

# PARTICIPATION IS CENTRAL

## Alpine Carpathian Toolbox for Participation in Central European Mountain Areas

Final version

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### **Introductory text:**

Central Mountains is a project co-financed by the European Union working on governance solutions for sustainable development in mountain areas of Central Europe. **This toolbox was co-developed by all partners of the Central Mountains consortium, with input and methods directly tested by the partners.** It will guide and inspire regional and local actors in approaching, designing and implementing engagement of citizens, youth and stakeholders in decision-making strategies in a transnational context. Thus, increasing meaningful participation of relevant actors in the Alpine and Carpathian region.

This toolbox is one of three solutions created within the scope of the Central Mountains project. All three solutions are available on the Central Mountains website.

*COOPERATION IS CENTRAL.  
PARTICIPATION IS CENTRAL.*

# 1. Participation in Central European Mountain Areas

This toolbox aims to foster participative approaches in decision-making processes and through that empower youth, citizens and communities. By that it contributes to build a more inclusive, participatory democracy. The toolbox is built upon experiences, methods and tools used by our partners in the Central Mountains project and demonstrates which methods worked well in a given environment and setting.

**The collection of tools aims to inspire, support and guide other associations, NGOs, administrations and policy makers to involve youth and stakeholders in their activities.**

**Participation** is the meaningful and active involvement of individuals, groups, or communities in decision-making processes that affect them. It is a fundamental principle of inclusive and democratic practice, ensuring that diverse voices are heard, valued, and integrated into outcomes. Participation can take many forms—from consultation and collaboration to co-creation—and fosters shared ownership, transparency, and trust. In the context of this toolbox, participation is seen as a practice that empowers people, enhances legitimacy, and leads to more effective and sustainable solutions as well as a mechanism that guarantees the meaningful uptake of the solutions developed within the project.



*Central Mountains project team, © Carpathian Euroregion*

The regions represented in this toolbox range from the Alps to the Carpathians and operate in diverse social, economic, geographic and cultural contexts. Still, especially remote,

mountainous areas are often faced with similar challenges in governance contexts, like out-migration, accessibility, and socio-economic inequalities. Cross-border cooperation and innovative governance approaches are central to achieving sustainable development in these regions. The methods tested by the partnership are applicable and transferable to other contexts of associations, institutions, and administrations that are working in a transnational and cross-border setting.

## Participatory Governance and the Alpine & Carpathian Conventions

Participatory governance is a cornerstone of effective international mountain policy. Both the Alpine Convention (1991) and the Carpathian Convention (2003) emphasise the importance of involving stakeholders, civil society, and youth in shaping sustainable development pathways for their respective mountain regions.

### The Alpine Convention



**Article 4** commits the Parties to regularly informing the public on results and actions.

The eight thematic Protocols each contain a specific article on “Participation of the regional and local authorities”.

The “Declaration on Population and Culture” (2006) affirms the objective of encouraging the participation of the general population in public affairs and proposes several corresponding measures.

### The Carpathian Convention



**Article 2** calls on Parties to pursue integrated and coordinated policies through broad stakeholder engagement.

**Article 13** strengthens public participation by ensuring access to information, fostering environmental education, and enabling involvement in decision-making on sustainable development.

These principles are further operationalised through its Protocols promoting participatory approaches across biodiversity, tourism, forests, transport and agriculture.

Together, these instruments provide a solid foundation for participatory governance as a cornerstone of Alpine and Carpathian cooperation, with civil society and youth engagement increasingly recognised as essential for the effective implementation of the Conventions’ Work Programmes.

## 2. Benefits of Stakeholder and Citizens Participation

Stakeholders of the Central Mountains project were asked about the role of participation in their work. These are the key learnings:

*Does citizen involvement play a significant role?*

Yes, for project stakeholders involving citizens is an integral part of their work.

*What is citizen involvement useful for?*

...it is relevant for the acceptance of measures  
...it can generate feedback for activities  
...it can empower local citizens  
...and it can secure long-term support

*What are the most popular methods for citizen involvement among the project's stakeholders?*

... citizen consultations, workshops, surveys and information events.

**Participation can benefit everyone.** Here are the key benefits, ordered by actor: public authorities, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and citizens.

Benefits  
for  
authorities

- Building long-term trust and public support
- Smarter decisions and more successful, cost-effective policies
- Engaging early helps identify and resolve community issues before they escalate
- Input improves quality and relevance of public services

Benefits  
for CSOs

- Represent community interests and influence policies
- Ensure public authorities act transparently and follow democratic rules
- Active involvement raises the public profile of CSOs and credibility
- Fosters collaboration and long-term alliances, fosters knowledge sharing

Benefits  
for  
citizens

- Citizens get a voice in decisions that shape their lives
- Participation fosters stronger community connections and shared sense of belonging
- Involvement educates citizens about policies and strengthens democratic engagement



### 3. Young Voices from Mountainous Areas

Youth participation plays a vital role in the development of mountainous regions, where demographic shifts, environmental challenges, and access to services require innovative and inclusive solutions. This toolbox includes methods and ideas specifically on youth participation in the Alps and Carpathians, recognizing the unique context and potential of these mountainous areas.

**Youth** in the context of the Central Mountains project reflects a diversity of ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and places of origin of the young people engaged in participatory processes. While the school workshops targeted mostly students, the project partners involved youth in a variety of ways, targeting different age groups and backgrounds.

*“Young people are the bridge to the territories of tomorrow, bearers of thoughts, productive forces and awareness that can build new systemic visions for development and cooperation between territories.”\**

Effective youth participation must avoid being merely symbolic or instrumentalised—it should offer meaningful opportunities for young people to influence decisions and shape their communities. To achieve this, participation needs to occur at multiple levels: across different age groups, communities, and political scales, from local municipalities to cross-border and regional cooperation.

\*Central Mountains Report D.1.3.1 Joint workshop with young students

## Central Mountains School Workshops

In the first phase of the project a series of school workshops were held in four different cities involving more than 80 students mostly aged between 14-19 years old. The students participated in (1) a **questionnaire** to learn about their views, needs and ideas on participation and (2) a **simulation game**.



*Workshop with students in Dornbirn, © CIPRA  
Int. Lab GmbH*

### Our workshop results show:

- Young people across the Alpine-Carpathian mountains are **keen to be more involved** in decision-making processes.
- A majority would like to be **better informed** through channels and tools that are suited for young people.
- Overall, students are **little aware of existing participation structures** and cross-border governance structures.
  - More than 80% are not aware of projects and initiatives in their region to increase youth participation.
  - More than 90% are not aware of local cross-border structures.
- “Bridging elements” such as politicians or local associations in cultural, political and social spheres are needed that can serve as mediation and connection in public issues.
- Young people need to be given the opportunity to use their voices to shape their regions and territorial issues to develop their role as political beings within the society.

## Summer Camp on Youth Participation in the Carpathians

As part of the project, the Carpathian Civil Society Platform (CCSP) hosted a summer camp that brought together civil society organisations (CSOs) and youth leaders from Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine to strengthen cross-border cooperation and youth participation in the Carpathians.

### Main challenges identified

- **Symbolic involvement of youth** with little impact on actual decision-making
- **Declining motivation & volunteerism** that is worsened by low wages and lack of recognition
- **Information gaps** - opportunities are not reaching youth effectively
- **Barriers in education and bureaucracy** limiting engagement
- **Shrinking civic space** in some countries due to restrictive political environments
- **Impact of the Russian war against Ukraine:** migration, disrupted planning, higher needs for aid and safe spaces in the youth sector

### Key recommendations

- **Mandatory youth representation** in decision-making bodies
- Better visibility of opportunities via **schools & social media**
- **Education reforms** to focus on cooperation, not competition
- Stronger **cross-border partnerships** and trust-building
- More **funding & scholarships** to retain youth and strengthen CSOs
- Support for **safe spaces** where young people's voices are genuinely heard

The summer camp was also used as a platform to highlight **positive examples** of youth participation in the Carpathians:

**Hungary:** youth offices and trainings by the Community Foundation Eger support participation

**Poland:** the Folkowisko Association shifted from cultural work to engaging volunteers and providing humanitarian aid during the war

**Romania:** the SZMISZ association focuses on prevention, inclusion, and mediation for at-risk youth

**Slovakia:** the Youth Bank model empowers young people with real funding responsibilities

**Ukraine:** volunteers and organisations support families, the elderly, and displaced persons

### Key message

Young people do not want to be “decorative” participants but have a **genuine role** in shaping decisions. Sustainable youth engagement requires safe spaces, recognition and fair compensation, as well as cross-border opportunities for cooperation. Ending Russia’s war against the Ukraine remains an essential condition for creating a stable environment where young people can contribute fully to their communities.



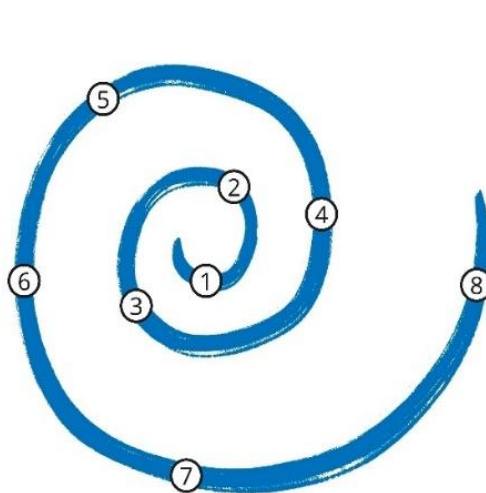
*“For youngsters it is important to join this [CCSP] platform, because they can find NGOs in the area they are interested in. They can make their voices heard by the NGOs and thereby stakeholders and decision-makers.”*

- István Sáfár, SZMISZ, Romania

## 4. Youth Participation as a Process

Youth participation is more than a one-time event — it is a continuous process that can foster long-term impact. The graph illustrates this participatory journey: from early involvement of relevant stakeholders, through iterative feedback loops that help respond effectively to the needs of young people, to the pursuit of long-term goals such as upscaling and systemic change. Our partners' experiences from the field reflect and reinforce these steps, highlighting the practical relevance of understanding (youth) participation as a process across different local contexts.

- ① **Engagement of stakeholders**
  - Interaction with implementers and affected interests early on and throughout the planning process
- ② **Broad identification of needs and wishes**
  - Includes information/feedback, consultation and negotiation
  - Provides stakeholders additional information on the topic
  - Assumes that open participation leads to better decisions
  - Focuses on mobilisation of support
- ③ **Proposals and ideas**
  - Development of a concept
- ④ **Political anchoring**
  - Gather feedback from politicians
  - Adapt and improve concept

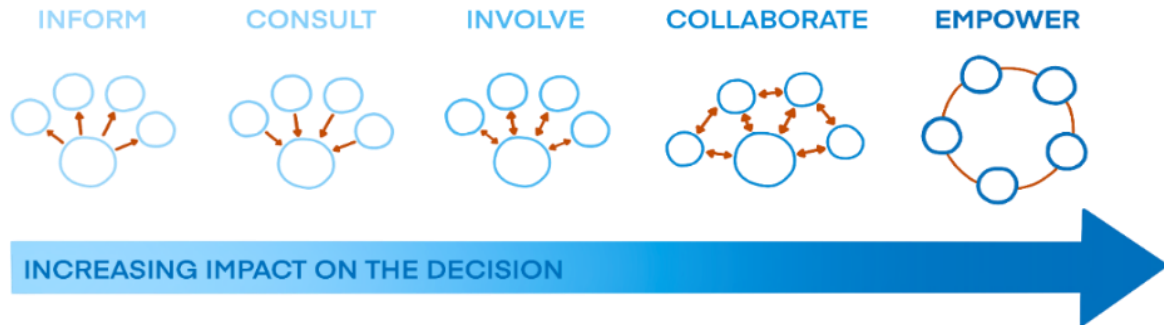


- ⑤ **Implementation**
  - Importance of early wins to show administration's commitment and reassure young people's motivation
  - Prototyping mindset - improvement of solutions through constant participation
- ⑥ **Monitoring**
  - Success measured by sufficient information, goals reached, transparency, efficiency, stakeholder support, and the use of appropriate methods
- ⑦ **Scaling up**
  - Identification of what is replicable and scalable in other contexts
- ⑧ **Systemic Change**
  - Helping the seed of change to alter the system - by establishing a new 'modus operandi'

*The illustration was originally inspired by (1) Lang, R. (1986) Contingent Theory and Planning Practice. Paper presented to the ACSP Conference: NYC., and (2) The Open Book of Social Innovation - The Young Foundation and is an adapted version of the Spiral of Youth Participation in the GaYA's Youth Participation Toolbox: Thoughts, Models and Methods (2018) CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.*

## 5. The Spectrum of Participation

The Spectrum of Participation outlines different levels of how individuals and groups can be engaged in decision-making processes. Ranging from simply receiving information to having full decision-making power, this model helps clarify roles, expectations, and influence. It serves as a practical guide for choosing the most appropriate method(s) for participation based on context, goals, and the needs of those involved.



*The illustration is based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.*

*© Federation of International Association for Public Participation 2024. All rights reserved. This work was created with contributions from Lewis Michaelson, Martha Rozelle, and Doug Sarno. [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org).*



### INFORM

Participants receive clear and balanced information to understand the issues.

### CONSULT

Input is gathered from stakeholders and considered in decisions.

### INVOLVE

Perspectives and concerns from all groups are actively reflected throughout the process.

### COLLABORATE

Partners take part in shaping and selecting possible solutions.

### EMPOWER

Final decision-making authority is placed in the hands of the participants.

## 6. Best Practice Examples of the Central Mountains Project

Participation is a central part of the project activities and took place in diverse forms – working on different levels and with different target groups. Within the scope of the Central Mountains pilot activities, our partners – experienced organisations, NGOs, and institutions working closely with stakeholders and the public – applied a diverse range of youth and stakeholder participation methods, often in cross-border and transnational settings. The examples collected in this toolbox are drawn directly from their work and are intended to inspire others seeking to meaningfully engage their communities.

These **real-life cases** offer practical guidance, tips, and reflections, including valuable insights into the challenges faced and lessons learned during implementation. They range from **youth participation to stakeholder engagement and active member involvement**. Arranged according to their **level of participation**, in ascending order, the methods provide a structured overview of approaches to citizens and stakeholder involvement. The colour codes on the titles indicate where on the spectrum the method can be located.

For more information on the organisations that carried out the activities, simply scan the QR codes included on each page.

## 6.1. Simulation Games with Students

*Who it is designed for:*

*High school students, undergraduate students, teachers, schools' managers*

### HOW IT WORKS

This participation method followed a structured, two-stage approach designed to inform and involve different youth groups in governance and decision-making processes.

- In the first stage, all participants complete the same exploratory [questionnaire](#), providing a consistent starting point across groups.
- Following, [simulation games](#) that vary depending on the target audience are executed with distinct exercises for high school students and university students.
- The simulation games are best tailored to locally relevant issues, for instance, the construction of a new cable car in the area, putting the students in different roles to simulate the decision-making process.

This approach has a consistent framework while allowing for adjustments in content and methodology to better fit the specific needs of different youth segments. Each workshop lasted approximately two hours.



*“In essence, the method combines a standardized survey with customized interactive activities to effectively engage young people in a way that is both structured and adaptable.”*

- Isidoro De Bortoli, Workshop moderator

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Encouraging students to step into the shoes of institutional decision-makers and convey that the choices they made in this role could have real implications for their own futures.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

Creating role-play situations in which they experience scenarios that closely affect them, making them feel responsible and helping them understand that they can influence governance processes as well.

## TIPS



- 1) Let them play seriously.
- 2) Never underestimate their potential and interest.
- 3) Always involve teachers, who work alongside young people on a daily basis.

## CONTEXT

The Central Mountains school workshops have been conducted in the first phase of the project to assess the status quo of youth participation in governance mechanisms in specific areas of the mountain regions covered by the project.



## ABOUT

*Eurac Research is an interdisciplinary research centre in Bolzano working to promote local solutions to global challenges.*

## 6.2. Worksheets for Schools

*Who it is designed for:*

*Students aged 11-13, and their teachers*

### HOW IT WORKS

The [worksheets](#) are designed for children aged 11-13, explaining the concept of local branding and regional products in an age-appropriate and accessible way. The worksheets include:

- An explanation of the concept of regional products and brands.
- The values it stands for - localness, respect for tradition, respect for the environment.
- A task to design their own regional product that fulfils these values.
- A task to create a company that will produce the product (i.e. design a name, logo, website; invent an ID number and describe who the customers will be).
- A task to design a visual of the stand where they will offer their products at the fair.

The completed worksheets and photos capturing the process were collected. As an incentive, the participating schools were promised a reward, such as a workshop with a specific regional producer.



*“It was quite challenging for the kids, but they got great ideas. They haven’t encountered a theme like this before, much less tried to work out everything from start to finish. But they handled it pretty well. I’m glad for the challenge!”*

- Veronika Hegarovár,  
after-school club teacher

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Communication with schools which are overloaded with duties and various offers of courses and activities.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

Address the activity directly to teachers who might be interested. If possible, visit the school in person to explain the workshop, or even join the event yourself and participate with the children.

## TIPS



- 1) The best way to address schools is through a personal contact, if possible, together with explaining the matter of the worksheets.
- 2) Motivate not only the children, but also the teachers - practical workshops or site visits work well.
- 3) Add an appropriate feedback survey, e.g. a simple questionnaire summing up the participation and remarks from teachers.

## CONTEXT

In the pilot action cooperation between the public and private sectors in the mountains on the Czech-Polish border has been encouraged through building the House of Brands.



## ABOUT

*The Association of Regional Brands supports quality regional products (food, handicrafts), as well as services and experiences with proven origin in regions of the Czech Republic.*

## 6.3. Co-creating Trust Among Stakeholders

*Who it is designed for:*

*Local and regional public authorities, interest groups including NGOs, higher education and research organisations, tourism brands*

### HOW IT WORKS

This method was developed and implemented as part of the newly established House of Brands initiative to integrate its diverse members and build a relationship with each other.

- It consists of a series of interactive workshops centred on topics relevant for the stakeholders, such as regional branding principles, ways of reaching target groups including young people, historical storytelling, social media and the different characteristics of their audience, etc.
- A key feature was its dynamic structure, starting each workshop with a presentation from one of the members of the House of Brands, focused on the theme of the meeting, allowing them to get to know each other and their activities and achievements.
- Midway through the sessions, an [evaluation survey](#) was conducted to gather feedback on the participants' experiences and their sense of involvement.
- The workshops were not limited to passive participation, all members were encouraged to contribute to discussions, fill out live surveys, voice their perspectives and engage with each other.



*“Working on genuine problems of stakeholders influenced greater involvement of workshop participants, while also giving the opportunity to design solutions that can be implemented immediately.”*

- Marta Kot, coordinator and meeting leader

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Initial lack of trust and low engagement due to unfamiliarity among participants.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

This was addressed by tailoring workshop topics to their interests and actively involving them in discussions, which gradually built rapport and encouraged open participation.

## TIPS



- 1) Choose topics that are genuinely relevant and meaningful to participants to foster engagement from the start.
- 2) Don't treat attendees as passive listeners. Instead invite them to the discussion by giving them the opportunity to present to each other, ask questions and create live surveys.
- 3) Use feedback tools like surveys after few meetings to improve, e.g., by adjusting the content.

## CONTEXT

The pilot action focused on establishing a House of Brands on the Czech-Polish border. The initiative brought together 19 diverse institutions, starting with regional brands as well as tourism brands, local authorities and local action groups.



## ABOUT

*Foundation for Landscape Protection (FOK) is an NGO keenly involved in the protection of cultural and natural landscapes with a particular focus in the Central Mountains project on the Czech-Polish border area.*



## 6.4. Evaluating Network Impact through Stakeholder Voices

*Who it is designed for:*

*Member organisations (Alpine Pearls Members)*

### HOW IT WORKS

To gather meaningful insights on the value of network membership, [semi-structured interviews](#) guided a feedback process for the representatives of the EGTC Alpine Pearls. The following steps describe the structured approach taken to evaluate the network:

- Identify key EGTC Alpine Pearls representatives across member regions.
- Define clear objectives focused on perceived added value of network membership.
- Design a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended, culturally sensitive questions. Schedule interviews at times suitable for each representative.
- Use bilingual interviewers if needed.
- Ensure a neutral and respectful setting to encourage honest input.
- Record responses with consent.
- Analyse findings to extract common benefits, challenges, and suggestions.
- Share a summary with participants for validation and integration into strategic reflections.



*“We work every day with our partners, operators and local institutions to ensure that Primiero San Martino di Castrozza is recognised as an Alpine Pearl by everyone, guests and residents alike.”*

- Manuel Corso, director of the ApT Primiero San Martino di Castrozza

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Language barriers and cultural differences hindered mutual understanding during interviews in a cross-border context.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

Bilingual interviewers familiar with both cultures were involved, questions adapted accordingly, and interpretations validated to ensure accurate, respectful communication.

## TIPS



- 1) Clarify the purpose upfront - Explain clearly why the interview is being conducted and how the input will be used.
- 2) Document consistently - Use standardized templates and methods for recording and analysing responses to maintain quality and comparability.
- 3) Follow up with participants - Share key findings to show their input was valued and considered.

## CONTEXT

The pilot action worked to make the EGTC Alpine Pearls membership sounder and more attractive by highlighting its added value.



## ABOUT

*The EGTC Alpine Pearls promotes and facilitates cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation between the individual members to create a forum for the exchange of knowledge.*

## 6.5. Testing Groups with Local Students

*Who it is designed for:*

*Students aged 14-25 from schools and universities*

### HOW IT WORKS

A newly developed app prototype that promotes cross-border cooperation and its final version were tested with the help of local students.

- The student council of the local university was contacted early on in the project allowing for a contribution of the students from the outset.
- The students took part in four stakeholder meetings, three of which focused on testing the prototype. The meetings were used to gather feedback on the app.
- As students are often critical and adept at using digital platforms, their feedback could considerably aid in improving and enhancing the app's quality. Moreover, the testing process itself, including the quality of the evaluation forms, could be incorporated into the testing exercise.



*“Testing groups with students is a win-win approach!”*

- Emanuel Komár, president of the executive board, high school student council

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Attract student participation.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

To address this, contact the student councils and the schools that are thematically or geographically related.

## TIPS



- 1) Contact student councils or schools directly, particularly if the workshop can be seen as part of their practical learning or theory application.
- 2) Involve a small group of students in preparing the agenda and evaluation form for the workshop.
- 3) Remember to provide good food and to bring some environmentally friendly and useful promotional items.

## CONTEXT

In the pilot action a digital (mobile) application aimed at the Slovakian and Polish cross-border areas was developed. It seeks to create an innovative digital tool supporting cross-border cooperation and communication, enabling networking and exchanging know-how among member partners. The application will also promote sustainable tourism, including cultural and natural heritage.



## ABOUT

*The Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS) is the largest non-governmental organisation that associates and represents cities, municipalities, and city districts in the Slovak Republic.*

## 6.6. Design Thinking Approach to Involve Youth in Regional Branding

*Who it is designed for:*

*Local and regional public authorities, interest groups including NGOs, higher education and research organisations, tourism brands*

### HOW IT WORKS

As part of the Czech-Polish House of Brands initiative, we used a [design thinking methodology](#) for stakeholder workshops on marketing and branding with one session specifically aimed at exploring ways to engage local youth.

- Design thinking structured the workshop into five key stages: (1) empathise, (2) define, (3) ideate, (4) prototype and (5) test.
- Participants began by building empathy with young people, identifying their needs and challenges.
- To deepen problem analysis, the "5 Whys" technique was applied, helping distinguish the motivations and preferences of two target age groups: 13-19 and 20-30-year-olds.
- The collaborative setting enabled participants to share experiences and practical tips. Finally, an evaluation survey assessed the effectiveness and relevance of the youth engagement strategies discussed.



*"Through an in-depth analysis of the young generation, a model was created for working with youth. This encouraged our participants to look beyond existing stereotypes."*

- Anna Kraszewska, project manager

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Initial stakeholder approach to youth based on stereotypes.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

Empathising to understand the youth - their social situation, position in the labour market or the challenges they face - became the basis of the workshop.

## TIPS



- 1) Encourage participants to look beyond stereotypes on youth engagement.
- 2) Instead of presenting ready-made scenarios for youth engagement, encourage participants to actively participate in the design thinking process.
- 3) Create a space to share experiences and good practices related to working with young people, which will become an inspiration for the rest of us.

## CONTEXT

The pilot action focused on establishing a House of Brands on the Czech-Polish border. The initiative brought together 19 diverse institutions, starting with regional brands as well as tourism brands, local authorities and local action groups.



## ABOUT

*Foundation for Landscape Protection (FOK) is an NGO keenly involved in the protection of cultural and natural landscapes with a particular focus in the Central Mountains project on the Czech-Polish border area.*

## 6.7. Activating Stakeholders through Best Practice Trips

*Who it is designed for:*

*Self-governing regions, local action groups (LAGs), destination management organisations (DMOs)*

### HOW IT WORKS

To attract and engage more stakeholders in the digital app, which was developed during this project, two activities were combined: discussions among stakeholders and on-site best practice demonstrations.

- Instead of classic meeting formats, stakeholders were invited to visit interesting locations in the surrounding area.
- This approach allowed stakeholders to escape from their daily operations, enabling them to focus on the talks while sharing best practices and new ideas for their implementation.
- Combining best practice trips and discussions proved especially helpful in both the pre-prototype feedback collection and the prototype testing phases. It is also intended for use in the final stage of promotion.



*“Combining a formal discussion part with more informal learning about best practices ultimately results in better cooperation and quality of outputs.”*

- Jozef Balužinský, director of Litterra n.o., Revúca

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Best practice trips are capacity intensive.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

To address the issue, it is beneficial to select the most suitable best practices and collaborate with stakeholders to share ideas and develop partnerships or coalitions.

## TIPS



- 1) The meeting should be organised within a 1- to 2-hour distance from the usual residences of stakeholders.
- 2) The location should be carefully selected to provide both workshop facilities and a demonstration of best practices.
- 3) The outcomes of discussions and informal communications should be clearly formulated and agreed upon by the end of the meeting.

## CONTEXT

In the pilot action a digital (mobile) application aimed at the Slovakian and Polish cross-border areas was developed. It seeks to create an innovative digital tool supporting cross-border cooperation and communication, enabling networking and exchanging know-how among member partners. The application will also promote sustainable tourism, including cultural and natural heritage.



## ABOUT

*The Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS) is the largest non-governmental organisation that associates and represents cities, municipalities, and city districts in the Slovak Republic.*



## 6.8. Social Innovation Award

*Who it is designed for:*

Grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs), members of the Carpathian Civil Society Platform

### HOW IT WORKS

The Social Innovation Award was established to support grassroots organisations working on remote rural areas from the Carpathian Euroregion, composed of the bordering area of Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

- The topics, the procedure, and the evaluation criteria of the Social Innovation Award were discussed by the Platform's local focal points in each of the five sub-regions and the Council of the Platform.
- The call was launched through the Platform's website, social media, and the websites of the partners.
- The decision on the winning application was made by a jury composed of the local focal points and the Carpathian Foundation's staff and Board of Directors.
- The award ceremony was held in the framework of the Annual Platform meetings, where the winning projects presented their innovation - one from each country.
- The CSO's innovations were published and disseminated as a good practice for replication.



*“The Social Innovation Award is a very promising initiative. We support and highlight the projects of local active citizens who are working in the Carpathian region, and they also inspire others to join the Carpathian Civil Society Platform.*

- Veronika Poklembova,  
director of ETP Slovakia

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

The biggest challenge is how to reach CSOs and motivate them to apply.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

By using diverse communication channels and involving local focal points, motivation can be strengthened. Civil society organizations (CSOs) take pride in their innovations, but these are often not recognised. If they receive support in promoting and sharing their achievements, they are likely to be more proactive in applying their ideas.

## TIPS



- 1) Clearly define the scope and objectives of the Award.
- 2) Provide a clear and accessible definition of what constitutes a *social innovation*.
- 3) Organize an award ceremony that enables winners to present their innovations and ensure the awarded social innovations are widely published and disseminated.

## CONTEXT

Carpathian Civil Society Platform and Inter-regional Hub for Social Innovation is an inter-regional area-based organisation attached to the geographically, historically, culturally and sociologically contiguous territory of the Carpathians, which is the common ground for cooperation.



## ABOUT

*The Carpathian Foundation was established in 1995 to promote cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian Euroregion.*

## 6.9. Co-creation Process for Collaborative Development of Communication Platform

*Who it is designed for:*

*Self-governing regions, cities and municipalities, local action groups (LAGs), destination management organisations (DMOs), national parks, museums*

### HOW IT WORKS

In the case of the creation of a specific product, like the digital communication platform, stakeholders are the professionals and future users of the app, while we act as facilitators of the process.

- The involvement of end users in an App development- professionals and youth - can be secured by inviting them to participate in the early stages of the activity and along the process.
- Several rounds of receiving and incorporating feedback from the stakeholders ensure that the end design fits the needs of the users.
- A key component of the meetings were summaries at the end. The last 15 minutes of each discussion were spent reviewing the meeting notes and getting consensus approval (or amendments) from the participants by formulating recommendations and ensuring their implementation.



*“It’s not often that stakeholders are invited to create a joint product right at the beginning of a project. You [ZMOS] did it.”*

- Milan Gacík, director of the Red Monastery Museum

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Management of the different perspectives, experiences and interests of different stakeholder groups.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

Flexibility and openness to new approaches, perspectives, and innovation.

## TIPS



- 1) Prepare the project team for the unexpected.
- 2) Cultivate project ownership. Take stakeholders' involvement seriously and transform their contributions into outcomes, ensuring they feel like owners of the solutions.
- 3) Foster a creative atmosphere.

## CONTEXT

In the pilot action a digital (mobile) application aimed at the Slovakian and Polish cross-border areas was developed. It seeks to create an innovative digital tool supporting cross-border cooperation and communication, enabling networking and exchanging know-how among member partners. The application will also promote sustainable tourism, including cultural and natural heritage.



## ABOUT

*The Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS) is the largest non-governmental organisation that associates and represents cities, municipalities, and city districts in the Slovak Republic.*

## 6.10. Cross-Border Stakeholder Clusters

*Who it is designed for:*

*Local and regional public authorities, local cultural and educational institutions, NGOs and community actors, entrepreneurs and local business actors, local youth (18-30) and informal leaders, thematic experts and institutional partners*

### HOW IT WORKS

This method is designed as a multi-stage process for engaging diverse stakeholder groups across administrative and national borders. It focuses on participatory, recurring activities that build mutual trust, generate locally grounded content, and support strategy co-creation and operational model development for Carpathian Cross Border Functional Areas. The following steps are key:

- Stakeholder mapping and pre-engagement
- Cluster formation and nomination of coordinators
- Local and cross-border thematic labs
- Strategy drafting and cluster feedback loops
- Public consultations and political endorsement
- Pilot action design and micro-cooperation initiatives
- Monitoring and continuity



*“Cross-border functional areas are a new, innovative format of cooperation - a development impulse for cross-border areas in the Carpathians. This model will revitalise the most important local dimension of the Carpathian socio-economic space.”*

- Dawid Lasek, project manager in the Carpathian Euroregion

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Participation may drop after initial meetings or remain limited to a few active actors. Many stakeholders in the Carpathian border areas are overextended, underfunded, or unfamiliar with long-term cooperation projects.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

- Establishing rotating leadership among clusters to give every group a chance to coordinate.
- Involving local coordinators with specific responsibility for outreach and follow-up.

## TIPS



- 1) Ground your process in real-life local initiatives.  
Avoid abstract discussions in the first meetings and start with mapping what already works - festivals, school projects, community traditions, local businesses.

- 2) Let stakeholders take turns leading.

When local actors feel responsible for a session - and can host it in "their own" space - engagement rises significantly.

- 3) Use lightweight, visible tools to maintain momentum.

After every workshop, summarise results in a simple visual format, e.g., flipchart photos, a shared Google Doc.

## CONTEXT

Carpathian Euroregion activities are related to creation of strategy and operational model for 3 Cross-Border Functional Areas on the Carpathian areas of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary.

## ABOUT



*Carpathian Euroregion is an organisation supporting the socio-economic development of the Carpathians through many cross-border and transnational activities like cross-border functional areas and Carpathian brand 'CARPATHIA'.*

## 6.11. Thematic Co-creation Labs

*Who it is designed for:*

*Tourism small-medium enterprises, destination management organisations (DMOs), public authorities, NGOs, CSOs, academic experts, community representatives, regional tourism associations, youth (18-30), especially young professionals and students in tourism/environment*

### HOW IT WORKS

Thematic Co-Creation Labs are structured, topic-based workshops that gather local stakeholders around specific tourism challenges – e.g. ecotourism, gastro local outlets, mobility.

- Each lab involves participatory methods (e.g. scenario building, SWOT co-analysis, roundtable ideation, pilot co-designing).
- Participants co-create solutions and assign responsibilities.
- To ensure long-term cooperation, labs are not meant as one-offs— they're recurring and build a stakeholder network.
- The Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) integrates inputs, co-develops pilots, monitors follow-up actions and facilitates peer-to-peer mentoring, thereby creating a lasting CSTP collaboration platform supporting community-development initiatives.



*“These labs are meant to help us move from consultation to collaboration—and from meetings to real joint actions.”*

- Alina Dragan, CSTC Romania

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Keeping diverse stakeholders engaged beyond one-time meetings.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

By reinforcing a sense of shared mission and continuity under the CSTP umbrella.

## TIPS



- 1) Use real local portfolio under the CSTP – make labs hands-on, not abstract.
- 2) Assign rotating hosts in the framework of the CSTP – let different stakeholders take the lead per session.
- 3) Document clearly and follow up with simple action dashboards after working sessions.

## CONTEXT

This method is part of the Central Mountains CSTP pilot on building long-term tourism cooperation and stakeholder engagement strategies.



## ABOUT

*Braşov County Council is the public authority managing sustainable regional development in Brasov County, Romania.*



## 6.12. Creating Ownership for an Active Engagement of CSOs

*Who it is designed for:*

CSOs, local organisations, grassroots organisations, including youth organisations and CSOs dealing with young people

### HOW IT WORKS

Active member engagement of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Carpathian Civil Society Platform requires continuous exchange and building of relationships. The following actions were used to create a sense of ownership and long-term engagement of the members:

- A [needs assessment survey](#) was conducted at the beginning of the process of creating a platform to measure the needs and expectations of CSOs towards the platform and define the methodology together
- Regular face-to-face meetings with target groups (platform meeting)
- Local focal points (local partner organisations) in each of the Carpathian sub-regions who are in touch with local organisations
- Local CSO “hublets” - small local/subregional networks were created in each sub-region
- Each action is based on active participation of and permanent dialogue with stakeholders
- Capacity-building training on topics like advocacy, fundraising, communication and strategic planning



*“The Carpathian Civil Society Platform opened up a lot of possibilities across the borders. (...) It’s not just for the civil society but for all of us.”*

- Laura Dittel, executive director, Karpatská Nadácia

## THIS WAS A CHALLENGE

Language Barriers in the cross-border setting.

## HOW WE SOLVED IT

Each document is translated into the five spoken local languages, and interpretation at offline meetings.

## TIPS



- 1) Develop ownership, which secures the sustainability of the project.
- 2) Harmonize your goal with the interests and needs of stakeholders.
- 3) Permanent multi-instrumental dialogue with stakeholders.

## CONTEXT

The Carpathian Civil Society Platform is a loose network of grassroots CSOs in the Carpathian Region, which encompasses the border regions of Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine. It aims to foster cooperation between CSOs and amplify the voice of CSOs at local and interregional levels.



## ABOUT

*The Carpathian Foundation was established in 1995 to promote cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian Euroregion.*

## 7. Additional Youth Participation Methods

### **You need more inspiration for participation methods?**

In addition to the methods tested directly by our partners, more inspiring ideas for youth participation methods were gathered through surveys involving young people - foremost members of the CIPRA Youth Council (CYC) - and stakeholder consultation. The methods are organised according to their level of participation.

*There are many more ideas and great examples for (youth) participation out there. The lines left blank are there to take note of additional interesting methods - gathered by you.*

### **Social Media Campaigns**

To engage/inform youth through digital platforms about specific topics

**Example:** An Instagram campaign run by a municipality to raise awareness about climate adaptation plans targeting youth audiences.

### **Digital Tools**

Gathering feedback or input via digital tools, apps

**Example:** The regional youth app aha Vorarlberg is used to motivate young people for voluntary engagement through gamification elements and official recognition.

### **Youth Forum**

Engaged youth, e.g., class representatives, are asked to a dialogue meeting with adults (politics, municipalities, youth work...) to raise questions and topics for further discussion.

**Example:** A school hosts a youth forum where student leaders meet local politicians to discuss mental health services in rural areas.

## Youth Centres

Non-commercial community indoor spaces in municipalities for young people to meet, socialise and access informal support

**Example:** Municipalities in Liechtenstein have Youth Centres that can be used by youth initiatives and host regular open meetings for young people.

## Volunteering Programmes

Youth contribute to local activities or causes, gaining experience and docking on to local organisations

**Example:** In the Bergwaldprojekt of the Swiss Alpine Club, young volunteers help maintain hiking trails as part of a summer initiative.

## Participatory Youth Budget

Young people are actively involved in deciding how a portion of the municipal budget is allocated, often in collaboration with local authorities.

**Example:** The Youth Bank in Slovakia lead by the Bardejov Community Foundation enables young people take the lead in managing and distributing funds for projects that benefit their local communities.

## Youth Council

Representatives from youth organisations advise municipal authorities and contribute to shaping local policies.

**Example:** A youth council meets monthly with the town council to co-develop strategies on public transport accessibility for students.

## Youth Mayors

Elected by their peers, youth mayors represent the interests of young people in city councils or local governance bodies.

**Example:** The elected youth mayor of a small Alpine town presents youth concerns at municipal meetings and co-organises local events.

## Youth Innovation Labs (Mountain Hackathons)

Events where youth prototype ideas or solutions to regional challenges using creative or digital tools.

**Example:** In a university town, youth prototype a “Smart Hut” energy tracker for remote shelters in a weekend innovation lab.

### Youth-Led Local Media

Young people run digital platforms to share their views on rural life, sustainability, or politics (e.g., podcasts, mountain youth blogs)

**Example:** A group of Carpathian youth creates a podcast series interviewing local elders about climate changes they've witnessed in the region.

### Youth Climate Assemblies

Youth gather to deliberate on local or regional environmental issues and submit recommendations to policymakers.

**Example:** In an Alpine valley, a group of secondary school students participates in a youth climate assembly to propose solutions for glacier tourism and energy use.

### Youth Focal Points

Youth delegates are invited to take part in meetings, conferences and events of institutions

**Example:** Participation of youth in the Carpathian Convention processes such as conferences, creating a system of knowledge transfer and sharing and supported by budget for travelling expenses.

### Youth Parliament

Youth collaborate directly with institutions or local governments, influencing decisions and contributing to formal processes and strategies.

**Example:** The Green Student Parliament in Veszprém, Hungary is a biennial forum which serves as a platform for young people to bring in concerns and solutions for sustainability issues which are discussed in the local government.

### Youth Community-Based Monitoring (CBM)

Local youth actively track and assesses social or environmental issues, monitoring their own engagement process

**Example:** A group of young people in tracks changes local water sources and presents the data to environmental authorities to push for action.

*You have gathered more ideas for (youth) participation methods? Note them here:*

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## Central Mountains

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