

Involving locally studying but unregistered youth in university town of Tartu

Name of the organisation

Tartu linna noortevolikogu

Website of the organisation

<https://www.tartu.ee/et/tartu-linna-noortevolikogu>

Location of the organisation

Raekoja plats 12, Tartu, 51004 tartu, Estonia

E-mail address of the organisation

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Participation of young people in decision making
- Inclusion
- Digital youth work

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

Only 17 youth between the ages of 14-20 can be a part of the Tartu City Youth Council, but there are over 7000 youth in that same age group living in Tartu. Our goal was from the start to involve and empower youth around us not just within. Keeping this goal in mind we have aimed to involve youth in decision-making processes that shape their future lives in Tartu. Today it is crucial to use efficient communication methods to reach our target audience and involve them in our activities. These two aspects have been the backbone of our work and are shown through our work. Firstly our youth council is chosen through local elections. In some municipalities, youth councils are an extension of student councils but not in Tartu. Only recently, in 2021 we expanded voting rights to youth who are not registered citizens of Tartu but study at a local school. It is only logical with Tartu being the education capital of Estonia. Since 2021 the same youth group can also vote for local participative budgeting and thus shape their living environment. Communicating these possibilities to youth has made them want to be active citizens.

Good practice description

Almost everything in Estonia is done online, the same goes for youth participation. We have been certain to make involvement for youth as simple as possible for as many as possible to join us. In the last youth council election fewer than 10 votes were cast physically at a polling station but a little less than 300 were done digitally. The same goes for participative budgeting.

But to make the change of expanding the right to vote in these elections to youth not registered as citizens of Tartu, we had to be a part of a long, analytical process comprised of technical and legal challenges. For this, we had meetings with people from Tartu city government's legal and technical departments. The applicable regulations needed to be changed and we needed to make sure that there was technical ability to do so, knowing the habits of young voters. The biggest problem was how to get the right information about the youth who wanted to vote. We have high schools, vocational schools, universities, and colleges of universities located in another town in Tartu, which made the process trickier, but because of our persistence and the capabilities of our technical department, this hurdle was crossed.

There is no help of the digital possibilities if youth are not aware of them. As a youth council with limited resources, we co-operated with other departments and organizations in Tartu, Estonia, and even overseas. Starting at a local level we have seen that interactive social media posts are what enhance their experience following our work.

For us, it is also important to keep in mind to be environmentally friendly when buying merch, organizing events, having meetings, and so on. Tartu is one of 100 cities in Europe chosen to become climate-neutral by 2030. This is also extremely important for youth, which is why we hold ourselves to high standards. We have a guideline on how to hold such climate-friendly events and internal regulations which we follow on an everyday basis.

In a large town like Tartu youth have a lot of opportunities which is why we tend to work together with other organizations such as dance clubs, the Cultural Capital 2024 youth organization Extended, Youth centers, and others to achieve our common goal for youth to find the right path for them and empower and support each other.

Good practice result & concrete effects

It is important to analyze the effect and efficiency of our work. We held two surveys that sought to find how knowledgeable of Tartu City Youth Council the local youth were. The first was done in 2021 and the other a year later. After analyzing the results of the first one we saw what worked, and what did not and adapted. After the second survey, we saw that the results had improved and we are heading in the right direction. Between the two surveys, we had been more active on social media, visited schools, and held more events in the public space. We had also been seen together more with the city representatives.

At the beginning of 2021, it was the first time for youth not registered in Tartu to vote and be elected to the youth council election. By the time of the elections in 2022, the possibility was real for the second time, we had twice as many candidates and about four times as many voters. Participative budgeting voting rights for unregistered youth was also taken into effect in the same year. It is certain that these changes made youth more active and knowledgeable about our work.

