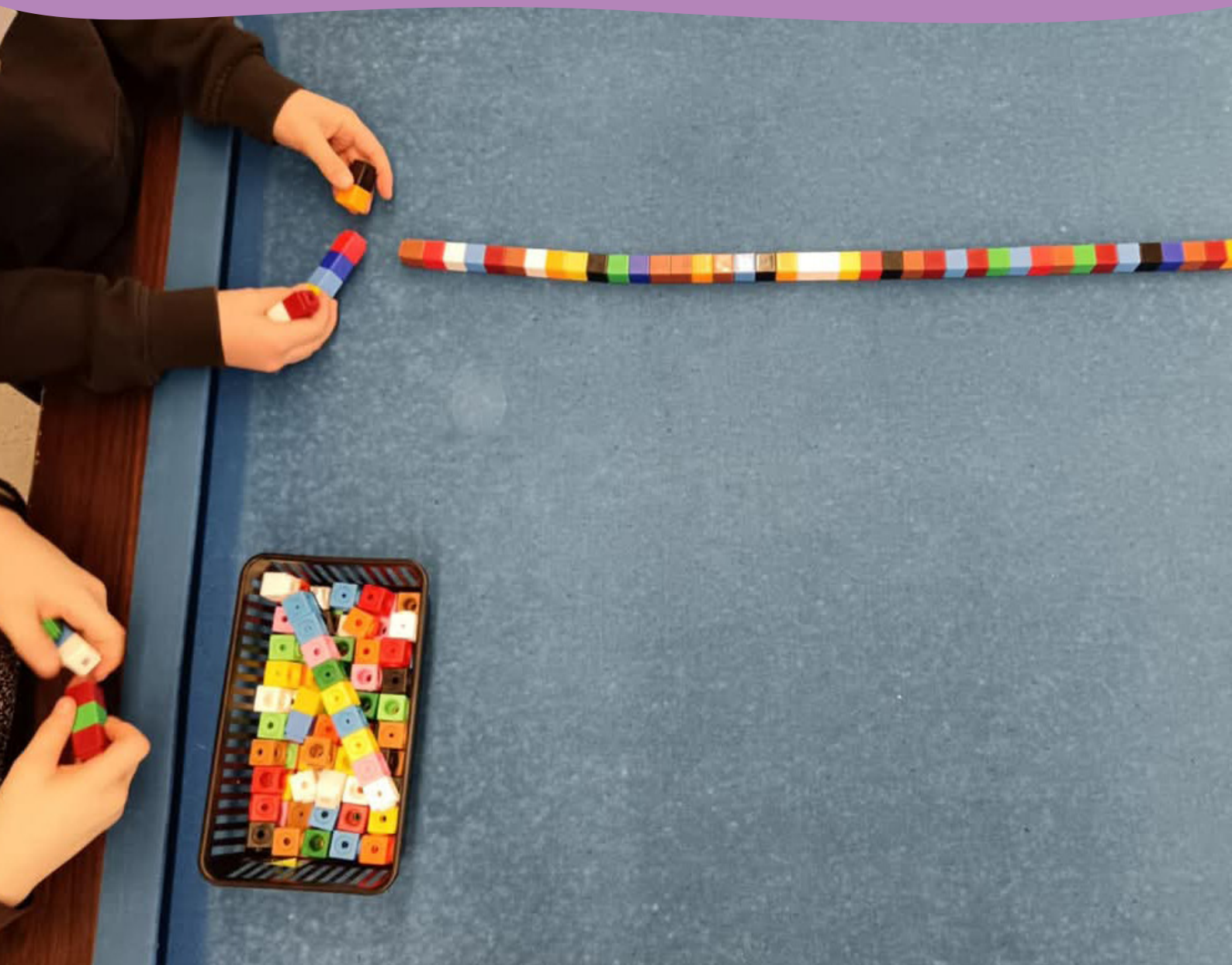
Youth led youth houses

Erasmus+ Small scale partnership project

between **Finland, Germany, Poland** and **Latvia**





FACTS

Organizations:
Lag Leipziger Muldenland,
Lag Trakt Piastów,
Lag Partneriba laukiem un jurai,
Rieska-Leader ry

Budget: 60.000€
Timeline: 1.9.2024-31.8.2026
1 study visit and benchmarking in each country

The project aimed to collect the best practices in youth managed youth houses, give good examples and have discussion on the different aspects including community involvement, volunteering, safety issues, educational needs, maintenance etc.

From an Empty Space to a Community | FINLAND

At the beginning of the project, there were no self-led youth houses in the Rieska-Leader ry region. During the project, the first pilot youth houses were established in Rautio and Raudaskylä. The pilots showed that creating a youth house is possible - but it requires a combination of space, funding, volunteers, clear responsibilities and trust in young people.

1. What needs to be solved?

Setting up a self-led youth house usually means finding solutions to five key questions:

Challenge:	Key question:
Space	Where can young people meet?
Money	How will the space and activities be paid for?
Volunteers	Who will support the young people?
Responsibilities	Who is responsible for what?
Safety	How can young people have independence while staying safe?

The good news!

Communities do not have to solve everything at once. Start with what already exists and build from there.





Space - Finding The Place

Look around the village before looking for something new.

Potential spaces may include:

- Empty community buildings
- Village halls
- Unused rooms in existing facilities
- Privately owned premises
- Spaces that are only used occasionally



Think creatively!

The space does not have to be perfect from the beginning. It can be **developed together with the young people, and it is even better in that way.**



LEADER funding can potentially support:

- Renovation and modernisation
- Furniture and equipment
- Improvements to the space
- Development projects, like youth work and support for the local community

Always check the current funding rules and possibilities in your own area. Other development funds are also available regionally and Erasmus+ can be a fun bonus for the youth activities.



- Leader is an EU rural development funding method.
You can find your own regional Leader group or LAG (Local Action Group) if you are from the countryside in an EU country
- Youth Leader is a small fund for Finnish rural young people for their projects, mostly evaluated by a group of local young people in a Leader group. The fund is usually 200-1000€

Money - How can the costs be covered?

Running a youth house does not necessarily have to depend on one source of funding. Possible ideas for financial maintenance in Finland:

Fundraising

- Community events
- Having a small café
- Other activities organized by the community

Income from the space

- Renting the space for events
- Allowing other groups to use the premises

Local support

- Sponsorship from local businesses
- Donations
- Support from village associations

Creative ideas

- a Small thrift shop
- Community markets
- Joint activities with other local organisations

Key lesson:

Funding opportunities are often available—but someone needs to take responsibility for looking for them.



Volunteers - Finding the People

A self-led youth house is youth-led, but not adult-free. Adults can stay in the background while making sure that young people have the support they need.





Who could help?

- Parents and family members
- Village association members
- Students studying youth work or social work
- Other community-minded residents and volunteers

Volunteers may also be supported through:

- Reimbursement of reasonable costs
- Recognition or rewards
- Training opportunities
- Opportunities to gain practical experience



Responsibilities + Safety= TRUST

One of the strongest lessons from the project is: Young people need both trust and a safe framework. Adults may sometimes need to be more open-minded and give young people more responsibility than they are used to.



At the same time, young people need to know:

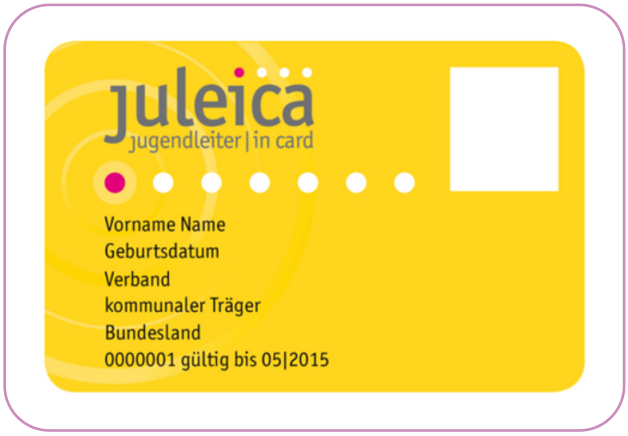
WE ARE TRUSTED - BUT WE ARE NOT ALONE

Training matters

Training can give both young people and adults more confidence in their roles. Useful topics include:

- responsibilities
- group dynamics
- conflict situations
- youth participation
- basic youth work skills
- first aid

The Juleica card from Germany provides one example of training and recognition for people involved in youth work. https://juleica.de/



Keep things clear

Simple practical tools can make a big difference:

Opening a timetable

Responsibility list

House rules

Emergency contact information

Cleaning and maintenance schedule

Even a simple timetable can help everyone understand how the youth house works.

Community is essential - it helps the young people to understand the potential of the place, then while using and developing it, they become their own community and can help the next generation to take over.

Best Practices to Share

Rautio

Situation:

A privately owned house bought by the village association and is being renovated from Leader-fund. Some of the furniture and equipment is bought second-hand, received as gift or will be purchased by the youngsters themselves using Youth Leader funding.

Possible issues:

To find active youth and make them fell in love with the place and take responsibility.

Possible solutions:

Active volunteers and local support might help and also international opportunities via Erasmus+ motivates the local youth.

Learnings from the project:

There is a lot of opportunities to give young people, they do not need much, they are smart and can do amazing things with something very little. The needs of the youth is pretty much the same in every country and answering their needs does not have to depend on bureaucracy or tight municipal budget, all age groups can be very creative in creating the dream space with young people for young people.

Best practices:

Strong local support and active village association, good use of Leader funding, open-minded attitude to international activities.







Raudaskylä

Situation:

Ahjola is an old youth community house that is possible to use. It needs renovation; the toilets are done now from Leader fund. A TV was gifted to the place.
Some pilot in a room of the local college worked for a while, but it was not ideal as it was not fully in free use and the village lacked volunteers.

Possible issues:

To find volunteers, need for more active involved community members.

Possible solutions:

Activating locals, Leader-fund for renovation and Youth Leader for equipment.

Learnings from the project:

Good ideas, bigger network between the locals, funding awareness.

Best practices:

Leader funds.

Something old, something new | GERMANY

The Current Situation

Several self-managed youth clubs operate in the Leipzig Muldenland region. These clubs give young people a place to meet and organize their own activities. However, municipalities and other partners are not always aware of the challenges the clubs face.

Main Challenges

- Finding new young people to take responsibility.
- Dealing with alcohol consumption.
- Ensuring safety and supervision.
- Clarifying responsibilities between municipalities, youth workers, and young people.

Recommended Solutions

The Erasmus+ project organized three professional conferences with partners from Finland, Latvia, Poland, and the local region. The conferences helped participants share experiences, discuss problems, and find solutions together.





Practical Steps and good practices

1. Organize regular meetings with all stakeholders.
2. Agree on clear rules and responsibilities.
3. Support young people in managing their clubs.
4. Share good practices with other youth clubs.
5. Continue cooperation between municipalities and youth organizations.

Project Results

The international examples gave new ideas for supporting young people, sharing responsibilities, and encouraging participation.

- One previously closed youth club reopened.
- Cooperation between municipalities, youth organizations, professionals, and young people improved.
- Regular regional meetings continued after the project.

Key Message

Self-managed youth clubs help young people develop responsibility, independence, and democratic participation. **Success requires clear rules, good cooperation, and trust in young people.**

Youth led communities thrive | POLAND

The Current Situation

Lack of Youth-Led Spaces: There is a distinct shortage of youth clubs that are organized, managed, and runned directly by young people themselves; only a few isolated instances exist across the region.
Adult-Centrated Model: Existing youth clubs are typically established by local governments or non-governmental organizations. These spaces function mainly as structured activity centers offering set programs, rather than open hubs where young people can simply spend their free time on their own terms.





ISSUES

Infrastructure & Legal Barriers: There is a severe lack of available premises for youth activities, alongside legal liability concerns regarding the oversight of physical spaces and the safety of minors.

Systemic & Experiential Gaps: Stakeholders face a general lack of experience in youth-led models. Furthermore, the role of youth worker is not officially recognized as a formal profession in the local labor market, creating a shortage of trained facilitators.

PROBABLE SOLUTIONS

International Cooperation & Benchmarking: Active participation in transnational projects strengthens mutual trust among partners, broadens perspectives, and enables the adoption of proven international best practices (such as youth work models from Germany).

Community Animation & Youth Empowerment: Animating local communities helps build grassroots support. Establishing Youth Advisory Councils (Młodzieżowe Rady) creates a formal platform for intergenerational dialogue and decision-making.

Development Suggestions

Conferences & Intergenerational Dialogue: Organize national and international conferences to share knowledge and foster inclusive spaces where young people and adults can exchange ideas on equal footing.

Funded Youth Initiatives: Encourage adults to actively mentor and support youth-driven initiatives, utilizing local and international funding opportunities—including resources provided by Local Action Groups (LGDs).

Best Practices to Share

The "#bezekranowi" (#screenfree) Youth Club: A self-organized youth collective that puts on theater performances and cultural events. Supported Autonomy Model: Adults provide the venue, equipment, and administrative backing through a formal association, while young people retain full creative freedom and responsibility for content, event execution, and topic selection.

Learnings from the Project

Multi-Stakeholder Engagement: Multi-stakeholder conferences focusing on youth clubs and youth support are highly effective in engaging public administration officials, who are traditionally the most difficult stakeholders to convince.

Empowerment via LGD Youth Councils: Establishing Youth Councils within Local Action Groups significantly boosts young people's decision-making power and serves as a sustainable bridge between generations.

Volunteering & International Mobility: Project activities should be actively reinforced through local and international volunteering programs.

Trust & Resource Mapping: Trusting young people with real responsibilities yields remarkable results, and international partnerships provide clear pathways for discovering and adapting high-impact best practices.



Sometimes “L” is for “Late”, sometimes for “Love”... | LATVIA

The Current Situation

At the beginning of the project, there were no established, active youth-led youth houses in the PLJ (Partnership for Rural and the Sea) territory. Although some initiatives aimed at encouraging independent youth participation already existed, there was no dedicated space where young people could regularly meet, organise their own activities and take responsibility for developing the space themselves.

Municipal youth centres were available in Tukums and Jūrmala, but their activities were mainly organised through municipal youth work programmes.

At the same time, the NGO 10x10 Youth Club was already bringing together young people from Tukums town and the surrounding rural areas. However, despite having a formal organisational structure, the club lacked its own premises and had only a small group of active members. The organisation had considerable potential but needed more opportunities, motivation and support to develop into a stronger youth-led community.

This situation highlighted a wider challenge in rural areas: young people need not only organised activities but also opportunities to take ownership, build relationships and shape their local environment.

ISSUES:

1. Lack of dedicated youth-led spaces. Without their own premises, young people had limited opportunities to meet regularly, develop a sense of belonging and organise activities independently.
Challenges in rural areas. Young people living outside the main towns faced additional barriers, including fewer accessible meeting places and activities. This made it particularly important to develop approaches that respond to local conditions and involve rural communities.

SOLUTION:

→ Using international cooperation as a source of inspiration.
The project enabled us to learn from the practical experiences of partner countries and explore how youth-led spaces and participation models could be adapted to the Latvian context.
Also making better use of funding opportunities. LEADER and other project funding opportunities can support youth-led initiatives, providing young people with assistance in developing ideas, preparing applications and implementing their projects.



2. Limited youth initiative and participation. Although young people were interested in local activities, there was a need to encourage more of them to become active volunteers, take responsibility and participate in community life.

→ Supporting young leaders and peer-to-peer engagement. The establishment of the PLJ Youth Council created a structure through which young people from rural and coastal communities could meet, exchange ideas, develop initiatives and encourage other young people to participate.

3. Dependence on adult-led structures. Existing youth activities were often organised by municipalities or other adults. More opportunities were needed for young people to identify their own priorities, make decisions and learn through practical experience.



→ Creating opportunities for regular youth-led activities. In Smārde, the establishment of a local community house manager position helped create opportunities for regular youth meetings. As the youth group became more active, the need for dedicated premises became apparent. The municipality subsequently allocated a small flat for the young people, and plans for renovating the main room are being developed.

4. Limited cooperation between stakeholders. There was potential to strengthen cooperation between municipalities, youth organisations, local communities, entrepreneurs and other actors who could support youth-led initiatives.

→ Strengthening cooperation with municipalities. The Local Action Group (LAG) can act as a bridge between young people, municipalities, community organisations and the private sector. Through dialogue and advocacy, the LAG can communicate young people's needs and help identify suitable premises and other resources. This approach was used to communicate the importance of providing young people with more opportunities for independent activities to the Tukums Municipality.



Development suggestions

A key recommendation is to recognise young people as active partners in local development rather than merely as recipients of youth services. This requires trust, flexibility and a willingness to share responsibility.

Cooperation between municipalities, youth organisations, community groups and local entrepreneurs should also be strengthened. LAGs are well positioned to facilitate this cooperation because they connect the public, private and civil society sectors and can help translate local needs into concrete development initiatives.

Municipalities and youth organisations should create opportunities for young people to initiate activities, participate in decision-making and learn from their own experiences, including mistakes. Youth-led spaces should not simply reproduce the programmes of existing youth centres; they should provide an environment where young people can decide what they want to do and how they want to organise themselves.

Finally, youth participation should be supported as a long-term process. Establishing a youth space is only the first step. Sustainable results depend on active young people, supportive adults, access to resources and opportunities for young people to develop leadership and organisational skills over time.

Learnings from the project

The most important learning from the project is that young people become more active when they are trusted, given real responsibility and provided with the space and support needed to turn their ideas into action. Youth participation cannot be developed through organised activities alone, it requires an environment in which young people feel that their ideas matter and that they can influence what happens in their communities.

Let them do it!



Best practices to share

10x10 Youth Club

— developing a youth-led space

The experience of 10x10 Youth Club in Tukums shows how providing young people with their own space, trust and freedom to take responsibility can transform a small organisation into an active youth community. Today, around 30 young people regularly use the space, develop project ideas and organise activities.

Best practice to share: Start with a motivated group of young people, provide a place to meet and support them in taking ownership of their activities. A youth-led space develops through active participation, not just through the availability of premises.





Smārde

— strengthening youth participation in a rural village

In Smārde, regular youth meetings, supported by the local community house manager, helped a rural youth group become more active and engaged. As the group grew, the municipality allocated a small flat for the young people, and renovation planning is underway.



Best practice to share: Regular opportunities to meet and supportive cooperation between young people, community representatives and the municipality can strengthen rural youth participation. Local stakeholders should respond flexibly as young people's needs and ambitions grow.

We hope our experience helps you to give a chance to the local youth – young people can achieve great things with a bit of support!

THANK YOU!

LEADER Rieska

Leipziger Muldenland

PARTNERĪBA LAUKIEM UN JŪRAI

Trakt Piastów LOKALNA GRUPA DZIAŁANIA

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