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EGL Project Lab in Rural Lazio

Strengthening Youth Participation

Who am I?

Matteo Sisto

Nerd

Serial Nonprofiteer

Active in the youth field as a:

- Project Designer and Manager,
- Facilitator and Trainer,
- Researcher and Cleaning Person

Involved in EGL for some years.

What is Europiamo?

A **community** that brings together individuals (youth workers and youth) and youth organisations active in the European programmes for youth.

Vision: Together to build a more participatory, accessible, and sustainable Europe

Mission: We connect youth to European opportunities that can empower them, we curate spaces for participation, we represent the youth sector and the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes in Italy

In 2025 we have more than **200 individuals** and **40 organisations** all across Italy.

We work mostly on the European Youth Goals N.1, N.9, and N.11 both with our own programmes (Generazione_E, Officine Europa, Precarie, Uè Giovane!) and with European and National projects

The logo for Europiamo, featuring the word "europiamo" in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter "e" is stylized with a circular shape around its left side. A small yellow dot is positioned at the end of the word, after the period.

Menu

- Europe Goes RURAL - The project;
- The Activity - Rural Project Lab;
- Lessons Learned Along the Way





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The Project

Europe Goes RURAL - The area Comunità Montana

A rural area near the province of Latina in the Lazio Region, not too far from Rome.

This is a second level local administrative entity that is composed of **12 small municipalities** that range in population between 1000 and 25000. It suffers typical issues related to small Italian municipalities: aging population, close mentality, few job opportunities, and limited public services (Transport, Health, Education)

Young people in the Monti Lepini and Ausoni area face **limited opportunities** for participation, education, and employment, leading to a **lack of engagement in local decision-making**.

The **absence of structured youth policies**, dedicated youth spaces, and effective communication channels isolates them from municipal initiatives. Many perceive their hometowns as **"dead spaces"** with few prospects, fueling youth migration to urban centers. Access to European programs like Erasmus+ and ESC is often hindered by low awareness and insufficient support structures.



Europe Goes RURAL - The Process

We got in touch with the president of the Comunità Montana thanks to our friendship with one of the officers. We presented the idea of developing a youth participation activity in **Erasmus+** that could support youth participation in the area.

Starting from the **EGL Charter of Youth Work** and the **Changemakers Kit** we adapted the guiding questions to be more simple and understandable and we organised a focus group with the decision makers from the municipalities of Comunità Montana that helped us to better understand the context.

We then involved young people via a **short survey** and **two online meetings** to further collect data about their needs and interests.

We thought thoroughly about the issues in the areas and the possibility. Linking the whole project with **European Youth Goal N.6 - Moving Rural Youth Forward** and we created:

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Europe Goes RURAL - The Project

A Youth Participation activity that aimed at **“Creating the conditions which enable young people to fulfill their potential in rural areas”**.

Comunità Montana was the main applicant together with 4 local municipalities, 1 local youth organisation (Polygonal), and Europiamo to bring expertise and support the whole process.

It started with a kick off meeting and **team building** for the youth of the area to connect and support the preparation of an open event on the second day. To further bring together citizens, local organisations and decision makers.

It then continued with a **training for young people** about Erasmus+ and ESC opportunities.

Those young people then organised **6 local events** to promote the project and the European programmes to other youth. It also served to collect ideas and needs from a wider audience.

Based on the inputs collected during our events, we organized **two co-creation sessions** with citizens, organizations, and decision-makers to further refine and operationalize their ideas into concrete actions and strategies.

Eventually **2 trainings** were organised reflecting the previous work done during the events, one for young people where we supported them in developing Solidarity Projects; one for youth organisations and decision makers to support them in applying for the Quality Label and managing the volunteers according to ESC quality standards.

Europe Goes RURAL - The Project

The project finished with a **conference** where we involved regional decision makers and the national youth policy department with the intention to replicate the project in other areas.

Just because we are crazy, we also added another activity the day after the conference that is:

“Rural Project Lab”





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The Activity

The Activity - Rural Project Lab

When my good friend **Ilaria Zocco** and I found ourselves in the area, we thought, "***Why not make history and organize the first EGL Project Lab in Italy?***" No sooner said than done!

We knew we had a unique audience: mostly young people in their civil service year at the municipalities of the Comunità Montana. **Any problem? Yes:** They weren't getting much guidance or inspiration to make their experience truly meaningful. So, we designed the lab to **equip them with tools, ideas,** and European **best practices** to create follow-up actions that would actually make a difference.

The setup was simple but effective:

15 civil service youth + 5 NGO representatives + a mix of youth from Europiamo and Erasmus+ organizations + **decision-makers** from the area and beyond.



The Activity – Rural Project Lab

What Happened?

Kickoff with an icebreaker – Because nothing says "Let's collaborate!" like a good laugh.

Digging into motivations – We had participants sit in small groups and reflect on why they joined civil service in the first place. Spoiler: "Because my parents made me" was not one of the answers (we think).

Context mapping – We shuffled the groups to mix youth and NGO reps and asked them to analyze the strengths and challenges of their local communities.

A plot twist – The Case Study Challenge! – We handed them real-world scenarios, adapted to their civil service roles, featuring inspirational EGL best practices. With support from Europiamo and youth organization members, they brainstormed youth-led projects they could actually implement.

Shark Tank, EGL edition – They pitched their projects to local policymakers, not just for feedback but to get their commitment to help make it happen.

The Activity - Rural Project Lab

The Result?

A room full of motivated young people, engaged decision-makers, and fresh project ideas that weren't just hypothetical – they had real potential for implementation.

And honestly? Seeing civil service youth go from "I'm just here for the certificate" to ***"I'm actually going to do something with this!"*** was worth every second.

Moral of the story? Sometimes all it takes is a bit of inspiration, a well-structured process, and a room full of passionate people to turn civic duty into civic action.





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Lessons learned along the way

Lessons Learned Along the Way

In rural areas, **the need to integrate formal and non-formal education is even more important**. As the youth there have fewer opportunities to get involved in youth organisations or European youth programmes

It is very hard to start up a participatory process when the citizens in rural areas have never participated in this sort of activity and are **skeptical**.

Local administrators are **missing the skills and methods** necessary to implement participatory processes.

Local administrators are struggling to make full use of the possibilities within **European programmes** as they are often too busy with local issues or are missing the language skills necessary to engage properly with the programmes.

Your project/activity **does not need to change the world**, but it can be a first step towards something bigger.

Working with young people from rural areas is really **inspiring**, as for most of them was the first time in a non formal education setting and they found it really meaningful.

We need to **simplify** and **contextualise** better our intervention as we otherwise risk to alienate the local people. They need to be in charge of the process.

Thank you!

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out to us, please scan
the QR code

