



D2.2 - Needs Assessment

Badajoz Province, Chalkidiki, Gabrovo Region and
Mugello

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| EC | European Commission |
| EU | European Union |
| PO | Place Out! |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| YGO | Youth Grassroots Organisations |
| LI | Local Institution |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 1.1 Needs Assessment Methodology | 4 |
| 2. Badajoz Province | 9 |
| 2.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations | 9 |
| 2.2 Local Institutions | 11 |
| 3. Chalkidiki | 13 |
| 3.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations | 13 |
| 3.2 Local Institutions | 15 |
| 4. Gabrovo Region | 17 |
| 4.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations | 17 |
| 4.2 Local Institutions | 19 |
| 5. Mugello | 21 |
| 5.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations | 21 |
| 5.2 Local Institutions | 23 |

1. Introduction

This document contains an analysis of the needs of Local Institutions (LI) and Youth Grassroot Organisations (YGO) in the contexts addressed by the Place Out project, namely the territories of the subregions of Badajoz, in Spain, Chalkidiki, in Greece, Gabrovo, in Bulgaria, and Mugello, in Italy.

The four needs analyses presented in the document have been carried out by the local coordinators of the project: Wazo Coop (Badajoz Province), Action Aid Hellas (Chalkidiki), Ecosystem Europe (Gabrovo Region) and Beecom (Mugello), under the coordination of LAMA, which weaved together the results collected by the other partners with a dedicated set of interviews and engagement activities implemented with YGOs and LIs.

Place Out local coordinators enriched and more deeply understood YGOs and LIs needs and desires with the interviews, and this additional analysis complements the results of the desk research (D2.1 - 'Context analysis') underpinning the actions to be executed by Place Out in 2023 - 2024. The results of the analysis are synthesised in this deliverable, with contacts of the interviewed actors indicated in D2.3 ' List of Local Institutions and Youth Organisations of the four territories'.

1.1 Needs Assessment Methodology

Before starting the participatory research activity, a discussion among all project partners was organised during the meeting in Ronta held in February 2023, to define all elements shaping the participatory needs assessment work.

As a first step, the consortium agreed on a clear and shared research question giving an exact definition of what kind of information we are seeking as a project, and for what purpose (the objective of the activity). The research question guiding Place Out needs assessment activity is:

What are the perspectives, needs, challenges perceived by YGO and Local Institutions?

Following partner's indications, LAMA designed an Interview guide: a list of semi-structured questions to conduct the interview. All partners used a predefined data collection tool (with a template provided by LAMA together with consent forms for the collection of data) so that all the data produced in the research activity has been efficiently captured and then reported in the shared project online folder.

The main dimensions to be investigated, and the semi-structured exploratory questions for each of those dimensions, are indicated in the following tables, respectively for YGOs and LIs. The ones in black are the general questions to be asked during the interview. The ones in blue are optional questions the interviewer might ask to gain deeper insights on specific aspects related to the general dimensions of inquiry.

Table 1. Interview questions for YGOs

| PART I - ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | What are the needs you have to enhance your capacity to engage, foster dialogue and stimulate participation among inhabitants and other organisations? |
| 2 | Do you feel the need for your YGO to improve communication skills ? If yes, which skills might be particularly relevant for your organisation? |
| 3 | Do you feel the need to network with a wider ecosystem of youth and mentorship organisations? |
| 4 | Are you feeling a lack of motivation to participate for young people? If positive, which factors influence motivation? What can be done to increase motivation? |
| 5 | Do you feel there are enough spaces and moments to provide feedback on the initiatives and policies? |
| PART II - POLICY INFLUENCING | |
| 6 | Do you think your organisation, as well as other YGOs, are duly listened to and engaged in the definition of local policies and initiatives by local institutions? |
| 7 | What could empower your organisation in its capacities to influence local policies ? What kind of support do you think might be useful for improving on this matter? |
| 8 | Are you aware of local policy frameworks targeting youth? How do these frameworks work at an operational level? |
| 9 | Is there a need to access key persons of LIs at a political and technical level? Is there a need to access experts and skilled people? In which fields? |
| PART III - SPACES REGENERATION | |
| 10 | How much do you know about the regeneration of spaces ? |
| 11 | Do you feel your competencies and practice on the matter might be enhanced? If yes, which aspects do you think might be strengthened? |
| 12 | Is there a need for more spaces dedicated to communities in your area? If yes, which kind of communities are most in need of these spaces? |

| PART IV - MOST SIGNIFICANT NEED | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 13 | What is the most significant need and challenge for your organisation? |
| 14 | Are there some soft skills you feel might be strengthened in your organisation? Which ones? Why? How? |
| 15 | Is there a need to improve the capacities to develop projects and attract funds , both at EU and Local levels? |
| 16 | Is there a lack of opportunities for YGOs? If yes, on which themes it might be recommendable to improve the opportunities for them? Are there already existing opportunities and channels that could be harnessed more by local YGOs? |
| 17 | Do you think it could be easy for you to create connections with other European organisations or institutions ? Do you think starting, or increasing, involvement in European projects could be useful? |

Table 2. Interview questions for LIs

| PART I - ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | What are the needs you have to enhance your capacity to engage, foster dialogue and stimulate participation among inhabitants and other organisations? |
| 2 | Do you feel there might be a need to increase the capacities to understand local YGO needs ? If yes, what can be done to improve on this? |
| 3 | Do you feel there might be a need to increase the capacities to directly reach individuals to stimulate participation ? If yes, what can be done to improve on this? |
| 4 | Do you feel the need for your LI to improve communication skills ? If yes, which skills might be particularly relevant for your organisation? |
| 5 | Is there a need to improve and/or communicate better the mechanisms available for participation ? If yes, what would be envisageable in your view? |
| PART III - POLICY CO-DESIGN | |
| 6 | Do you think your organisation, as well as other Local Institutions, are listening to and engaging appropriately with YGOs in the definition of local policies and initiatives ? |
| 7 | What could empower your organisation in its capacities to engage YGOs in the co-design and co-definition of local policies? What kind of |

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| | support do you think might be useful for improving on this matter? |
| 8 | What can be done to better communicate policies and collect feedback from citizens and youth on them? |
| PART IV - SPACES REGENERATION | |
| 9 | How much do you know about the regeneration of spaces ? |
| 10 | Do you feel your competencies and practice on the matter might be enhanced? If yes, which aspects do you think might be strengthened? |
| 11 | Are there needs to better regulate the access to spaces (licences, costs, permissions)? Can you provide some practical examples of aspects that may be improved? Do you feel there's enough flexibility to enable spaces regeneration in your area? |
| PART IV - MOST SIGNIFICANT NEED | |
| 12 | What is the most significant need and challenge for your organisation? |
| 13 | Do you feel there might be a need for an innovative mindset ? Does LIs might benefit from an improved knowledge on innovative projects on territorial development, participation, and regeneration? |
| 14 | Are there some soft skills you feel might be strengthened in your organisation? Which ones? Why? How? |
| 15 | Is there a need to improve the capacities to develop projects and attract funds , both at EU and local levels? |
| 16 | Is there a need to improve coordination among different parts of the public administration in the implementation of youth policies? If yes, can you provide some examples? |
| 17 | Do you think it could be easy for you to create connections with other European organisations or institutions ? Do you think starting, or increasing, involvement in European projects could be useful? |

A total of **35 interviews and 5 focus groups** have been conducted during the months of March, April and May 2023 on the four territories, collecting information among **21 YGOs** and **19 LIs**, and engaging a total of **54 people**.

For every interview, interviewers collected answers using a shared data collection template so that all the data produced by the research activity could be efficiently captured. To involve different types of stakeholders, local partners selected the most suitable and effective methods for their local context and local group of stakeholders. Mainly interviews and Focus Groups have been conducted to collect qualitative data during the research.

The research team adopted a participatory research approach, aimed to increase knowledge and understanding of selected topics (engagement and participation, policy co-design, spaces regeneration), by investigating in depth, through a collaborative and empathic dynamic of interaction with the stakeholders involved, the needs, issues and motivations of the target groups involved in the research. To put answers in perspective, and better understand in a contextual framework the dimensions investigated, interviewers also investigated the “most significant need” perceived by interviewees relating to the organisation they were representing.

After all information were collected, interviewers looked at their interview notes and extracted meaningful insights, highlighting the recurring findings that emerged revealing a specific truth about the topic. at least one “insight” has been defined for each question, extracted by observing the patterns of information with a cross-cutting analysis of each research dimension.

For each interview also general information has been collected, such as the ‘Info on the interview’ (date of the interview and participants) and the ‘General Profile of the interviewed organisation’ (name, type of legal entity, where it is located and where it acts, sector, mission, key activities).

The main insights stemming from the needs assessment are synthetically presented in the next chapters. For each territory, needs analyses of YGOs and LIs are presented separately.

2. Badajoz Province

2.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations

Five interviews have been conducted in Badajoz Province, respectively with 2 formal cultural associations, one youth association, a non-formal youth group, and the 'Regional Youth Council', a formal representative body of youth in the area.

Regarding **engagement and participation**, to enhance their capacity to engage, foster dialogue and stimulate participation these organisations seem primarily to increase their awareness regarding their potential stronger protagonism in the local political and social arena, as well as to be supported with the strengthening of existing skills to better understand how to convey activities and needs specifically towards the dialogue with local institutions.

The need for YGOs to improve their communication skills is widely perceived by interviewees, with the essential participative and social entrepreneurial communication skills, such as building a vision, transmitting it, engaging in face-to-face meetings with policy makers, being particularly relevant.

Organisations also perceived a need to network more with organisations in the youth field, but also more in general to everyone dealing with local development issues: a supportive ecosystem made by private and public organisations, putting forward a mutualist and cooperative mindset would be useful to have a common understanding

About the **policy influencing capacity** of the YGO, all the interviewees acknowledged that young people often lack motivation, and appear not being interested in what LIs offer to them. LIs take a strong role in local processes and it is very present in the daily life of youngsters (i.e. through schools and other educational centres). There is a large offer of activities aimed at young people and sometimes it is perceived as overwhelming, generating a 'participation fatigue'. The activities often take place in educational institutions, so attendance is forced and this might have a negative influence on activities that are free to attend outside of school hours. YGOs often struggle to attract the interest of young people in their areas.

There are many mechanisms available for citizens of all ages to provide feedback on the initiatives and policies. However, YGOs don't have a big experience in defying and sharing their needs in a systematic way, and support to enable a wider access to the above mentioned participation mechanisms may be very useful.

All the interviewed subjects acknowledged that YGOs are duly listened to and engaged in the definition of local policies and initiatives by local institutions, but often the topics covered are not of their interest or they are not aware of their importance. Even if moments in which policies can be influenced exist in a structured way, YGOs rarely feel protagonists in the debate, and they may feel undermotivated to participate in many cases.

Democratic and social entrepreneurship literacy would be very useful to local YGOs. More specifically, support in developing skills like project development and management, as well as better navigating legal frameworks, which would help YGOs organise better some activities, as well as their own governance and legal form. All of this would better frame their action and would allow them to be fully involved in local policy-making processes. Concerning the Youth Council, having full time board members would surely strengthen it, together with more resources for community managers and project managers.

There is not a specific need for access to key persons of LIs at a political and technical level, since all YGOs involved considered local politicians as being very open and reachable, especially for collectives and legal entities.

The needs highlighted about policy influencing are strictly connected with the issue of **spaces regeneration**. All interviewed organisations declared lacking the basic knowledge and skills, or having limited knowledge and skills, related to the regeneration of spaces. Some key interests of interviewed persons on this matter regard community engagement, cooperation and commoning, relation of regeneration practices with local development, building efficiency, respectful restoration of historic buildings and project management of regenerative participatory initiatives. All participants recognized that there are plenty of spaces available in the area, usually strongly under control of LIs. There aren't many youth spaces directly managed by youth or by local communities. Supporting leadership and raising interest in the local population are thus two systemic challenges surely to be undertaken when facing the opportunity of participatory spaces regeneration in the area.

When it comes to analysing more generally the **most significant needs** of local YGOs, the importance for them to recognise the distinction between voluntarism and non-profit organisations stems out. They surely also need skills development in project management, design, and execution, as well as fundraising, and also incentives to take a leading role in their initiatives. YGOs in the area can be stimulated to be more proactive and not rely solely on local institutions to address all challenges. The development of soft skills such as decision making, critical thinking, leadership, can be key in attaining this higher level of proactivity.

Moreover, these organisations can further improve their capacities to develop projects and attract funds; in fact, many YGOs apply for local/provincial/regional funds but not always with high competencies. A greater professionalisation would surely be supportive of local YGOs sustainability and capacity. Regarding fundraising, it is worth noticing that some of the interviewed persons acknowledged that there are calls for projects led by YGOs, yet these are not flexible enough, and this influences the capability of YGOs, often forced to design very elementary projects to fit in local call requirements.

YOUTH GRASSROOTS ORGANISATION BADAJOZ PROVINCE MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: YGO interviewed feel a need for individuating a sense of purpose regarding the potential impact of their work. Also, there is a perceived need to improve communication skills to foster engagement and participation, and a need to structure a network between local YGO.

Policy Influencing Capacity: While mechanisms for feedback exist, there is a perceived lack of willingness or interest among young people. Therefore, a related strong lack of democratic and civic literacy is perceived.

Spaces Regeneration: YGO interviewed describe plenty of spaces available, but very few managed directly by youth organisations.

Most Significant Needs: The development of management competencies and fundraising skills is perceived as crucial, such as to recognize the difference between voluntarism and professional work in the non-profit sector.

2.2 Local Institutions

Four LIs have been interviewed to collect data on local needs. Three of them were city council officials (Municipalities of Olivenza, Almendralejo, Jerez de los Caballeros), and one of them was a Regional body, the Instituto de la Juventud de Extremadura¹. All of them are elected politicians, not public workers: for the municipality of Olivenza and Almendralejo we town councillors have been interviewed. In Jerez de los Caballeros the mayor has been interviewed. For the Instituto de la Juventud, the conversation took place with the General Director.

Engagement and participation are, for LIs, critically connected with the issue of **Policy Co-design**.

The LIs members agree with what highlighted by YGO members regarding the issue of policy influencing believing that there are a wide range of mechanisms and processes available to young people to influence local policies like youth councils, participatory processes, and informal meetings. However, despite their attempts, they do not always get good results in terms of youth engagement and activation.

¹ The Instituto is also a formal partner of the PO project. It has nonetheless also been involved in the interviews with LIs, being one of the most relevant LIs working with youth in the area.

Mechanisms for engagement exist, especially in bigger municipalities or villages (whereas the number of YGOs is significantly decreasing, while in smaller places YGOs are still relevant in the social life).

However, there is not a real follow up from the LIs after participatory mechanisms are activated. Many of the interviewees felt that real progress in dialogue with local stakeholders was not made in councils, but rather in individual meetings. In many cases, councils have become informational meetings where organisations do not co-design: they either receive information or choose between options. In many cases the participation to these meetings is too low to have a fully consistent and significant representativeness of the results deliberated.

This results in LIs members feeling disconnected from youth, and perceiving a lack of mutual understanding and lead to related **significant needs**.

Upskilling and actions to increase motivation of public officers can be two ways to answer LIs attempt to cope with the above mentioned challenges. Also, more examples of democratic and bottom-up approaches, as well as exposure to good social innovation practices, might enrich the portfolio of options these actors might choose when activating participatory policy-making processes.

LIs can surely improve in their communication skills, and it may be particularly relevant for their organisations to not only refer to the use of media; in fact the main area of improvement seems to be the development of clear messages as well as addressing the theme of sustainability in communication, rather than the identification of channels for communication or of target groups to be reached. Public actors can benefit from an increase of their soft skills, with a specific focus on critical thinking and openness to criticism. However, developing harder skills such as project development and fundraising can be equally helpful for officers, especially in small municipalities.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS BADAJOZ PROVINCE MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: LIs describe how, despite a wide range of mechanisms and processes available to young people to influence local policies are present, It seems that they are unable to effectively and continuously engage the youth.

Policy co-design: Lis interviewed describe a situation where real progress in dialogue with local stakeholders was not made in councils, but rather in individual meetings, where organisations do not co-design but receive information or choose between options.

Most Significant Needs: Improving in communication skills, non only about the use of the media but especially related to the content to transmit, and improving in soft skill, with a specific focus on critical thinking and openness to criticism, has been the most significant need highlighted from LIs.

3. Chalkidiki

3.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations

Five interviews have been conducted in Chalkidiki, with 6 organisations, respectively two NGOs, an informal youth initiative, two artistic and cultural organisations and two formalised YGO. A total of seven people have been engaged.

Regarding **engagement and participation**, the primary insight that emerges from nearly all the interviews is the dearth of enthusiasm and motivation among the local community to engage in these initiatives. They find themselves operating within a somewhat hostile environment, where not only do the residents abstain from participation, but they occasionally regard such initiatives with suspicion. The lack of incentives, unawareness, and competing priorities are the two primary factors that contribute to the limited involvement of the residents in these endeavours. Moreover, all interviewed people felt there aren't enough spaces and moments to provide feedback on the initiatives and policies implemented by local public institutions.

The interviewed YGOs do not believe their lack of communication skills is the primary issue; instead, the main problem lies in the lack of participation due to the aforementioned reasons. Some of the mentioned need emphasised finding methods to ignite the interest of the residents. Therefore, it is not primarily the methods or specific communication skills that need improvement, but rather the content of the message that can be enhanced.

To increase their capacity to participate, everyone of the interviewed YGOs acknowledged the importance of having a network where they can feel connected to something greater. Even though there are a few initiatives, they are often unaware of one another, particularly across different municipalities. Within the same municipality, there is some basic networking, but when it comes to other municipalities, there is a lack of exchange among them.

All participants highlighted the lack of motivation among the youth as a prominent concern. Factors such as the absence of encouragement from their families, competing priorities like pursuing higher education in another city or securing employment, and the overall absence of a participatory culture within the entire Region greatly impact youth motivation. The prospect of receiving rewards in return was mentioned as a potential method for increasing motivation. However, overall, participants hold scepticism regarding the possibility of bringing about substantial change in this regard.

About the **policy influencing capacity** of the YGOs, there is a unanimous consensus among everyone interviewed that YGOs are not being heard or actively involved in local policies. While LIs are not outright opposed to discussing matters with YGOs, such discussions only occur when YGOs proactively request a meeting. Participants' experience reported is that little to no change occurs as a consequence of participation, and that if any change does happen, it usually requires significant time and effort. During the interviews, we noted a general feeling of lack of trust towards LIs, and a strong scepticism towards the possibility of change in this situation.

None of the municipalities included in the assessment have a specific local policy framework dedicated to youth participation. The youth is not regarded as a distinct sector with unique needs that require focused attention from the municipalities. Furthermore, none of the municipalities have established a dedicated department, office, or service specifically designed to cater to the needs of the youth.

In these small communities, there is no significant necessity to access key individuals, as people are acquainted with one another. However, the real challenge lies in the lack of genuinely skilled individuals who possess the expertise and willingness to address matters pertaining to YGOs, youth policies, and related subjects.

During the interviews, it was found that the term '**regeneration of spaces**' is not well known. However, almost all these initiatives are trying to convince the municipalities to provide them spaces (buildings) which are abandoned and where they can host their activities. The same need for spaces not only applies to YGOs but also to all those initiatives targeting elderly people.

When it comes to analysing more generally the **most significant needs** of local YGOs, the primary requirement is to address the lack of participation. Additionally, there is a scarcity of human and financial resources, and a general lack of willingness from the local society to provide support.

Some soft skills that could be strengthened in YGOs concern creativity and resourcefulness. Also the capacity to develop EU projects and attract funds seems to be relevant for them. Within Chalkidiki only a handful of individuals are making earnest efforts to win the trust and garner support from the rest of the community. Despite facing a hostile environment, they remain resolute and determined to bring about change. If these individuals can enhance their cooperation and unite their forces, there is a genuine possibility of creating fresh opportunities not only for themselves but also for the entire society.

Lastly, all interviewed YGOs are willing to connect with European Organisations. It seems as an opportunity to them since they don't have much to expect at the local level. However, the lack of capacity to support such connections appears as the main obstacle.

YOUTH GRASSROOTS ORGANISATION CHALKIDIKI MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: For the interviewed YGOs, it is not always easy to engage people in their activities. There is enthusiasm, but often there is a kind of "suspicion" that translates into a lack of interest.

Policy Influencing: YGOs interviewed feel they are not being heard or actively involved in local policies.

Spaces Regeneration: Spaces regeneration is a not well known concept among YGO interviewed, despite the attempts to obtain and manage some buildings from municipalities.

Most Significant Needs: YOGs interviewed described a scarcity of human and financial

resources, and a general lack of willingness from the local society to provide support: soft skills and capacity to attract funds (also from EU) are perceived needs.

3.2 Local Institutions

Four LIs representatives have been interviewed, covering three municipalities of the area (Nea Propontida, Aristoteli, Polygyros). All of them were members of the local community board, focussing on themes like environment, social inclusion, local culture, EU projects.

Regarding LIs **capacity to engage, foster dialogue and stimulate participation** among inhabitants and other organisations, the primary issue revolves around the absence of proactive initiatives from the local authorities to facilitate dialogue and encourage participation. There is a noticeable deficit of trust from citizens towards the LIs, likely related to the lack of initiatives in this sense from them. Furthermore, the employees responsible for implementing such initiatives often lack the necessary training and skills.

There is a clear and urgent requirement for local authorities to enhance their capacity in understanding the needs of YGOs. Unfortunately, the mayors, vice-mayors, and a majority of the employees lack the necessary skills and motivation to undertake such efforts. There might be a need to increase the capacities to directly reach individuals to stimulate participation. The main obstacle here is that there seems to be a lack of mentality towards those processes, and additionally the high level of centralization of power and decision making leaves little space for the voice of citizens in decision making.

In terms of communication, more channels between YGOs and LIs should be created. Even if there might be needs in terms of updating public servants' communication skills, the problems related to the lack of communication mainly lies in the absence of adequate institutional governance to enable participation. In fact, there are no established mechanisms for youth participation, with the municipality of Nea Propontida being an outlier, with a more positive approach towards initiatives that can stimulate participation. In the other municipalities there aren't mechanisms available for participation, and no plan seems to be already formulated to undertake this issue in the near future.

Regarding their capacity to **involve youth in policy co-design**, interviewed LIs reported that there are no established processes for co-design and engagement of YGOs in the decision making process and in the definition of local policies. A political input is often required on this matter.

Regarding the **knowledge on space regeneration**, knowledge is quite low among LIs, and the need to be exposed to best practices in this field has been clearly formulated by interviewed representatives. In general terms, bureaucracy and lack of flexibility seems to be the main challenges to tackle on this matter.

Some more **general challenges** considered significant by interviewed subjects have been identified by the assessment.

Firstly, they acknowledged the existence of a 'conservative mindset', partially caused by the lack of opportunities for the youth in the area, who usually have to leave the area after secondary school. Secondly, the lack of education and innovative mindset towards participatory processes can also be considered a relevant factor.

Team work, adaptability and creativity are the main skills to be strengthened among LIs. These have been perceived as being the ones which limit their mindset and set obstacles towards a change.

Everyone recognized the need for better coordination among all the departments of LIs and the connection of the LIs with the central state, although the lack of a clear framework on youth policies weakens the possibility of dedicated coordination efforts on this theme.

Finally, all interviewed declared the importance of increasing their connections with the EU: this seems to be a very relevant point for the Municipality of Nea Propontida where some experience on EU projects has already been gained with few projects implemented. The municipality already established some connections with EU networks, and would like to further enhance them. However, in the other municipalities, although their importance is recognized, the lack of capacity of people to implement EU projects seems to be a relevant hindering factor to be considered.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS CHALKIDIKI MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: Lis interviewed described the absence of proactive initiatives from the local authorities to facilitate dialogue and encourage participation. There is a noticeable deficit of trust from citizens towards the LIs.

Policy co-design: Lis interviewed reports that there are no established processes for co-design and engagement of YGOs in the decision making process and in the definition of local policies.

Spaces Regeneration: Knowledge about spaces regeneration practices is quite low among LIs, and the need to be exposed to best practices in this field has been clearly formulated by interviewed representatives.

Most Significant Needs: Lis Interviewed describe the necessity of better coordination among all the departments of LIs and the connection of the LIs with the central state.

4. Gabrovo Region

4.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations

One Focus Group with 10 people and one interview have been conducted in Gabrovo Region, respectively with the Gabrovo Youth Centre, a formal youth organisation providing lessons, events, seminars, training activities, and the Youth Zone association, an informal youth group of people from the area, between 13 and 19 years old and dedicated to volunteering, personal and career development, leisure initiatives.

The **main needs expressed** by the above-mentioned actors are related to enhancing their capacity to **engage, foster dialogue and stimulate participation** among inhabitants and other organisations mainly refer to developing a sustainable network of contacts, getting more financial support and getting in contact with more people who can open their views, 'thinking outside the box'. For this reason, the need to network with a wider ecosystem of youth and mentorship organisations can be beneficial, to share best practices and foster dialogue between organisations. Also, the development of soft skills such as time management, negotiation skills, trust building and conflict management can be supportive for the personal development of people working in these organisations.

Local YGOs perceive a lack of motivation to participate from young people, and want to experiment proposing unconventional experiences to attract them. Opportunities to participate are present on the territory, and there are events and initiatives fostering youth participation. Actors organising youth participation activities are equally present: there is a network of youth centres in Bulgaria and a Bulgarian Youth Forum. However, participation seems lacking, and unhealthy competition between youth organisations may be a by-product of this situation.

Regarding **policy co-design**, the Gabrovo Youth Center is often consulted by the Municipality, and frequently is invited by various institutions to participate in discussions and proposals for youth activities. Also the Youth Zone association is episodically engaged by LIs. However, more regular meetings with policy makers in the city could empower the organisations in their capacities to influence local policies.

Youth empowerment in the area is being implemented through the established Youth Parliament, and the Youth Centre recently created a youth podcast to reach a wider audience of young people in the area. The centre is trying to organise different skill development initiatives, such as teamwork, leadership, community engagement, with out of school activities, but also organise lesson programs in class on topics such as tolerance, ecology, friendship, communication. Moreover, the youth centre also proposes environmental initiatives to increase youth's commitment towards environmental protection.

Finally, the youth project funding programme tried to engage youth towards community development initiatives.

However, interviewed people agreed that in general there are not enough opportunities for youth organisations, especially for the small ones. Non-formal education is underestimated and policies towards it do not work, putting it in the background of formal education.

The organisations seem to have already established good relations with key persons of LIs at a political and technical level. However in many cases experts contacted do not have enough freedom and financial support to support YGOs activities.

Knowledge on the **regeneration of spaces** of interviewed people varied, with some having contacts with various cultural and design organisations and studios working on urban regeneration. Some interviewed knew cases of spaces regeneration from Romania and Bilbao, where cultural events and temporary uses supported the creation of culturally attractive venues.

The perception concerning the availability of spaces is that teenagers and older people in the area don't usually have access to spaces. Finding free, underused, abandoned space is not so difficult, but the real problem for local organisations is finding enough money to cover the high maintenance cost of shared and social spaces.

YOUTH GRASSROOTS ORGANISATION GABROVO REGION MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: YGO interviewed describe a lack of motivation among young people and a general lack of interest in participating in activities related to the Place Out project.

Policy Influencing: While YGOs describe some interaction between young people and institutions, the co-design process is not perceived as yet substantial with the mechanism for effective dialogue perceived as not yet structured.

Spaces Regeneration: The spaces in the four municipal territories exist, but they are not perceived as accessible or usable. The main challenge is the lack of funding.

Most Significant Needs: The most significant needs identified regards the creation of networks, access to external funding and the provision of incentives to promote engagement and participation.

4.2 Local Institutions

Seven stakeholders have been interviewed² to collect information on the needs of LIs from the area of Gabrovo: one regional representative, three representatives of municipalities in the area (Gabrovo, Tryavna, Sevlievo), a public association, two public institutions and a higher education institution.

The needs to enhance their **capacity to engage, foster dialogue and stimulate participation** among inhabitants and other organisations that these these organisations highlighted vary widely, but can be summarised in strengthening their communication skills, gaining new contacts and inter-institutional cooperation at local and european levels, improve in the coordination of actions and implementation of joint initiatives, have access to motivated and trained teams of specialists.

Opportunities for LIs of dialogue with youth exist, but the real understanding of the needs of youth organisations and especially of young people is insufficient. The process is two-sided - youth organisations do not seek out institutions actively enough or only for specific, usually financial, support. Institutions, specifically the municipality, have legal commitments to youth and the formation of councils, but lack mechanisms to influence a sector that is traditionally informal. In general, administrative procedures are unattractive to this group of community representatives, hindering even more the contact between public sector and YGOs. The interventions of the different organisations interviewed vary from bringing the youth into the administration and introducing them more closely to the work of the institutions. Also, it should be noticed that in smaller municipalities direct communication with youth is less of a problem. In general, strengthening LIs awareness and information channels for youth initiatives can be very helpful: LIs not only need to increase their reach, but also better understand how the information they share is perceived by youth and how to better deliver them communications.

Most LIs believe that the administration seeks and incorporates the views of youth organisations when determining **local policies and initiatives**. However, many activities could help empower LIs in their capacities to engage YGOs in the co-design and co-definition of local policies. For example, the continuous exchange of ideas between formal and informal youth workers, but also a dedicated research and analysis of the needs and attitudes of young people. Another possibility is the design and implementation of joint projects between LIs and YGOs.

However, in order to get more people involved, there needs to be better communication between the different organisations. Youth workers need to be involved in project design processes by LIs to generate additional opportunities to implement more youth initiatives.

Efforts towards inclusion of youngsters should prioritise approaches that are tailored to the specific contexts of young people, and that leverage communication channels that are familiar and accessible to them. Innovative and novel event formats should be developed in order to

² In two cases, the interview has been done with two and three people. The total number of people interviewed is thus ten people.

capture the attention of young people. Gamification can be employed to present policies in an engaging and interactive manner. Polls, round tables, and other opportunities for dialogue should also be provided to facilitate constructive engagement with young people.

Regarding the **knowledge on space regeneration**, most participants described regeneration in very broad terms as the renewal of a space, leading to new benefits from it. Only some respondents could give specific examples, like the one of Kapana district, in Plovdiv.

Just a few of the participants have knowledge about the legislation and law frames on this topic. There aren't national instruments to support the regeneration of privately owned spaces and this is an important limitation to the development of practices around this theme in the Country. For government or municipal property is slightly easier, but legal procedures related to the renovation of spaces are nonetheless heavy for LIs.

Some more **general challenges** considered significant by interviewed subjects have been identified by the assessment.

One important issue concerns the shortage of human resources, particularly those with specialised expertise, resulting in a single expert being tasked with overseeing multiple areas. Communication and partnership-building for regional policies also present significant obstacles that can be at least in part overcome with more regular and frequent coordination meetings among local development actors.

The LIs personnel can be supported on the development of several life-skills: time management skills, communication, project coordination, critical thinking; this can happen with programmes aimed at overcoming resistance to change, incentivising proactivity and teamwork, training the development of analytical and decision making skills.

Finally, LIs might benefit from an improved knowledge on innovative projects on territorial development, participation, and regeneration.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS GABROVO REGION MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: LIs interviewed state that, while opportunities for engagement and participation exist, a "real understanding" of the needs of youth organisations and especially of young people is lacking.

Policy co-design: In general, attempts are made, but on one hand there is a lack of interest from young people, and on the other hand there is a lack of ability to effectively interact with a predominantly informal sector.

Spaces regeneration: There is a lack of knowledge regarding legal frameworks or concrete

examples. No national instruments to support the regeneration of privately owned spaces.

Most significant needs: The most significant needs emerged are the implementation of Inter-institutional cooperation, communication skills, lack of human resources, and a need for continuous training.

5. Mugello

5.1 Youth Grassroot Organisations

Four interviews and four focus group discussions have been conducted in Mugello, engaging in total 11 people, representing 5 associations, one municipal youth initiative, one informal association, one volunteering grassroots organisation.

All associations share the common need to encourage participation and associationism among the younger generation to ensure the continuity of objectives and projects. This requires agency and empowerment and the provision of suitable spaces and resources. Building a strong network can also help associations in terms of solidarity and task-sharing.

Administration and bureaucracy are a challenge for associations, as they often lack the skills and resources to keep up with them consistently and correctly. It is important to work on the self-management skills of young people and provide training courses to improve organisational, communication, and bureaucratic management skills.

There is a great need for funds at the local and European level, but there is often a lack of knowledge of available opportunities and how to attract them. Some associations network with other European associations for certain events or projects, while others operate solely at the local level. However, involvement in European projects can be useful for many associations.

The associations interviewed were very diverse in terms of their activities and areas of interest, but the majority, on the theme of **engagement and participation of youth**, expressed concerns regarding the generation gap within local organisations, and the need to stimulate participation in younger groups and to empower them in order to activate them in the associations' lives and to give value to their territory.

As far as communication is concerned, most of the associations rely on their personal skills to obtain visibility and communicate their events. Most of the associations widely rely on the use of social media, while some have the opportunity to be supported by a communication agency, relying thus on an already structured media channel. Most of the organisations therefore rely on their own strengths and knowledge to communicate. Especially for this

reason, most of the participants to interviews equally expressed the desire to be able to improve their communication skills.

The need to network and liaise among local YGOs and with other NGOs and LIS appears to be a common concern for associations that would like to network with other associations in the territory and, even, in the wider Mugello area. Being in a network would support associations and increase their sustainability, stimulating a synergetic work that would pool resources, efforts, and definitely increase the efficacy and efficiency of local YGOs and NGOs work to support the community.

Many of the interviewed people agreed on the great need for structured dialogue between actors in the third sector in general and on youth policies in particular. Not engaging in dialogue means missing opportunities to network, to create synergies, but also to get to know what is already there on the ground.

In the associations that were interviewed, there was a common desire to strengthen their connection with institutions to increase their capacity to **influence policies**. Currently, this connection is established through personal acquaintances with reference persons, but there is a need to encourage more dialogue at the level of the Union of Municipalities, so that there can be synergy with all other relevant entities.

To be more proactive in local youth policies, it would be beneficial for the associations to have effective participation in the youth policy forum organised by the Società della Salute, which is the health branch of the supra-territorial body Unione dei Comuni del Mugello. It would also be valuable to have an advisory service that acts as a mediator between the associations and the institutions, which would foster dialogue and collaboration. What is often lacking by local YGOs is a guideline for action, more clarity on how to cope with bureaucratic procedures, for example to organise events and fulfil all obligations foreseen by law. It could be useful to have a coordination and administrative desk to help associations with this bureaucratic part.

Due to the small size of Mugello, there is some knowledge of political initiatives, but limited awareness and a lack of initiatives for young people. Access to key figures in the administration is important for coordination and co-planning. Although some key figures are already involved in certain projects or associations, there is often a lack of specific training on youth policy, which means that the success of initiatives often relies on the sensitivity of the constituents.

During the interviews, it was found that the term '**regeneration of spaces**' is not widely known in Mugello. The practices for implementing this concept are not consolidated, and there is not always a clear vision on how to redevelop disused spaces in the area and repurpose them for social use.

However, all the associations expressed a positive willingness to explore this concept further. It may be beneficial to use vacant buildings, empty lots, and unused spaces as sites for co-creative experimentation, unlocking a multitude of innovative cultural, social, and

entrepreneurial activities. To do so, collaboration around shared objectives with other associations in the area has been perceived as an enabling condition by all participants in the assessment.

Generally speaking, there is a lack of available adequate spaces for community use in Mugello, and YGOs expressed that they don't think that building new structures to address this issue is a good idea. Rather, there is a need for more flexible spaces that can be used for social purposes, and some spaces regenerated with this purpose could be the most envisageable solution. Unfortunately, not many of the abandoned spaces are municipally-owned, and not all of them can be converted into multi-purpose spaces.

YOUTH GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION MUGELLO

MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: YGO members perceive a strong generational gap with young people, that leads to difficulties in engagement.

Policy Influencing: YGOs perceive that the ability to interact with institutions is based on relational dynamics, and that consequently the existing formal tools (forums and working groups) are perceived as ineffective.

Spaces regeneration: YGOs states that there is not always a clear vision on how to redevelop disused spaces in the area and repurpose them for social use, due little knowledge about opportunities of spaces regeneration and lack of concrete examples

Most significant needs: To assure continuity to their activities engaging younger generations, and to improve organisational, communication, and bureaucratic management skills are the most significant needs highlighted from local YGOs.

5.2 Local Institutions

Five LIs representatives have been interviewed, covering five municipalities of the area (Borgo San Lorenzo, Barberino del Mugello, Scarperia e San Piero a Sieve, Dicomano, Vicchio). All of them were councillors, some of which had delegated powers on youth policies. Two of them were vice-mayors.

The interviews with LIs highlighted the need for promoting participation and civic sense in young people to take public good and political participation into their own hands, as well as the importance of attracting them to activities that can fulfil their interests. LIs feel the necessity of having more professional figures, deemed necessary to interact with young people, understand their needs, and help them formalise and express their ideas.

Networking is also considered central for the interviewed subjects: Building a territorial network between institutions would allow for better policies and the distribution of possibilities, opportunities, and spaces for young people. However, there are currently no dedicated offices at the level of the Union of Municipalities, and transportation between municipalities is not well served, causing discomfort for young people. Moreover, in some cases municipalities may lack spaces for hosting youth activities.

At the municipal level, there is a lack of specific expertise in **participatory processes and innovations**. Training courses are needed to improve the administration's planning, understanding of young people's needs, language and communication, as well as generating new opportunities by improving LIs capacities to attract funds and work on calls for tenders, particularly European ones. It would be also useful to increase the opportunities of knowledge exchange between associations and institutions at the European level. Strengthening the capacity of LIs on project co-design with youth is particularly relevant because even if there are funds available after the pandemic, what is mostly lacking are ideas, projects, and the ability to involve young people and understand their needs. Empowerment in project management is considered equally important, especially considering the lack of sufficient staff of small Municipalities.

For the interviewed LIs, the weaknesses of youth participation shall also be stimulated through strong and effective educational policies. Merely creating structures, spaces, or associations is not enough; they must be accompanied by content and projects that foster social connection, inclusion, prevention, and health in collaboration with schools. For instance, initiatives related to music, sports, and other areas can help to encourage participation, as well as prevent school dropouts.

Regarding the capacity to **engage YGOs in the co-design and co-definition of local policies**, LIs recognize the importance of creating opportunities for dialogue to improve their understanding of the needs of local YGOs and NGOs. To improve their capacity to understand their needs, LIs find it particularly important to build practical and regular occasions for dialogue. While there is already some dialogue with YGOs, LIs recognized that it does not always result in mutual understanding and in practical results. Moreover, there is often a lack of young people in YGOs, which can lead to initiatives that do not address their needs directly. Thus, it is crucial to involve young people in the dialogue process since they are the only ones who can express their needs directly.

Despite existing dialogue, there is a need for more training and skills for the administration to better understand the needs of young people. LIs must also be able to promote dialogue and stimulate the participation of young people effectively. However, the greatest need may be in stimulating youth associationism in the area, which has faced numerous challenges, especially after the pandemic emergency.

There is existing knowledge regarding **urban regeneration and temporary uses** in Borgo San Lorenzo, which has been previously explored in participatory initiatives on this theme like 'Spazio ai Giovani' and the participatory town planning process 'Borgo Prossima'. However, there is still a need to deepen this knowledge, especially in terms of regulatory frameworks.

Unfortunately, councillors and local administrations often lack the specific training needed to effectively deal with issues related to rural regeneration and participatory processes involving young people.

In addition to regenerating physical spaces, it is also important to consider the rural spaces surrounding them, which may not always be connected to services or accessible to the public. There is a need for simplification and flexibility at the regulatory level, particularly in relation to regional landscape restrictions that do not consider the specific needs of rural areas.

Temporary Uses could be a useful tool to stimulate regenerative processes, but for all LIs it needs to be developed in collaboration with the Union of Municipalities and coordinated with other municipalities. Continuous training and updates on funds and tenders on this subject are also necessary to ensure that opportunities are not missed. However, financial limitations pose a challenge for investments in safety and payment for temporary use of private spaces. Generating new ideas and projects for utilising these spaces is also a challenge. Despite these challenges, the whole area and in particular the Municipality of Borgo San Lorenzo has demonstrated great interest on this matter, with a clear willingness to use existing resources and regulations to experiment and innovate.

LOCAL INSTITUTION MUGELLO MAIN INSIGHTS:

Engagement and Participation: Lack of competences and expertise in participatory processes is perceived.

Policy co-design: LIs claim the lack of more regular and structured opportunities for dialogue with YGOs.

Spaces regeneration: A little knowledge about the opportunity of space regeneration is present, but real knowledge and competences are perceived as missing.

Most significant needs: LIs highlight the necessity of dedicated personnel and more competences about youth policies and engagement and participation practices.