



Study Visit

Turning European solidarity into
local participation.

Call for partners



Co-funded by
the European Union

The idea

What does democratic participation mean for a young person living far from major urban centres?

Across Europe, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean, young people living in rural, inland, island and peripheral territories often face fewer opportunities to access youth work, international mobility and meaningful spaces for participation.

Depopulation, youth migration, geographical isolation, limited youth services and weak dialogue with institutions can create not only a geographical periphery, but also a democratic periphery.

At the same time, international youth work and volunteering can bring new energy, relationships and a European dimension into these communities.

But one question remains: **What remains after the volunteers leave?**

CHILL LAB wants to explore how youth workers can transform international mobility and solidarity from temporary experiences into catalysts for long-term youth participation and community engagement.

From CHILL to Chill Lab

CHILL LAB grows from the practical experience of **Basilicata Link** APS, an Italian youth organisation based in Matera and active since 2012 in international mobility, non-formal education, European volunteering and community-based youth work.

Through its European Solidarity Corps activities, Basilicata Link has experimented with bringing international volunteers into very different communities.

One of the main starting points is: **CHILL** – Community Hub, Living Labs in Inland.

Through ESC Teams in small and inland communities such as Miglionico in Basilicata and Rittana in the Italian Alps, CHILL explored how international volunteering, culture and creativity can contribute to community activation in territories affected by depopulation and limited youth opportunities.

Other experiences

Other experiences expanded this approach.

In **Pisticci**, international volunteering was connected with the Lucania Film Festival, using culture and creativity as spaces for active citizenship.

Across the Adriatic and the Western Balkans, cooperation with organisations such as **Beyond Barriers** Association in Albania, **Udruženje Svetlost** (Moving Balkans in Novi Sad), Serbia, and **International Forum of Solidarity – EMMAUS** in Bosnia and Herzegovina connected European volunteering with local communities, cultural participation, solidarity and intercultural dialogue.

These experiences generated the question behind CHILL LAB:

Can international mobility become a tool not only for individual learning, but also for strengthening democratic participation in local communities?

From Mobility organizers to Community participation facilitators

Many youth organisations know how to organise a good international mobility.

But **organising mobility is not enough**.

Youth workers also need methods to connect the temporary energy created by an international project with: local young people / community organisations / municipalities / cultural actors / public spaces / local needs / opportunities for participation.

CHILL LAB therefore wants to explore a shift:

FROM MOBILITY → TO PARTICIPATION

FROM INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING → TO COMMUNITY ACTIVATION

FROM TEMPORARY PROJECTS → TO SUSTAINABLE LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

FROM MOBILITY ORGANISERS → TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FACILITATORS

What do we want to learn

Understanding participation in peripheral territories

How can youth workers identify the visible and invisible barriers preventing young people from participating in community life?

Participants will explore tools for community mapping, stakeholder mapping, listening to young people and identifying formal and informal spaces of participation.

Connecting international mobility with local participation

How can an ESC Team, youth mobility or international cultural project involve local young people rather than simply taking place around them?

We will investigate how international volunteers can become catalysts rather than protagonists, creating opportunities for local young people to participate, organise and take initiative.

Building local ecosystems for youth participation

How can youth workers create stronger relationships between:
young people – youth organisations – local authorities – cultural organisations – communities?

Participants will explore ways of transforming temporary European projects into longer-term opportunities for participation.

Basilicata as a Living Lab

LAB is planned as an approximately 7-day travelling study visit and peer-learning experience.

Participants will not spend the week inside a training room.

They will explore Matera and inland communities of Basilicata, meet young people, associations, local actors and municipalities, and critically analyse previous experiences of European volunteering.

Existing ESC experiences will not be presented as “best practices”.

Instead, they will become case studies.

We want to ask: What worked? Who participated and who did not? Did international volunteering activate local young people? What relationships were created?

What disappeared when the project ended? What remained?

The learning process will follow:

OBSERVE → LISTEN → QUESTION → COMPARE → LEARN → ADAPT →
TRANSFER

The Euro-Mediterranean Scenario

CHILL LAB wants to connect territories that may be geographically distant but experience similar challenges.

We are interested in different forms of peripherality:

GEOGRAPHICAL PERIPHERY / Distance from services, opportunities and urban centres.

SOCIAL PERIPHERY / Young people with fewer opportunities or limited access to organised youth work.

DEMOCRATIC PERIPHERY / Young people who feel distant from institutions and decision-making processes.

EUROPEAN PERIPHERY / Communities where Europe and European opportunities may feel distant from everyday life.

For this reason, we want to create a learning space connecting experiences from Southern Europe, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean.

The context of Matera and Tétouan as **Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue 2026** - and Skopje in 2028 - also offers an inspiring framework for strengthening the Euro-Mediterranean dimension of the project.

One, many methods

Photography and photovoice will be used as learning methods rather than as separate project topics.

Under the working theme: VISIBLE / INVISIBLE PARTICIPATION

participants will explore their surroundings through questions such as:

Where do young people meet? Which spaces belong to them? Where are decisions taken?

Who participates? Who remains invisible? Where can young people see “Europe” in their everyday lives?

Participatory visual storytelling will help youth workers observe communities differently and experiment with methods they can later use with young people.

Back to the local communities

CHILL LAB should not end in Basilicata.

Before the mobility, each partner will identify a:

LOCAL PARTICIPATION CHALLENGE

A concrete challenge affecting young people in its own territory.

It could concern youth migration, geographical isolation, lack of youth spaces, weak participation in volunteering, difficult dialogue with municipalities, distrust towards institutions or limited access to European opportunities.

During CHILL LAB, these challenges will become material for international peer learning.

After the mobility, each partner will be encouraged to develop a small:

CHILL LOCAL EXPERIMENT

A method, activity or community intervention inspired by the Lab and adapted to its own territory.

The process will therefore be:

LOCAL CHALLENGE → INTERNATIONAL LEARNING → LOCAL EXPERIMENTATION

Before the Study Visit, Basilicata Link will organize at least one preparatory meeting (online).

Who are we looking for?

We are looking for experienced and motivated youth organisations working with young people in:

- rural or inland areas;
- small municipalities;
- islands;
- mountain communities;
- peripheral territories;
- communities affected by depopulation or youth migration.

We are particularly interested in organisations with experience in one or more of the following fields: youth democratic participation / community-based youth work / European Solidarity Corps / volunteering / rural youth work / active citizenship / youth-local authority dialogue / inclusion of young people facing geographical barriers / participatory methods

We are especially interested in partners from Southern Europe, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean.

What kind of partnership are we building?

We are not looking for organisations that simply want to send participants to another Erasmus+ mobility. We want a small and committed partnership of organisations willing to become co-creators of CHILL LAB.

Each partner should bring:

A TERRITORY - a rural, inland or peripheral community where the organisation works.

A CHALLENGE - a concrete issue concerning youth participation.

AN EXPERIENCE - a practice, project, methodology – or even a failure – that others can learn from.

A QUESTION - something its youth workers genuinely want to explore through international peer learning.

A COMMITMENT - the willingness to transfer and test the learning after returning home.

Participant profile

Participants should be youth workers, youth leaders, project coordinators, community workers or active volunteers directly involved in youth and community work.

We particularly welcome participants who:

- work directly with young people;
- have experience in rural/peripheral territories;
- are interested in democratic participation and community development;
- are ready to critically reflect on their own practices;
- want to learn from other European and Mediterranean realities;
- can transfer the learning into their organisation and local community.

Expected outcome

CHILL LAB aims to develop:

- stronger competences among youth workers working in peripheral communities;
- practical approaches for connecting international mobility with local participation;
- new cooperation between youth organisations, communities and local authorities;
- a network of organisations working on youth participation from the peripheries;
- local experiments implemented by participating organisations after the mobility;
- a practical collection of methods and experiences that could become the CHILL LAB – Rural Democracy Toolkit.

INTERESTED IN JOINING CHILL LAB?

At this stage, the project is under development and we are looking for partners interested in contributing to its design.

If your organisation is interested, please send us a short expression of interest answering these five questions:

1. Which rural, inland, island or peripheral territory do you work with?
2. What is the main challenge concerning youth participation in your community?
3. What relevant experience, practice or project could you bring to CHILL LAB?
4. What would your youth workers like to learn from the other partners?
5. How could your organisation contribute to the project before, during and after the study visit?

You will find these and other questions in the questionnaire. Please fill it out to help us to select the most suitable partners.

[Here](#)

QUESTIONS?

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