

RIVER OF IDEAS

RE-THINK THE RIVER

TOOLKIT



PROJECT TITLE

RIDE: Rivers of Ideas

PROJECT COORDINATION

RibellARCI APS

DOCUMENT COORDINATION

LINC scs

CONTRIBUTIONS

ASPEA, K.A.N.E, Wildfluss Akademie, Drustvo Bodi Svetloba, RibellARCI

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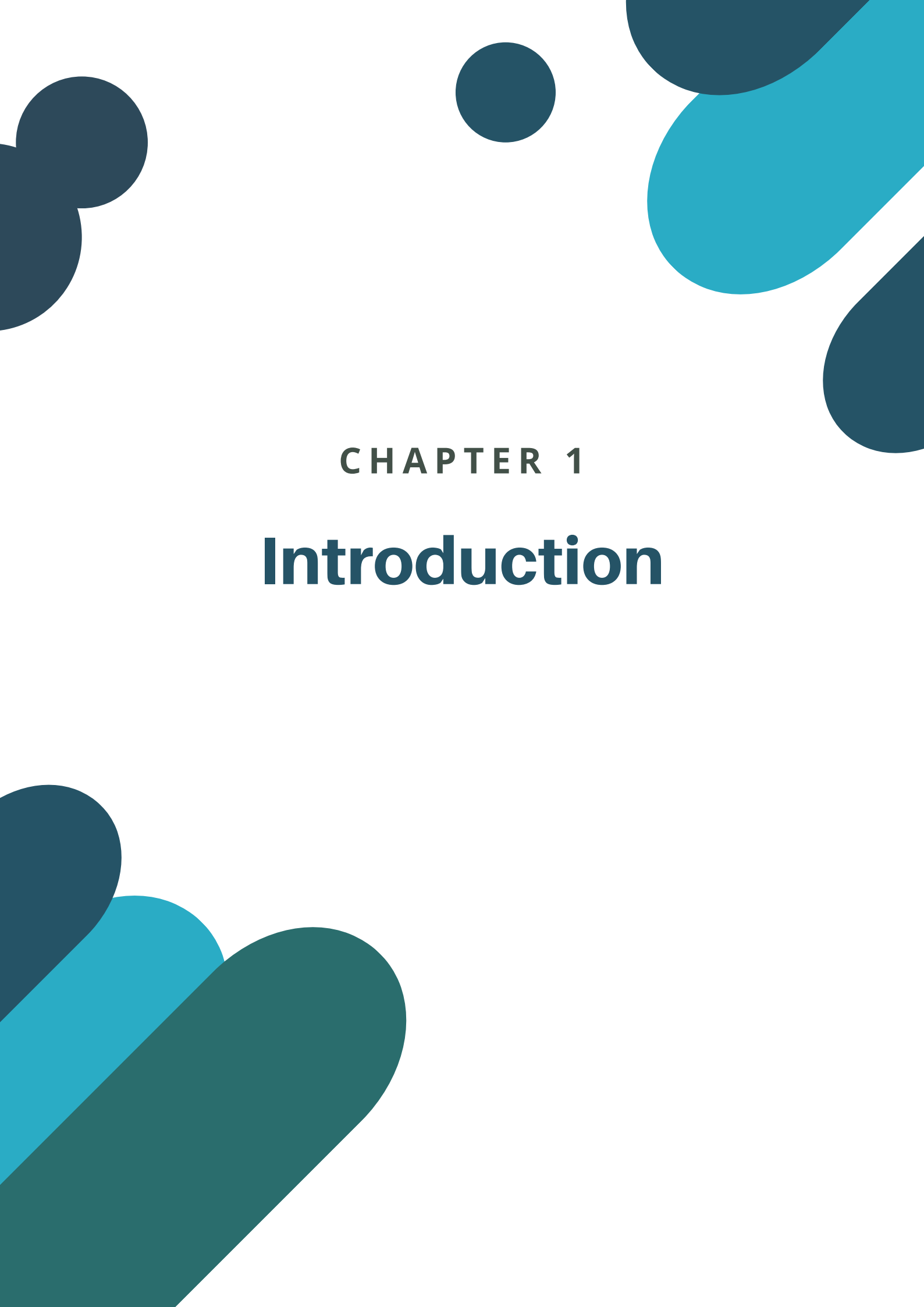
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the toolkit and how to use it

This toolkit is a free digital resource designed for those who want to build youth and community participation projects to promote the rediscovery of local natural and human heritage, with particular reference to river communities.

The toolkit is aimed at all those involved in promoting youth leadership, working with the community, democratic participation and the environment.

In particular, the toolkit may be of interest to:

@ youth organizations

@youth worker

@ voluntary organizations

The toolkit is made up of 3 sections: the first contains general information on the project, tells in more detail the context of the countries involved and analyzes the relationship between young people, the environment and the local community; the second contains valuable methodological indications and an in-depth analysis of the key words used by the project; the last one shows practical activities and a step by step path to work with river communities, putting youth protagonism at the centre.

We recommend following the reading order proposed in the index to better understand the suggested path and therefore be able to adapt it more easily to your needs.

The path undertaken by the project and, consequently, the tools included in the toolkit, refers to the context of river communities but we believe that the methodological and operational indications can be adopted and replicated in all contexts in which we want to make young people protagonists of change on topics relevant to your community (environmental but also social and cultural).

1.2 The RIDE project

RIDE 'River of IDEas' is a European project financed by the Italian National Youth Agency through the Erasmus+ programme, as part of cooperation projects in the 'youth' sector. The project, carried out between 2022 and 2024, involved six organizations from five European countries: Italy, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Slovenia. The organizations involved are active in their communities of reference in the context of the active participation of young people in the democratic life of the community but also in the defense of the river basins present in their territories of reference.

In fact, the project was born from two key observations: 1) the communities belonging to the partner countries of the RIDE project experience a lack of attention and protection towards river ecosystems. Yet these represented important resources from a natural, economic and social point of view, closely linked to the local culture. It is no coincidence that in the same communities, many identity traditions linked to rivers are being lost and we are witnessing the abandonment of an intangible heritage; 2) in the communities where the project was implemented, few young people have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives and that of their communities, with a growing disinterest and a growing distance between the local government and the young people themselves.

Starting from these premises, RIDE wanted to focus on the contribution that young people can bring as agents of positive change in their communities, which is often overlooked. This contribution was linked to the need to enhance river basins by recovering and strengthening the link between water resources and young citizens. From the perspective of the project, young people are the driving force and protagonists of the transformation process, not just recipients.

Concretely, the objectives of the project were:

- a) Promote knowledge and dissemination of best practices at local and European level for the valorization of rivers and local communities.
- b) Increase the competence of young people in planning eco-sustainable river recovery actions capable of involving and activating the entire community
- c) Open a profitable channel of communication between young people and local institutions

To achieve the set objectives, RIDE worked on multiple levels and implemented a variety of actions, from the exchange of good practices to training, up to moments of listening and discussion with local stakeholders.

In particular, the project developed on the following actions:

- 1) Read the River - European Research. A comparative analysis on the specific contexts of the different countries involved in the project. The research aimed to detect the state of the art in the territories of the partner organizations regarding the health of the rivers, the link between the local community and the river resource and the role of young people in its protection.
- 2) Re-Think the River - Toolkit. A participatory process of listening and discussion within local communities on the rediscovery of the value of rivers and on the collective construction of regenerative and protection interventions. The path included moments of training, planning and listening to the community. This process resulted in a final document summarizing the tools and path developed by the project for the reactivation of communities around river resources thanks to youth leadership.

Through the activities carried out and the methodology adopted, RIDE has allowed the community in which it was promoted to open a profitable space for discussion and shared planning which has not only involved young people but also institutions and citizens with a view to promoting the empowerment of young people and the community.

1.3 Project partners



Italian RibellARCI Association (project coordinator) has its roots in the history of Italian solidarity and has always been committed to trying to reduce the symptoms of social problems experienced by young and old people. It participates in various projects of national importance. The association has always been committed to the integration of immigrants in Italy as well as to Pan-European integration between various European cultures. It was founded with non-profit purposes as it pursues social objectives. It aims to bring together the best youth energies who want to encourage and stimulate the participation and civic sense of citizens and young people.



LINC - Working together in the community is an Italian non-profit social cooperative that operates in the community sector. LINC supports organisations,

institutions and associations in designing interventions related to community development and empowerment. The aim is to enhance the resources of individuals and communities through capacity building to foster inclusive communities. Over the years, the cooperative has built many interventions aimed at promoting youth participation and strengthening active citizenship skills through educational services and projects.



Greek Social Youth Development (KANE), a non-governmental and non-profit organization active in the fields of Education, Youth, Social

Inclusion, Vocational Training, and Culture was founded in 2008 in Kalamata, Greece. The organization's main objectives are to foster youth motivation for active citizenship and to support the personal and professional development of people through educational activities, especially targeting people at risk or facing social exclusion, young people in general, and adult/vet learners.



German Wildfluss Akademie, with its founder and CEO, Nico Döring, is a limited liability company that creates ideas, concepts and civil participation along the

Isar river and other wild rivers. It offers new approaches concerning synergy with rivers, water, urban and rural land use through regenerative cultures. People experience fascinating ecosystems, perspectives on an enriched, diverse living environment, and how to create a sustainable and safe relationship with the river.



ASPEA is a Portuguese association , founded in 1990, with 6 regional delegations whose mission is to educate, conduct campaigns and raise environmental awareness directing its activities to all audiences. Among other projects, ASPEA coordinates in Portugal the ProjetoRios, which is an Iberian project that aims to answer to the visible problem regarding the alteration and deterioration of the quality of rivers and the lack of effective involvement of users and the population in general, intending to promote education, awareness and active involvement of the community.



Društvo Slovenian Bodi Svetloba , for educational and humanitarian activities, was officially established in December 2017. It is a member organization of the Slovenian NGDO network SLOGA and the international network Global Call To Action Against Poverty (GCAP). The president of the NGO is the vice president of the SLOGA council. It is active in the field of global education and 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Currently, the NGO is involved in various Erasmus Ka2 projects in school, youth, and adult fields.

1.4 Local contexts

Before proceeding with the methodological and meaningful premises that guided the project, it seems useful to provide a reference framework on the different local contexts involved in the project. Some indications come to us from the research conducted in the first phase of the project, which can be downloaded in the full version from the project website ¹. The research focused in parallel on the identification of three central aspects for the project: the management and protection of river water resources (from the European to the local framework), the existing legislative operational tools for the promotion of youth participation (from the national to the local) and the relationship between communities and the rivers that cross them (in the various local contexts).

The research was made up of several phases: a first phase of desk research, in which the different national legislations implemented at various levels to protect river resources were highlighted, as well as the tools used to promote active citizenship and youth protagonism. Following this, the second phase focused on an 'in the field' survey of the perceptions of the communities involved and their relationship with the river resource, through the creation of interviews and focus groups.

From the point of view of regulation and protection of river resources, it emerges that the driving force is that of the European Union which over the years has issued various directives aimed at promoting the protection of river water resources ². To these, implemented by the member states, are added the commitments made at national level which have integrated European legislation. Finally, at a local level, there is a plurality of tools available to policy makers for the protection of rivers, which in the case of the countries involved in the project represent protected natural areas (albeit with different levels of protection).

Even from the point of view of promoting youth participation, there are different methods of coordination and representation. For example, in Greece and Italy there is no specific legislation on youth policies at national level, delegated to regional and local government bodies, although national representative bodies exist. In Slovenia and Portugal, however, the system appears more organic also at a national level. Finally in Germany, the management of

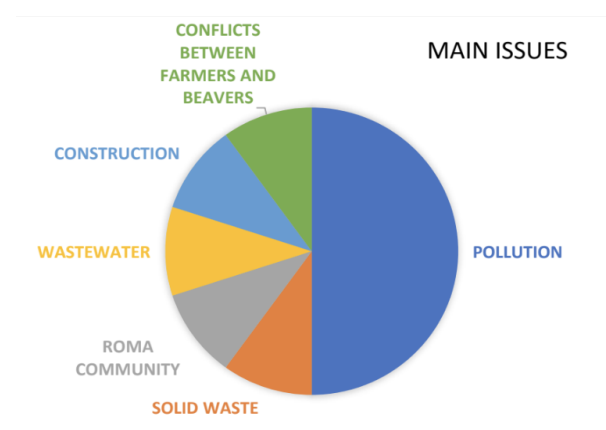
¹<https://www.projectride.eu/index.html>

²The main legal act is the 'Directive 2000/60/EC Framework for Community action in the field of water policy' Specify rules to prevent the deterioration of the status of water bodies in the European Union (Union) and on the subsequent amendments that have been to update and integrate legislation.

youth policies embraces all levels of government with a more integrated approach. Despite the national and regional differences, however, it is useful to underline that at a local level in all the contexts analyzed there are institutionalized forms of youth representation (Eg Youth Forum, Youth Board, Youth Council) which complement non-formal forms of youth protagonism (eg community centres, youth associations).

To instead draw a picture of the perceptions of local communities regarding the presence of the river resource and their connection with it, the first element noted was the emotional attachment to the river of the people interviewed. The highest level of emotional attachment was measured in Italy (median mark 4.3 out of 5), followed by Portugal and Slovenia (both countries' median mark almost 4), Greece (median mark 3.2), and Germany (median mark 3). In Portugal and Italy, attachment to the river is mostly connected with memories of childhood, in Greece with living by the river or visiting it, in Germany and Slovenia with present activities such as leisure (walking by the river, bathing in it).

The use of the river in Portugal in the past was mostly for agriculture, fishing, and transport, in Italy and Germany for fishing, agriculture, and washing clothes, in Greece for agriculture, fishing, and swimming while in Slovenia for transport, trade, and fishing. The current use of the river in Portugal is for agriculture, sport, and leisure, in Italy for energy, sport, and agriculture, in Greece for leisure, sports, and tourism, in Germany for leisure, sanctuary, and children's playgrounds while in Slovenia it is for leisure, tourism, and a restaurant.



Even with regards to the problems there is a common perception in the territories involved. Indeed, the main problems seem to be identified in the pollution of the rivers. This element has a high impact on the accessibility of the resource by citizens since the perception of the poor state of the river prevents its use, especially from the point of view of emotional enjoyment and pleasure.

According to the Portuguese interviewed main issues are pollution and solid waste, in Italy pollution and wastewater, in Greece pollution from factories and the Roma community, in Germany pollution and conflicts between farmers and beavers and in Slovenia pollution and

construction. The solutions proposed by the communities are various. In Portugal the most common topics were education, reforestation, flood prevention, and widening of the river. While in Italy the community proposed to raise awareness about the environment, the establishment of environmental NGOs, and the end of pollution. In Greece increasing education and awareness among factories were the proposed solutions. For Germany, community is important: the re-naturalization of the river and awareness raising. While in Slovenia cleaning the river, a ban on pesticides and more inspection of the river.

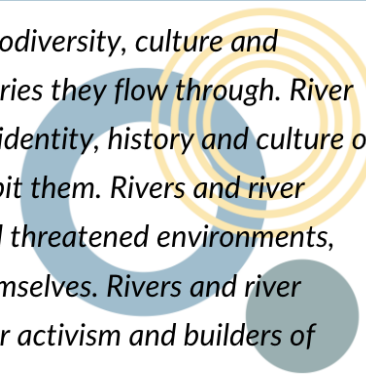
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CHAPTER 2

RIDE community activism

2.1 Rivers, environment youth and participation

Communities have always clustered around symbolic and utilitarian places, places that guarantee life and growth. Opportunities that human beings have recognised in rivers, so much so that a UNESCO study points out that 60% of the world's population lives within 60 km of a river. Rivers and river towns are



Rivers are sources of life, biodiversity, culture and development for the territories they flow through. River hamlets are expressions of identity, history and culture of the communities that inhabit them. Rivers and river hamlets are also fragile and threatened environments, often by human beings themselves. Rivers and river hamlets can be catalysts for activism and builders of communities.

expressions of identity, history, tradition and innovation of the communities that inhabit them. Europe boasts numerous examples of river towns rich in cultural, artistic, architectural and social heritage.

According to a study by the European Environment Agency in 2018 only 40% of European rivers had a good or high ecological status³. This means that many rivers are degraded in terms of water quality, biodiversity, morphology and ecological continuity. This has negative repercussions not only on the environment but also on human health, agriculture, energy, and the very life of surrounding communities. Protecting and enhancing rivers and river hamlets means promoting the environmental, social and economic sustainability of territories and people. Moreover, the profound relationship between the environment and the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals and communities is now evident. The presence of green spaces and natural resources in cities increases community participation, with a greater propensity to participate in voluntary initiatives and community activities.

The strongest expression of this community urgency can be found in young people protesting in defense of the environment. According to a Eurobarometer survey of 2021, 39% of young Europeans aged between 16 and 30 consider combating climate change and protecting the environment among the most urgent issues to be addressed. Young people are also the protagonists of movements and initiatives in defense of the environment, such as Fridays for future, the Civil Environmental Service and environmental education projects.

³ Report 'European waters. Assessment of status and pressures 2018' (European Environment agency)

Ecology is an activity for young people, because it motivates them to become informed, to participate, to cooperate, to innovate, to express their creativity and leadership to face the environmental and social challenges of the present and the future. Young people are aware that ecology is not only about nature, but also about culture, economics, politics and ethics. The connection with nature and the understanding of the importance of preserving and regenerating our ecosystems have become increasingly relevant for the younger generation.

Youth participation in environmental protection in Europe has become a significant and growing phenomenon, highlighting the crucial role of young people in driving sustainability and environmental protection initiatives. This movement has intensified in response to climate emergencies and growing concerns about environmental degradation. It is therefore necessary for those working with young people to support this drive, to value new ideas of the future, emerging aspirations and above all to support the creation of new tools and spaces for dialogue where young people can make their voices heard.

2.2 Methodology and key words

The working model proposed by the RIDE project is inspired by the theoretical approaches and tools of community psychology, a branch of study that focuses on people inserted in socio-cultural contexts with the aim of promoting processes of social change starting from relationships. With this in mind, the project envisaged, through a series of actions and tools detailed in Chapter 3, a path of listening, discussion and community participation that led to the creation of proposals for the regeneration and protection of rivers. The engines of the path were the young energies of the young people involved in the process; they were not just recipients but real community activists.

It is good to clarify first of all what we are referring to when we speak of **COMMUNITY**. If in fact the term may seem trivial, everyone may have a different image of reference. In the RIDE approach, the community is defined as 'a set of social subjects, therefore with different roles and positions, who share, partly consciously and partly unconsciously, significant aspects (positive or critical or problematic) of their own existence and who, for this reason, are in a relationship of interdependence, can develop a sense of belonging (territorial, symbolic, etc.), share processes of symbolic signification and entertain trusting relationships among themselves' (Tamanza, Gozzoli & Marta, 2009)⁴. In fact, when we use the term 'community', we must remember that we are referring to groups of people who share symbols, meanings, cultural references, norms and values expressed within an organisational framework of roles that the community itself has given itself in a specific spatial context (we are referring here to the three dimensions identified by Campbell, 2000).

EMPOWERMENT is a key word in the methodology adopted by the project. Indeed, as highlighted by several theories, a fundamental aspect for communities is the construct of empowerment, which states that the well-being of a community is measured by the participation and decision-making power that people perceive they can exercise. The concept of empowerment can be defined as: 'It is a process that allows individuals, organisations and communities to have control over their own lives. (Rappaport, 1987). Promoting empowerment means recognising that a community or group already possesses the skills, resources and potential to bring about positive change. It is no coincidence that this concept refers both to the process needed to produce the outcome and to the outcome itself (a

⁴ Marta E. (2009). La validità della Ricerca-Intervento in psicologia di comunità. *Ricerche di psicologia*.

community or group becomes 'competent' to change reality, improving its own situation or context).

The concept of empowerment is strongly linked to that of **PARTICIPATION**. The competences required to sustain the process of empowerment, and thus of change, can only be strengthened through experience. Participation is a way in which a community or a group builds values and uses its resources, but it is also a process that allows people to improve their skills, increase their ability to contribute to the common good and at the same time increase the sense of subjective well-being. Active participation in the social, political or civic life of one's community thus enables the empowerment of the people who participate. At the same time, the more people perceive that they are able to act on the context in which they live, the more they are driven to participate actively. The link between empowerment and participation thus enables a virtuous circle to be triggered.



These keywords, in the project's vision, are complemented by the concept of **ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP** through which we refer to the fact that “*Citizenship competence is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic,*

legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability"⁵. Being an active citizen therefore means taking responsibility for participating in the political, social and economic life of one's community, driven by the awareness that everyone's contribution is necessary to build more inclusive and sustainable communities. To strengthen the ability to be active citizens, certain social and interpersonal skills are essential: critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, efficient communication, empathy and creativity. It is therefore clear that this concept is closely related and complementary to those previously introduced.

This concept is closely related to that of **ENGAGEMENT**. Youth engagement refers to the active and meaningful involvement of young people in decision-making processes, activities,

⁵ EU Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences>

and initiatives that affect their lives and communities. This involves recognizing young people as essential contributors to the political, social and economic sphere of the community and involves providing them with the tools, resources and support necessary so that they can make their voices heard and concretely influence the reality around them and the future. There are a wide variety of tools and strategies for engaging young people: formal tools such as youth and students council or youth-led organizations but also less structured tools such as mentorship programmes, use of social media and digital platforms, volunteering, design of Collaborative projects and campaigns, etc. These are just a few examples. The specific tools and strategies used should be evaluated and adapted to the context, needs and interests of the young people involved. Flexibility, inclusiveness and continuous feedback are key principles to ensure meaningful and lasting involvement of young people.

Finally, another central concept in the approach of the RIDE project is that of **LEARNING**. Learning refers both to the process of change in the way people experience and conceptualise the world around them and to the product itself, i.e. the change in behaviours, skills and preferences that we acquire through learning. In the modern conception of learning as a life-long process (and not only in childhood or youth), it is necessary to remember that learning occurs in different situations and through different forms of experience. This is why we speak of:

- Formal learning refers to situations in which learning takes place in a formal way, i.e. organised and structured contexts such as schools or vocational and educational programmes. In these case the learning objectives are set externally and the learning process and outcome are subject to monitoring and verification, on the basis of which a qualification is awarded;
- Non-formal learning refers to those situations where there is an intentional choice of the person to learn but this process takes place outside formal systems, in any organisation that pursues educational and training purposes, including voluntary work. In these cases learning is mainly cooperative and evaluation takes place in groups or through self-evaluation.
- Informal learning refers to the learning experiences we have in performing activities in everyday life situations and in the interactions that take place therein, in the context of work, family and leisure. There is no intentionality on the part of the learner.

Taking these elements into account is very important when planning activities because different learning contexts and experiences can produce different outcomes in both young people and adults.

On the basis of these premises, RIDE worked on two levels:

- 1) At the community level, by promoting a path of listening and confrontation;
- 2) At the level of the target group, young citizens between the ages of 15 and 25, who were the driving force behind the whole process.

Through its intervention model, RIDE wanted to promote youth leadership, enabling young citizens to acquire and strengthen the skills necessary to act as ‘activators’ of change in their communities. The final aim was to generate a virtuous process, fostering the empowerment of young people in their territories. Of course, this approach can be applied in different contexts (not only in river communities) and with reference to different environmental and local resources. Considering the different possible forms of participation and their intensity, the RIDE intervention could be placed in the higher levels of the participation scale (among ‘Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children’ and ‘Child-initiated and directed’), as groups of young people were formed at the local level who planned and conducted actions within the communities, with the ambition of creating the necessary preconditions to support the autonomous actions of young people in the community, as in the last level of the participation scale called ‘Child-initiated, shared decision with adults’ (Hart, 1992).

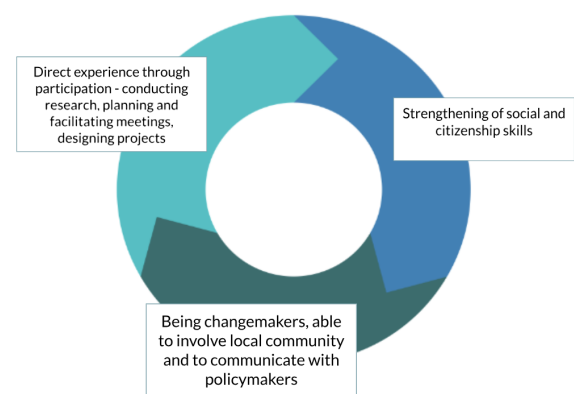


Table: RIDE Approach

The role of the young people, supported by the organisations' experts, was that of community “facilitators”, accompanying the emergence of needs, ideas, desires and visions about the future of the rivers and their communities.

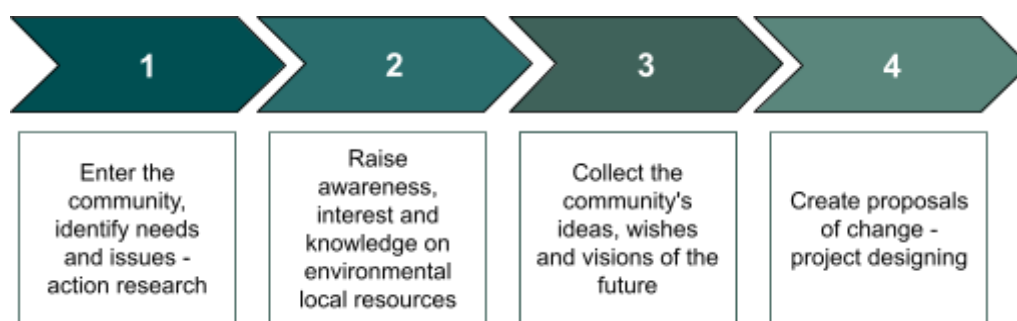


Table: RIDE Model of intervention

2.3 The role of the facilitator

Within the framework of the approach and intervention model proposed by the project, the young people involved and the operators played the role of community facilitators. The term facilitation refers to the process of supporting a group in achieving a shared goal through discussion and collaboration. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term facilitation as *“the act of helping other people to deal with a process or reach an agreement or solution without getting directly involved in the process, discussion, etc. yourself”*.

The facilitator is therefore the person who possesses the skills and knowledge necessary to design a path to accompany and guide the group in a well defined process through a solid strategy. His role is not to transmit information or specialised knowledge but to create a favourable environment for groups to find solutions and effective tools to achieve their goals. The facilitator's task is to create a positive environment in which everyone can express their opinions and thoughts, supporting the group in staying focused on the objective, managing any conflicts that may arise and ensuring that the group arrives at a synthesis or shared outcome.

Then the facilitator helps the group to:

- Stay focused on the issue at hand and the common goal
- Bring out different points of view, ensuring that all voices are heard
- Build a climate of mutual trust and a safe space where all group members feel welcome
- Mediate between different positions when necessary
- Increase participation by identifying the strategies and tools needed to foster group motivation
- Creating favourable and comfortable settings for learning.

The figure of the facilitator is, as can be guessed, a complex figure, who moves on a broad scale of activities (may facilitate workshops, meetings, focus groups etc.) within which different techniques and exercises may be adopted. However, we believe that there are some basic skills, especially social and relational skills, that beyond the contexts in which a facilitator operates, he or she should possess. These skills are summarised in the graphic below.

01

ACTIVE LISTENING

Life skill fundamental to ensuring effective communication with others. It involves giving full attention to the words of the interlocutor without judgement and paying attention to the emotions communicated in order to respond constructively. It is also important to listen through facial expressions and body positioning. Active listening allows people to feel welcomed and understood, creating a climate of trust.

02

FLEXIBILITY&ADAPTABILITY

In group facilitation, even with well-defined planning and strategy, unforeseen circumstances may lead to unexpected changes that require modifications to initial plans. This highlights the importance of remaining open and adaptable to new information or changing dynamics that may require a change in activities and tools. Being flexible means constantly assessing the situation and progress towards objectives and being ready to alter the course of action if necessary.

03

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

If the topics covered are particularly relevant to the group and if there are people with different roles and interests, conflicts can often emerge. It is important that conflict is not avoided but managed, welcoming tensions but supporting people to stay focused on concreteness and facts, through precise and clear questions that can help to reduce aggressivity.

04

TIME MANAGEMENT

In facilitating group dynamics, time constraints are one of the biggest challenges. In fact, this requires us to properly manage speaking turns, avoiding that time is monopolized by only a few people, while still ensuring that everyone has the space to express themselves. Time management must be guaranteed both in the planning phase by providing an adequate duration of the phases of the meeting, and during the implementation.

05

PLANNING

It is always appropriate to start from the analysis of the objective (what do you want to achieve through the process?) and who are the stakeholders. On the basis of this, it is possible to design an intervention strategy, identifying actions - meetings, workshops - , the tools and techniques to use - participatory techniques, analysis techniques - and what time will be required by the process.

06

NEUTRALITY

Facilitator is not focused on what people said but on how, his attention is all on the process, not on the contents. It is indeed essential that there is a complete absence of bias or prejudice towards the people participating in a group activity. The facilitator's approach is to bring out the participants' perspectives without revealing his or her own personal opinions.

2.4 Project implementation

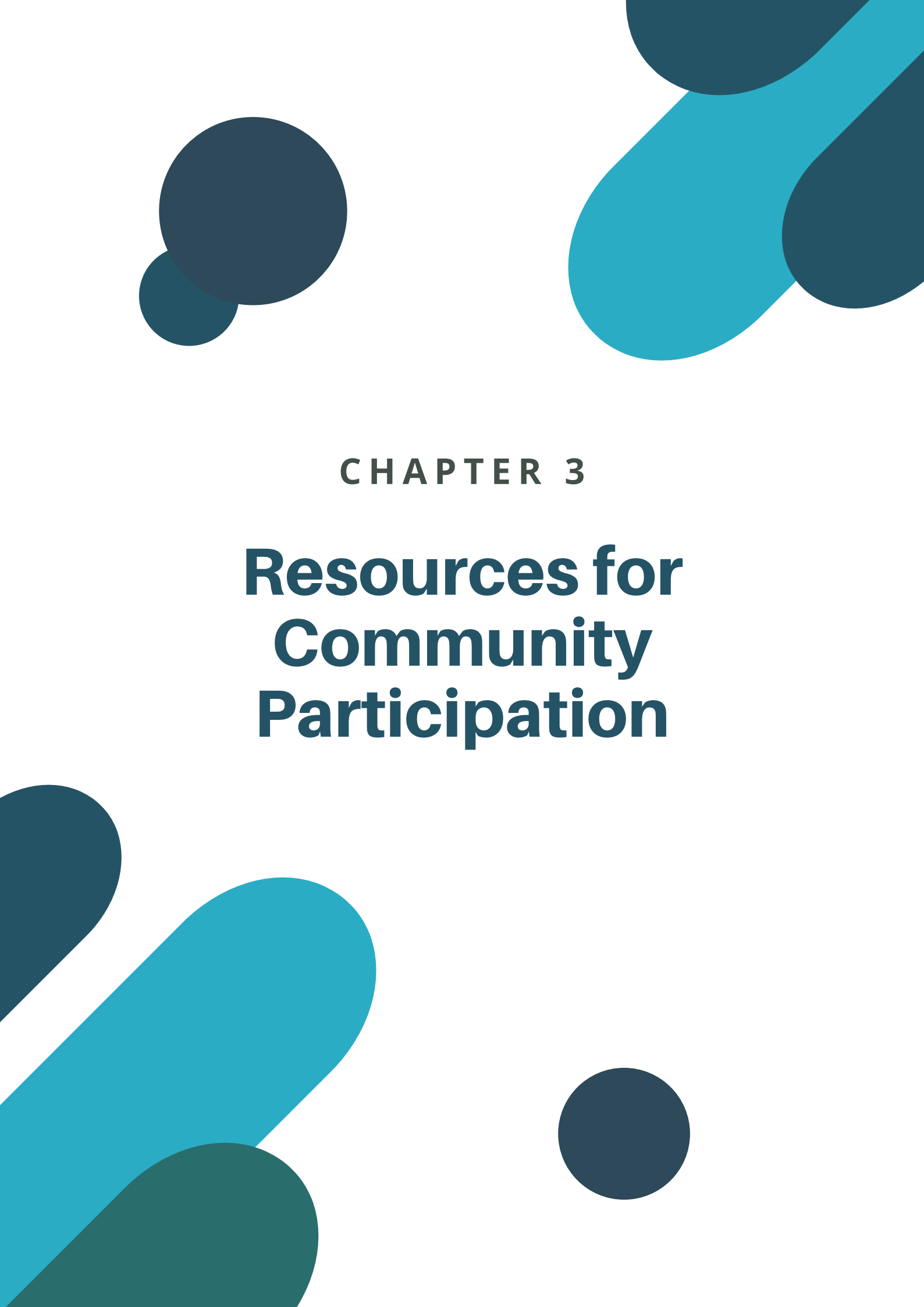
The path outlined by the RIDE project was implemented in the five countries involved in the project thanks to the contributions of the partner organisations. The flexible structure of the process and methodology adopted enabled the organisations to adapt the activities to the particular needs of their local context, without losing the overall vision and common line of action. In the implementation phase, despite the differences, common strengths and challenges emerged, which can be useful as an indication to those who wish to adopt the project tools and replicate the process.

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
Local networks The existence of strong networks of relations with both institutions (local administration and schools) and civil society organisations plays a key role in ensuring the broadest possible involvement of the community and its various cultural and interest groups.	Youth engagement and inclusion The involvement of young people proved to be a critical element, especially in the initial phase of the project. In particular, the challenge was to effectively motivate young people who are not in education, employment or training. This risk can be limited through the use of local networking and effective communication and awareness-raising.
Variety of actions The variety of activities offered by the work programme - training, non-formal education, youth exchanges and debates - makes it possible to meet the needs of different groups of young people.	Lack of material resources The issue of limited financial and material resources can often influence the progress of activities and limit the scope of events, especially important events such as a festival. However, through a efficient and innovative use of available resources and by actively collaborating with other local entities it is possible to overcome this limit.

In terms of the change promoted by RIDE in the areas involved, two main results can be highlighted:

At the political level, a channel of communication was created between young people and local institutions through the elaboration and presentation of regeneration proposals (also thanks to the organisation of local festivals): young people found the space to make their voices heard on the future of the river in their area and at the same time, administrations were made aware of youth demands.

At the level of the organisations involved in the European partnership, the competence of the professionals and youth workers who took part in the project was increased, sharing tools, methodologies and practices to the benefit of the quality of their work.

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CHAPTER 3

Resources for Community Participation

RIDE PLANNING

MAPPING



- Identifying local resources
- Getting to know the territory
- Awareness of local context

TRAINING



- Acquiring new knowledge
- Strengthening green skills
- Being able to act locally

LISTENING



- Identifying needs
- Discussing main issues
- Facilitating dialogue

DESIGNING



- Stimulating creativity
- Building new vision of future
- Developing projects

STEP 1 - MAPPING

The mapping exercise refers to the identification of local resources available in a given area or territory. Indeed, communities often have environmental, cultural and historical resources that represent great wealth and potential but are not always exploited.

Carrying out a mapping with groups of citizens offers the possibility of making them discover the potential of their community by increasing the emotional bond with their territory. Furthermore, the activity allows the operators who conduct the activity to identify which places are important for the community and which are the needs and critical issues related to those same places. This operation guarantees the collection of essential information to then build intervention proposals and projects that respond to real local needs, enhancing existing resources and places.

How to proceed:

Step 1. Through brainstorming, highlight all the resources that are relevant to the group at a local level. Collect the list visually on a poster or digital media. Then, systematize what has emerged into categories (environmental resources, cultural resources, historical resources).

Step 2. Using a map (paper or digital), geographically identify the various resources in the territory. At this point, it is possible to divide the participants into smaller groups, assigning them the different categories and asking them to create a card for each resource containing: description of the resource, photo, strengths and weaknesses.

Conclude the activity with the presentation of the cards produced in plenary.

[Google my Maps](#) is an accessible and free tool for creating and sharing collaborative maps. Its strength lies in the interface that is easily accessible even for less experienced users. The application allows, once the area in which to operate has been identified, to enter several points of interest through pointers to which names, descriptions, photographs can be assigned. The points can also be grouped into categories and each pointer can be assigned a different colour. Several users can contribute to the creation of the same map at the same time by sharing a link via the platform.



STEP 2 - TRAINING

A wide range of techniques can be used to develop training activities. There is no right and wrong technique, each can be useful depending on the objective to be pursued and the time and space constraints we have. Within the project, the most commonly used training techniques were:

WORKSHOP - Useful when one wants to work creatively on specific content. The main characteristic of a workshop is that participants should not have the role of spectators but should be involved themselves (through discussions, round tables, exchange of ideas, etc.). The expert has the role of facilitator in this context. moreover, one can work on concrete projects, fostering the connection between theory and practice.

CIRCLE TIME - It is a psycho-educational technique that allows groups to share experiences, feelings, thoughts. It is a useful technique to create a relaxed and safe climate within the group, facilitating involvement in activities. Participants, in a circle, can discuss a specific topic or share free thoughts (either on specific topics or on their own emotions). The trainer/facilitator leads the discussion and can also use this technique to monitor participants' response to the proposed stimuli (e.g. by asking how they feel after specific activities or what their level of energy and attention is).

LECTURE - Lecture means the more or less structured frontal intervention of a lecturer or expert who wants to convey specific content and information. The risk of using this technique excessively is that of not actively promoting learning. However, if used consciously, it is very useful for introducing concepts and content at the beginning of training sessions and then making way for more participative techniques.

BRAINSTORMING - Brainstorming is a creative thinking technique that facilitates the emergence of innovative ideas and solutions through collective participation. It can be used in different ways: e.g. free collection of key words on a specific topic, collection of individual solutions to an identified problem, collection of needs. Whatever the focus, it is important that there is an initial moment in which participants can express themselves freely (everything that is said can be visualised visually by writing it down), followed by the group's systematisation of the ideas collected (e.g. by creating a conceptual map), thanks to the mediation of the trainer.

GAMIFICATION - It is the application of the methods and elements typical of 'gaming' processes to learning environments. It is in fact now well established that the mechanisms of the game (such as points or incentives, the freedom of action and to make mistakes, the challenge towards oneself, immediate feedback, etc.) allow for learning to be facilitated through constant involvement in the experience itself.

STEP 2 - TRAINING

Secrets of the riverbed

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Objectives:

- To raise awareness about issues related to rivers
- To understand the river's ecology, its importance, and the close dependence of life on these ecosystems
- To explore the impact of pollution and climate change in the river life
- To identify the problems and discuss ways and behavior in order to preserve rivers

Through this activity you can work on:

- Green Economy
- Green Skills
- Active Citizenship



Tools:

- boots
- net
- amplifier
- identification sheets
- white plastic container

Description:

- Introduction to the river. Give information about the river (name, hydrographic basin, some facts about the history and importance of the river for the village/city, etc.), study and safety guidelines.
- Basic concepts of river ecology. Present the basic concepts of river ecology, the importance of water, specifically of freshwater, to life; understand concepts such as fauna; flora; biodiversity, native and invasive species; show some examples of main native species and their importance for the ecosystem (with resources such as images or samples ie. leaves, fruits, etc.).
- Collect the water sample. Demonstrate proper sampling techniques to the group. Use nets to collect macroinvertebrates from the river. Place the collected sample in a white container with river water.
- Identify the macroinvertebrates. Observe the sample with the amplifier and with the identification sheets. Classify the macroinvertebrates into groups. Record species diversity and abundance data.
- Qualify the quality of the water and ecosystems. Record identified macroinvertebrates in the water quality index. Interpret the findings and discuss the implications for water quality and ecosystem health.
- Discussion. Discuss findings, trends, and potential implications with the group. Consider any recommendations for ecosystem conservation or restoration.

STEP 2 - TRAINING

Guardians of
the river

Objectives:

- To raise participants' awareness on the issues of the rivers
- To promote active involvement
- To engage participants and encourage them to take action for the promotion of the significance of the river and its protection

Through this activity you can work on:

- Green Skills
- Active Citizenship



Tools:

- Laptops/computers/smart phones
- Presentation software
- Projector/screen
- Pens/markers/flipchart papers/A4 papers

Description:

Part one: Introduction (from 30 min to 1 hour)

Begin with a presentation that introduces the river to the participants and its importance to the environment, economy, and communities. Use visuals, local history, and data to make it engaging. You can also invite older people from the community to share their stories and memories of the river. Allow for questions.

Part two: Explore the river (1 hour)

If it is possible, go with the participants down to the river. Split them in groups and ask them to:

- 1) Make observations about the river (how it is, is it clean, what does it need?)
- 2) Think of different activities that can take place there

You can also engage them in different activities such as testing the water, cleaning the area, etc (if not already done in previous sessions).

Part three: Call to action (45 min)

Come back to the room and split participants into groups of 4-5 people. Ask half the groups to design an awareness campaign for community engagement. They can design posters, brochures, or even digital campaigns highlighting the importance of river conservation and the creative use of the river space. Ask the other half to design a community event that will take place by the river (defining target group, activities, promotion of the event, etc). At the end, ask the groups to present their ideas to the whole group.

Debriefing. It is important to debrief the session. You can ask questions such as:

- What was the most memorable part of the activity for you?
- How has your perspective on river conservation changed after this activity?
- How do you think the condition of our local river impacts your daily life?
- How do you see the relationship between the community and the river now, as compared to before the activity?

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STEP 2 - TRAINING

Mapping
the needs

Objectives:

- To support participants in conducting a needs assessment
- To raise awareness of the participants on the needs of the community, in relation also to the river
- To foster a sense of empathy and connection with the community and to appreciate diverse perspectives on the river's role and impact.
- This activity will support the development of skills like data collection, observation, presentation, empathy and critical thinking.

Through this activity you can work on:

- Active Citizenship



Tools:

- Maps of the community and river.
- Notebooks and pens.
- Cameras or smartphones (optional).
- Flipchart paper
- Markers, colored pencils, sticky notes.
- Survey templates or questionnaires.

Description:

Begin with a short discussion on the importance of rivers for communities. Share some general points about the possible positive and negative effects a river can have. Then, separate participants in groups and give them maps of the community. Ask them to identify and mark important spots related to the river, such as fishing spots, tourist sites, areas prone to flooding, any infrastructure, farming fields that use the water of the river etc. After that, you can assign the tasks to each group

- Group 1: Create a survey with open ended and closed questions aiming at understanding the community's needs, concerns, and views about the river (it is good, if you could also provide them with or support them in finding sample surveys). After preparing the survey, go outside and find at least 10 people from the community to answer your survey.
- Group 2: Prepare a set of interview questions that can help you understand the relationship that the community has with the river (at least 5 questions). Then go outside and find at least 5 people to interview.
- Group 3: Observe. Walk along the river and observe. Pay special attention to signs of pollution, community activities, wildlife, etc. Take notes, pictures or even draw sketches.

Give them about 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete the task (if the river is far away, or if the facilitator deems necessary, more time can be given). When they come back, give them 20 minutes to gather their findings and prepare a creative presentation on the flipchart. Give 3-5 minutes to each team to present the findings and allow time for comments or questions.

Debriefing Questions:

- What was the most surprising thing you learned from the community about the river?
- Why do you think certain needs or concerns were more common among community members?
- What role do you think young people can play in addressing some of these needs?

STEP 3 - LISTENING

WORLD CAFÉ'

"The World Café is a powerful tool for hosting conversations that matter."

World Café is a tool useful to build informal conversations on concrete and urgent issues for the life of an organisation/community. The objective is to promote learning and knowledge sharing in order to create new possibilities for action.

How it works:

- 1 Divide participants into small groups (about 4 or 5 people) and invite them to sit at a table like in a Café. Provide them with piece of paper, posters, pens and whatever else is necessary on the table for people to write down and graphically represent the ideas that emerge. Assign each table an important question or issue to discuss.
- 2 Each group will have 20 or 30 min to discuss that topic. Then participants will be asked to stand up and change tables. Several rounds of conversation can be launched (as many as the number of topics) .

Table host: after the first round one person stays at the table as a contact person. This role is very important to encourage everyone's contribution, managing turns to speak and respecting the desire to remain silent.

Talking stick: it could be useful the adoption of a symbolic object to be held in one's hand to talk. At the end of one's speech, it should be placed back in the centre of the table but can also be given to someone else;

Closing moment: It is important to foresee a final moment of collective sharing in plenary of what has emerged, giving visibility to collective intelligence (for example using posters or post-it notes to stick ideas on the wall).

Reference: 'A quick reference for hosting World Café' by The World Café Community Foundation www.theworldcafe.com

STEP 3 - LISTENING

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY (OST)

“Groups of people gathered around an issue for which they care deeply will find the way-provided they had the (safe) space in which to explore”

(Harrison Owen, initiator of the method)

OST is a method of participation based on the self-organisation of discussions. It is important for its realisation that a defined issue is chosen that is relevant to the participants. It is useful both for quickly finding creative and innovative solutions to urgent problems and for working on long-term strategies and work plans. The values underlying this method are passion of the participants for the subject matter and shared responsibility (organisation and results are the responsibility of all).

How it works:

- 1 Opening. The central question of the event is presented and the methodology, the role of the facilitator and the guiding principles - *whoever comes is the right people, whenever it starts is the right time, whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened, when it's over it's over* - and the main law - *law of mobility says that if you are not learning or contributing go somewhere you can learn and contribute more* - are introduced.
- 2 Marketplace. Following this, the agenda is collectively constructed. Participants are asked to propose topics they would like to address in the working sessions by sticking a post-it note on the agenda board. On the basis of the contributions, the agenda is discussed and working sessions decided.
- 3 Open Space. Once the agenda has been defined, the working tables can be opened, i.e. the open space for discussion on collectively identified topics. At the end of each session, the group prepares a report with the findings or ideas emerged.
- 4 Closing. In plenary, the groups present reports of their work. A final report will then be created by the organisers and shared with the participants.

Reference: 'A brief user's guide to Open Space Technology', Harrison Owen
Open Space World - www.openspaceworld.org

STEP 4 - DESIGNING

At the end of the process, it is important to materialize what has been collected in a concrete proposal for intervention to be implemented in the community. The RIDE project has produced proposals for the regeneration of the river, starting from the needs that emerged in the previous steps.

The formulation of the proposals was achieved through LABs of Ideas, i.e. co-design laboratories that involved young activists. Through non-formal and cooperative education techniques, the young people's ideas and desires on the future of the river were brought to the surface, which were then translated into concrete proposals for action.

Some of the proposals that emerged from the young people during the workshops are:

1. River Clean-Up and Restoration Project
 - Activities: Organize regular clean-up drives, remove invasive species, and restore native vegetation. Collaborate with local schools and universities for volunteer participation.
 - Objective: Improve river health, enhance biodiversity, and create a cleaner environment for residents and wildlife.
2. Riverfront Recreational Spaces - Create recreational spaces along the riverbanks.
 - Activities: Design parks with walking and biking trails, picnic areas, and playgrounds. Include facilities for sports like fishing and rowing.
 - Objective: Enhance quality of life, promote physical activity, and provide leisure spaces for families.
3. Biodiversity Conservation Initiative - Launch a biodiversity conservation program for the river ecosystems.
 - Activities: Conduct biodiversity assessments, protect endangered species, and restore habitats. Engage local communities in conservation efforts.
 - Objective: Protect wildlife, maintain ecological balance, and promote environmental stewardship.

STEP 4 - DESIGNING

4. Social Media Campaigns to raise awareness about river conservation.

- Details: Create engaging content, share success stories, and promote local events and initiatives. Use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to reach a wider audience.
- Impact: Increase public awareness, attract volunteers, and foster a sense of community involvement.

5. Develop routes of Artistic-Cultural-Historical interest along the river.

- Activities: Cleaning of abandoned areas by groups of volunteers; creation of infrastructures dedicated to the use of rivers and surrounding assets; construction of connection routes between rivers and historical-artistic assets present in the area
- Objective: Increase public awareness, attract volunteers, and foster a sense of community involvement.

