

# From Free Time to Civic Participation: The Trnava Youth Club Ecosystem

## **Name of the organisation**

GenT

## **Website of the organisation**

<https://klubovne.trnava.sk>

## **Location of the organisation**

Hlavná 1, Trnava, 91701 Trnava, Slovakia

## **E-mail address of the organisation**

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## **Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work**

- Community work
- Participation of young people in implementing youth activities (planning, preparing, carrying out, etc.)
- Safe/secure youth work environment

## **Good practice category**

A practice of processes and methods

## **Good practice aim & purpose**

The City of Trnava established a structured network of neighbourhood youth clubs under the municipal organisation GenT in order to create safe, inclusive and participatory civic spaces for young people aged 10–20.

Before this model, youth initiatives existed but were fragmented and mostly project-based. Young people lacked stable, non-formal environments where they could safely meet, express themselves and gradually engage in civic life. There was also limited structured connection between informal youth spaces and local governance.

The aim was to transform youth clubs from “free-time spaces” into neighbourhood civic laboratories – safe, apolitical and inclusive environments where young people can build relationships, develop competencies and learn participation in practice.

The practice addresses:

lack of structured youth participation,  
absence of safe and stable youth spaces across neighbourhoods,  
weak connection between informal youth life and local decision-making.

Through this model, Trnava sought to strengthen community work, create long-term trust-based youth work environments and embed participation into everyday youth practice, not only into formal representative structures.

## **Good practice description**

The Trnava Youth Club Model is a municipally coordinated system of neighbourhood youth clubs operated by GenT, a contribution organisation established by the City of Trnava in 2025.

The model consists of:

- 4 neighbourhood youth clubs
- trained youth workers and coordinators
- participatory internal rules created with young people
- open-access, free-of-charge services
- structured connection to the Youth City Council
- integration with city-wide youth policy

Each youth club functions as a safe, inclusive and non-formal environment. The clubs are:

- apolitical
- non-religious
- free of charge
- based on voluntary participation
- guided by trained youth workers

The daily practice includes open club hours, community events, workshops, informal counselling, volunteering activities and thematic programmes (digital skills, ecology, critical thinking, leadership, etc.).

A key technical element of the model is that participation is embedded in everyday practice:

1. Young people co-create internal club rules.
2. Young people propose activities and manage micro-projects.
3. Young people participate in community events.
4. Youth workers facilitate reflection and feedback processes.
5. Club participants are systematically connected to the Youth City Council and city-level participatory processes.

The clubs operate under a unified municipal framework with clear standards:

- child protection policy
- regular needs mapping
- supervision for youth workers
- structured monthly planning
- data collection (quantitative and qualitative impact)

The model connects neighbourhood-based community work with local governance. Youth clubs serve as entry-level civic spaces where young people first experience belonging, voice and agency. From there, they can move towards more formal participation structures.

This creates a gradual pathway:

Safe space → Community belonging → Responsibility → Participation → Civic engagement.

The system is financially supported by the municipality, which ensures stability beyond project cycles. The organisational structure includes strategic, operational and support levels, guaranteeing sustainability and professional standards.

The model is replicable for municipalities seeking to move from fragmented youth initiatives to systemic, policy-based local youth work infrastructure.

### **Good practice result & concrete effects**

As a result of implementing the municipal youth club model:

- Youth participation became embedded in everyday practice, not only in formal bodies.
- Young people report higher sense of belonging and safety.
- Trust between youth workers and young people increased significantly.
- Neighbourhood communities became more connected through youth-led events.
- The Youth City Council now receives participants who already have experience in participatory environments.

The clubs created stable civic spaces where young people can safely experiment with responsibility and initiative. This reduced passive leisure patterns and increased engagement in volunteering and city-level processes.

The municipal anchoring of the clubs ensured continuity, professional standards and long-term impact instead of short-term project-based interventions.

The model strengthened the perception of Trnava as a youth-friendly city that listens to young people and provides them with meaningful civic space.

### **Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work**

Organisation and practice