupils' everyday life and habits.

To decide which of these over a hundred ideas should be turned into reality, the students could support their favourite ideas by clicking on the like button. Furthermore, they could post comments to enhance a debate.

After three weeks, I selected feasible ideas with the most likes from each community and invited their inventors to a special meeting: We met with local MPs and presidents of the commune in the Lido restaurant for fish and chips. Why didn't we meet in the buildings of the local administration? It was important to me that the politicians go to everyday places of the students. This informal setting made the young people feel a bit more confident and proved that politics does not take place far away behind closed doors.

Sitting around a big table, we discussed how we could implement their ideas. The politicians were impressed by their creativity and elaborate plans. Therefore, they agreed to clarify the approval procedures for a floating boulder cube, look for a floating trampoline, and make the contacts to realise the historic village path with a playground. Additionally, they were so enthusiastic about the idea of a table tennis table at the lido that they promised to organise it by next summer.

There were many more excellent ideas and important needs than just these four selected ones. Therefore, I explained on posters several possibilities how they can implement ideas outside of the campaign, empowered them to do so and hung them up in the school buildings.

'Is this politics?', asked me a pupil after a class visit. This little question illustrates the positive effect "post it" had on the youth. The campaign wasn't just successful in terms of realisation of the four ideas but also in terms of citizenship education and empowerment for political participation. They understood that politics can start with fish and chips and that they too can participate even at their age.

Building Bridges: Connecting Turkish Youth with European Institutions

Zeynep Güner

Ankara, Türkiye

The project aimed to raise the awareness of Turkish youth born and raised abroad about the local and regional authorities in their cities and to facilitate their integration into their society. Although many Turkish youth are multilingual, have lived in Europe for years, and know that culture, they only live/spend time in environments where Turkish people are concentrated. With this project, I wanted to contribute to local and regional governance and show Turkish youth born and raised abroad how they can use their potential to become members of a more integrated society.

In this context, I designed a two-stage project and received support from an NGO called Youth Station (a youth organisation that started its activities in the Netherlands in 2020), both in reaching my target audience and especially in the institution visit phase. In the first stage of my project, I held an event via Zoom with Turkish youth born and raised in different cities such as Strasbourg, Hamburg, and Frankfurt. In the first minutes of this event, I conducted a short survey to understand whether they tend to follow the work of local and regional authorities more often in the cities they live in or in Türkiye. Afterwards, we discussed the survey questions that I conducted anonymously with the help of volunteers, and during the discussion, I tried to understand the underlying reasons why Turkish youth were distant from the institutions and organisations in their cities. In the second half of the event, I talked about the Council of Europe, its institutions, and the work they do. Then, I mentioned the Rejuvenating Politics initiative, which is the best opportunity for them to have their voices heard, and shared my experiences from my admission process to the 44th session. Finally, I talked about opportunities such as internships in EU institutions and projects within the scope of Erasmus and moved on to the question-and-answer part.

The second phase of the project took place a few weeks after the Zoom event, with the support of Youth Station. The European Parliament was visited by some of the Turkish youth who participated in the Zoom event. During the visit, the Turkish youth who had the opportunity to get to know the European Parliament closely stated that there was a positive change in their perspective on institutions and that the Zoom event contributed to this.

The most obvious finding of the project was that many Turkish youth were unaware of the opportunities around them and the work of local and regional authorities in their cities. The main reason for this was that they generally saw the environments populated by Turkish people as a comfort zone and wanted to stay there. However, as far as I understood from the feedback I received after the event, many young people wanted to get to know organisations/institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Parliament better and get involved in their work. Some people also contacted me with questions such as “What should I do to become the next youth delegate?” Therefore, even with an event that lasted approximately two hours, many Turkish youths’ closeness to institutions increased and the need for further projects, that foster harmony and integration within society, was identified.

School of Local Self-Government

Yaroslav Morozov

Ukraine

The “School of Local Self-Government” is a 2-day virtual educational project for young people from all over Ukraine, which was organised by the Youth Delegate to the Congress from Ukraine in partnership with the Youth Council under the Kharkiv Mayor and the European Law Students’ Association Kharkiv. The project was held in a virtual format because of the security precaution measures caused by the ongoing missile attacks by the aggressor state over the cities and regions of Ukraine.

The main goals of the project were to raise awareness of the Ukrainian youth (high school and university students) with the system and role of the local self-government in Ukraine, its cooperation with the local and national state authorities within Ukraine as well as to spread knowledge about the European standards of local self-government and youth participation on a local level.

The “School of Local Self-Government” consisted of a series of online lectures divided into panels, namely, (1) the system of local self-government in Ukraine, (2) international cooperation of the local municipalities and (3) youth participation in the decision-making processes on the local level.

During the first day of the event, the participants learned about the main functions of the local municipalities within Ukraine, their cooperation with the local and regional state administrations, procedures for implementation of the functions delegated from the national to the local level as well as the relevant issues concerning the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The second day of the event included lectures about the international cooperation of local municipalities and youth participation, during which the participants had the chance to learn about the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the “Rejuvenating Politics” initiative, youth civic engagement in NGOs and youth councils under the state and local authorities in Ukraine.

In general, the “School of Local Self-Government” project demonstrated an indirect reach of about 2,000 young people across Ukraine with more than 130 direct beneficiaries (participants) of the project. The initiative has increased the knowledge of young people about local self-government and its role in the public administration system and provided them with accessible tools for active youth participation in the decision-making processes on the local level.

Zacchaeus Heyward

United Kingdom

My project, “Cynrychiolaeth i Bawb: A Toolkit for Connecting Youth With Decision-Makers”, centred around widening Welsh young people’s access to democratic processes and lawmakers in order to allow them the space to affect necessary change in their communities. This project was built out of my experience as a Youth Council Member some years ago, where we found that often the people we were representing in my community had hugely insightful perspectives and ideas which could effectively meet the needs of people in the area and enhance their day to day lives. Often, however, they didn’t know how to bridge the gap between a young person and a seemingly inaccessible legal and political framework – which is where this work comes in.

Adapting the knowledge I gleaned from similar efforts some years ago, I assembled a toolkit which tackled at the root a few questions which I have found key to pushing the issues I or my peers might be facing:

- What needs changing in your area/community?
- Who has the power to do that?
- How could you build a connection and working relationship with them?
- Can you make more people aware of the change that should be made?
- Could you do more work with these people/groups?

I also took time in reflecting on which groups might need more support and who historically have been the most isolated from the levers of power in their community. In a Welsh context, working class, BAME, disabled and LGBTQ+ young people have faced particular impediments to ensuring they can be heard and therefore – when assembling a presentation/workshop on the toolkit – I took particular care to note structural hurdles to engagement and how we might overcome them on a case-by-case basis.

The workshop walks through each of the above questions in turn, identifying that different communities have individual needs, levels of government and policy organs might hold different powers, different lawmakers might have varying levels of interest in the work a group proposes, sometimes publicity might prove a valuable element in pushing for change, and that sometimes a good working relationship can lead to the transformation of circumstances a community faces by building greater links with those in positions to do right by the people speaking up.

The implementation phase of my project has been admittedly difficult – I have engaged with Young Wales and the Children’s Commissioner in attempting to find a hosting organism for the toolkit, so that at the end of my term the advice is updated, built upon and more widely disseminated than I am capable of. However, the procedures behind this have limited my ability to deliver the toolkit beyond a handful of meetings thus far, such as at the AHRC Conference on Intergenerational Justice at which I was proud to be a guest speaker at. I will be pushing to deliver my work more widely into 2024 and beyond, as I know that Youth Organisations across Wales deserve to be equipped with the tools to create change.