

WHAT ARE THE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES AND COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS?



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WHAT ARE THE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES OF BUILDING A COOPERATION?

This report tackles the needs and challenges of building a cooperation between the municipalities and community based organisations that work with youth or with the aim to improve the lives of youngsters.

The community based organisations in the context of this report are defined as youth organisations and youth social enterprises. Five municipalities and regions in different European countries were chosen to explore a variety of challenges and needs to build successful cooperation between municipalities and youth organisations in the context of the project "Enhancing youth capacity in municipalities and encouraging mutual cooperation using social entrepreneurship as a tool, LOCAL-Y-MPACT". The scope of areas chosen represent diversity of approaches and attitudes, however, it presents a number of ideas and reasons to cooperate.

The overall objective of the project "LOCAL-Y-MPACT" is to strengthen the cooperation between community based youth organisations and social enterprises and local municipalities, and promoting social entrepreneurship as an effective tool for reducing economic inequality, promoting social inclusion and integration, creating resilient society and fostering active participation within local communities.





SWEDEN

Region Dalarna is situated in the middle of Sweden with about 280 000 inhabitants. It includes 15 municipalities but no major cities and is a fairly rural region. The region is working towards sustainable development and has an ambition to be Sweden's best youth region. As part of this strategy, other actors such as those within the private and non-profit sectors are invited to collaborate in building thriving conditions and empowering youngsters in Dalarna. The social entrepreneurship sector is also under development with an increasing number of social enterprises contributing to solving some of Dalarna's societal challenges. There is huge potential in broader cross-sector collaboration and there is more to be done to take advantage of the opportunities wider cooperation offers.



LATVIA

Talsi is a picturesque town in Kurzeme region situated on the northern west side of the capital city Riga with more than 38 000 inhabitants. Its landscapes, the historic low-rise buildings by Lake Talsi and the hilly terrain are the most characteristic features of its landscape. There are around 300 non-governmental organisations registered in the municipality and new social enterprises are appearing in the region. There are several events organised by the community based organisations that allow inhabitants to express their opinion and realise their ideas such as Citizens' Forum that strengthens the dialogue between the public and the municipality, finding common ground on the most important tasks and priorities to be implemented in the municipality; project contest gives an opportunity to improve surrounding environment and receive financial support to implement the idea or Festival of Democracy aims to strengthen democratic values, develop skills necessary for democracy, and provide an opportunity to discuss topics of current interest in society.



LITHUANIA

Trakai District Municipality is one of 60 municipalities in Lithuania. Situated nearby Vilnius is a small municipality with approximately 32 000 inhabitants. The biggest city in the district is Lentvaris, not Trakai, its capital. Other settlements include Paluknys, Trakų Vokė, Dusmenys, and Rūdiškės. There are around 300 civic organisations, associations registered in the Center of Registers. However, at least half of them are closed or inactive, especially recently during Covid-19 pandemic and its strict regulations. Trakai has a significant Polish minority population in Lithuania, with about 30% of the population claiming Polish ethnicity.



PORTUGAL

Braga's Municipality has been focusing in the past years on Youth, Culture and Innovation. As one of the biggest cities in the North of Portugal, Braga was also the European Youth Capital in 2012, European Circular Economy Capital in 2021 and is now a candidate for European Culture Capital of 2027. Municipality of Braga was always ahead on the topic of entrepreneurship and social action, and today the focus has been driven into social entrepreneurship with its notorious social innovation centre, the Human Power Hub, situated in the city centre of Braga, in "Seminário Menor" building. Every year Human Power is developing their own incubating, acceleration and scaling training which later convert into projects incubated and supported by the centre, either with virtual or physical incubation. While social enterprises it's still an area of development with new enterprises opening every year, in the youth and NGO sector Braga is noted as being one of the cities of Portugal with the most active organisations.



CYPRUS

Cyprus is an island country in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea with a population of around 1 000 000. The island is partitioned and it comprises the Republic of Cyprus and Turkish occupied Cyprus.. It's capital, Nicosia, is the last divided city in the world, with the two communities separated by a "Green Line" controlled by the UN Peace Corps. The turbulent political, social, historical, and cultural context of the island poses a set of unique challenges in various fields and aspects of civic life and engagement. Despite its small size, Cyprus has several youth organisations and a small ecosystem of social enterprises that is slowly but steadily developing. Nonetheless, it should be noted that "Youth Organisations" is a term used contextually and does not hold any administrative or legal significance. Therefore, many organisations may target youth - among other groups - without necessarily identifying as a "Youth Organisation", while these organisations may also engage other groups in their activities. In addition to the above, Cyprus also has a variety of informal youth collectives or initiatives that lack a formal structure, but are quite active island-wide.

WHY IS COOPERATION NEEDED?

The municipality and local grassroots organisations in the long run share the same goal - to improve the life quality and satisfaction of the residents and create new opportunities in various fields of activity. Therefore, it seems only natural to be open to cooperation and work together to achieve the same goal creating synergies and value for both sides. It is even more essential when social issues are becoming more complex and need to be solved in a systematic way.

Lack of cooperation with non-governmental organisations implies difficulty in solving existing social issues. It is especially challenging to reach the target audience that can better explain the existing difficulties and present the most effective ways to resolve them. By reaching such target groups as youth, municipalities can ensure that the potential of youth is used effectively in local municipalities. Thus, youth will feel more included and appreciated and are less likely to develop negative habits. It is important to consider local resources. Getting to know one another can help to address the right stakeholder and avoid having different stereotypes.

Moreover, cooperation is essential when creating new tourist attractions, services, providing up to date information about new opportunities to promote and develop local tourism.

REASONS TO COLLABORATE:



Better knowledge of local resources

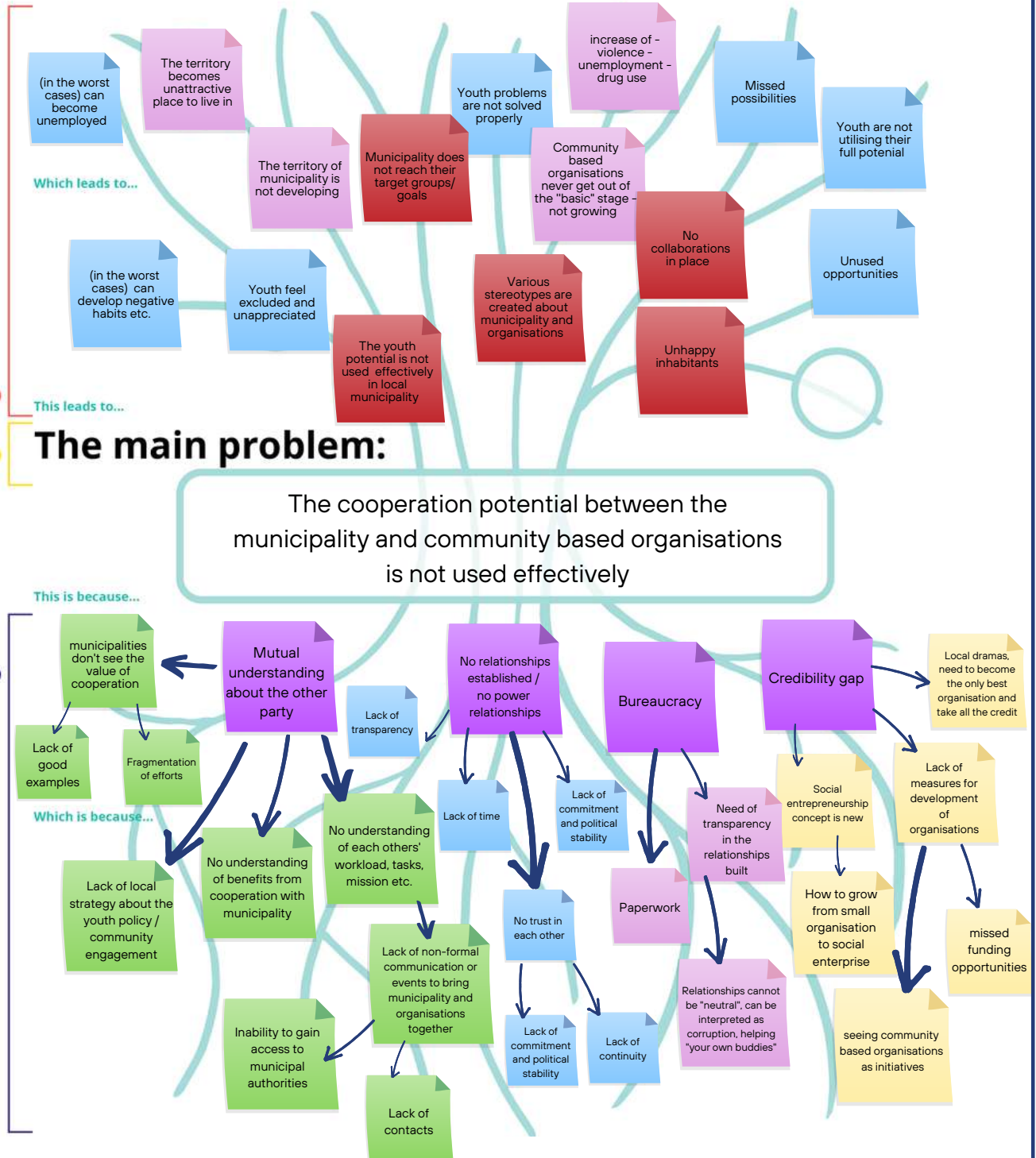


New innovative ideas to improve the local context



Strengthen the social inclusion and social integration

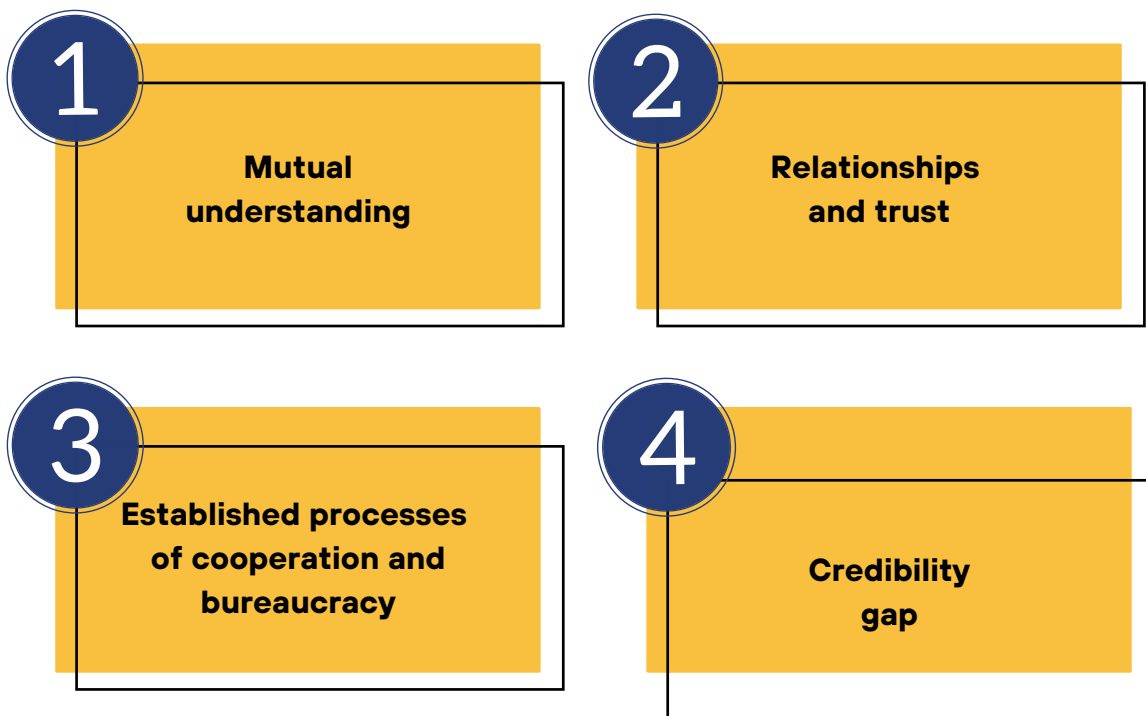
NEEDS AND CHALLENGES TO COOPERATE: PROBLEM TREE



NEEDS AND CHALLENGES TO COOPERATE

Even though the countries represent different regions, cultures, backgrounds and regulations, the main needs identified are quite similar. The needs and challenges were identified by individual communication with both sides - through surveys and interviews with the local organisation representatives and municipality workers, as well as locally held events.

Analysing the main problem which is that cooperation between municipalities and community based organisations is ineffective, four main causes have been identified, therefore, this report seeks to combine the needs and challenges in certain categories:



1

**MUTUAL
UNDERSTANDING**

It is assumed that municipality representatives are the ones closest to the inhabitants of a municipality establishing direct cooperations with local organisations and enterprises to promote active engagement of the local community. However, the conducted study indicates that even in the smaller areas where people usually know each other, there is a lack of up to date information about active organisations in the region. Moreover, there are no clear strategies about the youth organisation and community engagement.

For some, there is a lack of overall knowledge about active community based organisations. Interestingly, many of the pilot municipalities are not deliberately collecting information about those organisations that are active in the local municipality and the impact of their work. If information is collected then often it is outdated and isn't updated, therefore, it also presents organisations that are not active anymore. Moreover, often organisations do not know that information about them is available on the public domain, thus, not offering the possibility to provide actual information. Municipality representatives have mentioned that a regularly updated official registry of youth organisations and social entrepreneurship organisations on a local level would be a useful source for inhabitants to oversee the possible services and activities in their communities as well as for local organisations to increase their cooperation with other organisations and the municipality.

Study shows that both sides do not have a clear understanding of each other's work processes, aims and tasks.

Some municipality representatives do not have the knowledge of available support mechanisms. Furthermore, the lack of awareness regarding the youth organisations, youth stakeholders, social enterprises and their contribution towards local and wider communities fosters further isolation and lack of communication, mostly, because it is not the priority of the public sector actors. There is a need to bring two sides together in order to get to know each other better, understand each other's positions, available resources and possibilities and acquire the necessary contacts to communicate and promote each other's work. The conducted study indicates that there is a lack of understanding about the value of cooperation. It was identified in all partner countries that one of the main challenges is that the organisations are mostly centred on their own activities and are not necessarily searching partnerships and cooperation. They perform their work according to the plan and are reluctant to even share their activities as they don't see the benefit that collaboration brings.

Positive examples of good collaboration cases both among organisations and with municipalities could foster the understanding of the additional value created by cooperation.

2

RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

Building relationships is a process that requires time investments and interest from both sides. The accountability to internal municipal processes, often influenced by diverse national and political processes, does not always provide the time and established processes that determine possible forms of cooperation with local organisations. Municipality representatives have noted that they don't have structured and regular relationships with the organisations that operate in a regular and beneficial way. Often the fact that there is limited continuity and political stability plays the role in the transparency of processes and commitment to create sustainable partnerships. However, it is clear that the relationship between the community based organisations and the public sector is essentially a partnership that creates value for both sides and should not be built on hierarchical principles.

Unclear or unrealistic expectations by the public sector have been mentioned as an obstacle to create a long-term and sustainable partnership.

The expectation from community based organisations to work without the budget or volunteering on a regular basis without any gained value does not create a partnership

beneficial to everyone. In smaller municipalities, the personal relationship of leaders of the organisations can define the success of the partnerships, establishing a strong trusted personal connection to the decision makers can play the defining role in building the partnership. Personal relationship ensures that both parties have built the information exchange and will refer to the other party when needed. The interviews showed that high mutual trust between non-governmental organisations and municipalities is an important prerequisite for strong and long lasting partnerships.



3

ESTABLISHED PROCESSES OF COOPERATION AND BUREAUCRACY

The research showed that the information flow and the relationship between the organisations and municipalities is not maintained in a systematic way. To ensure one of the main functions of the municipality - to advocate the opinion of the local community, the distance between the local representatives and the citizens should be reduced. It is important to ensure the transparency of the relationship, there should be equality towards all the stakeholders to avoid favouritism towards specific organisations or even worse - corruptive activities.

There is a growing need to engage young citizens or future citizens in the activities that create the sense of belonging and appreciation of the place they come from.

That can ensure the willingness to stay in the municipality and serve the local community, as well as engage in the local decision making processes, including the interest in the electoral process.

A NUMBER OF CONSTRAINS LIMITING THE START OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION PROCESS AND CREATION OF RELATIONSHIPS WERE IDENTIFIED:



Opportunities for an active dialogue between all stakeholders



Delays in communication or lack of response



Lack of legal or administrative framework for potential collaborations



Bureaucratic obstacles and lack of transparency



Complicated administrative processes that change often

4

CREDIBILITY GAP

The profound interviews have shown the credibility gap between both sides - the municipality and community based organisations.

The reasons vary from general interpersonal relationships to the lack of understanding of the sector.

There are not enough growth opportunities available for the community based organisations, therefore, often they do not have capacity to foster their further development and are considered by the local representatives as the initiative based activities. The lack of capacity and resources result in missed financial opportunities that could help to scale the work of community based organisations. Moreover, the field of social entrepreneurship is fairly new, thus, the possibility for community based organisations to develop into social enterprises is not supported by helpful consultations and useful resources. Therefore, many community based organisations are based on the enthusiasm of local activists and continue their work as far as their capacity allows.

CONCLUSION

Overall the collaboration between the municipalities and community based organisations in partner countries are limited, however, all the stakeholders involved in the study process have noted that such collaborations are beneficial and should be developed further. The initial study gave a good overview of the needs and challenges experienced by both sides that can be used to help raise awareness of the importance of collaboration and provide various tools to foster cooperation.

Therefore, in the framework of the project the next steps are:

- Database of active youth organisations in the pilot municipalities,
- Cooperation examples,
- Main conclusions,
- Toolbox to foster cooperation among youth organisations and municipalities,
- Policy recommendations,
- Roadmap and further steps.

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