



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT GUIDE

The case of Buglaria and Romania



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CONTENTS

CONTENTS 2

Community Involvement in Youth-Led Spaces in Rural Communities in Bulgaria..... 3

 1. Why Community Involvement Is the Engine of a Youth-Led Space 3

 2. What Youth-Led + Community-Involved Looks Like in Practice 4

 3. Six-Step Model for Community Involvement 4

 4. Tools and Templates 11

 5. Common Pitfalls and Prevention..... 13

 6. A “ready-to-run” 30-day community involvement plan (starter) 14

 7. Sustainability: how involvement continues after the project 15

Community Involvement and Rural Innovation in Youth Spaces in Romania 16

 Why Community Involvement Matters 16

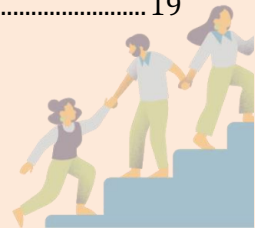
 The Case of Troianul, Teleorman County 16

 Key Elements of the Model 17

 A Framework for Community Involvement 18

 Risks and Impact..... 19

 Transferability 19



Community Involvement in Youth-Led Spaces in Rural Communities in Bulgaria




1. Why Community Involvement Is the Engine of a Youth-Led Space

In rural and peripheral areas, a youth space is rarely “one service among many.” Often, it becomes the only place where young people can meet safely, build skills, organise initiatives, and feel heard. That’s exactly why community involvement matters: when the youth space is connected to the local ecosystem (schools, families, municipalities, local NGOs, informal leaders, and businesses), it becomes stronger, safer, more trusted—and more sustainable.

Community involvement does **not** mean handing the space over to adults or turning youth work into a formal institution. It means building a bridge where the community supports youth leadership, and young people contribute to community life in visible, meaningful ways.

Key idea: In rural contexts, *trust travels faster than advertising.* Your strongest “promotion” is credible relationships and consistent presence.




2. What Youth-Led + Community-Involved Looks Like in Practice

A youth-led space with real community involvement typically has:

- **Youth ownership:** young people plan, decide, host, evaluate. Adults support, coach, and protect the process.
- **Clear participation routes:** everyone knows how to join (as participant, volunteer, youth board member, partner).
- **Mutual benefit partnerships:** partners see value (youth engagement, events, learning, community outcomes) and the youth space gets support (access, venues, mentors, visibility, in-kind resources).
- **A safe and predictable environment:** safeguarding and clear rules are visible and applied consistently.
- **Evidence and visibility:** activities are documented ethically, and the community can see results.

3. Six-Step Model for Community Involvement

Step 1: Quick Needs Scan (1–2 weeks) This model is designed for realistic conditions: small teams, limited time, and rural realities.



Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Step 1: Quick Needs Scan (1–2 weeks)

Before planning a calendar, spend a short period listening. The goal is not a “big research project,” but a clear picture of what young people need and what blocks participation.

Minimum recommended actions:

- 10–15 short conversations with young people (in the youth space, school breaks, online)
- 5–10 conversations with stakeholders (teachers, youth workers, parents, municipality, NGOs)


Use these 3 questions:

1. What works well for young people in our community today?
2. What is missing or hard to access (learning, culture, sport, support, safe places)?
3. What would make you more likely to participate in a youth space?

Output of Step 1:

A one-page “Needs Snapshot” with:

- Top 5 needs
- Top 5 barriers (transport, timing, motivation, fear of judgement, cost, etc.)
- Who is most excluded (and why)



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Step 2: Create participation routes (1 week)

Community involvement becomes real when people know exactly how to engage.

Create **three simple routes** and communicate them everywhere:

1. **Join activities** (open, low-barrier participation)
2. **Become part of the youth team** (volunteering, peer roles, youth board)
3. **Co-create with the community** (events, labs, joint initiatives)


Make it visible:

- a simple poster in the youth space and school
- a pinned post online
- a short sign-up form (QR code works well)
- one clear contact person

Output of Step 2:

A “Participation Map” (one page) describing each route + how to join.





Youth-Led Spaces for Transformation

Step 3: Build partnerships (2–4 weeks)

Rural communities rely on networks. Partnership work is not “optional”—it’s infrastructure.

Start with 5 priority partners:


- 1 school / teacher network
- municipality or local youth / culture department
- local NGO / community centre
- informal leaders (sports coach, librarian, community activist)
- local business (for in-kind support, venues, materials)

Partnership rule that works:

Ask for a **micro-action** first (something small within 30 days), not a big commitment.

Examples of micro-actions:

- school shares your activity invitation to students
- municipality co-hosts an open day or provides a hall once
- NGO provides one guest trainer or a workshop
- business sponsors snacks, printing, or a small prize



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Output of Step 3:

A partnership plan with:

- partner name + contact
- value proposition (what you offer / what you ask)
- micro-action + date
- next step after the micro-action

Step 4: Deliver one co-creation action every month

Community involvement grows through repetition, not one “big event.”

Choose one monthly format (rotate if needed):

- **Community Lab:** youth + adults solve a local issue (waste, safety, leisure, inclusion)
- **Open Day:** youth-led tours, mini-workshops, sign-up corner
- **Intergenerational session:** storytelling, skills exchange, local history, crafts
- **Local challenge session:** “What would improve life here in 90 days?”

Non-negotiable youth-led element:

Young people must co-host: welcome, facilitation, presentation, or documentation.



Output of Step 4:

A short “Co-creation note” (half a page):

- what happened
- who joined
- what was produced/decided
- what is next

Step 5: Visibility and trust (continuous)


Visibility is not about “more posts.” It’s about **clear proof that something meaningful is happening.**

A simple visibility structure:

- 1 photo that shows *process* (people working, not just posing)
- 1 line that links it to the project/activity
- 1 learning or result (what changed / what was produced)
- 1 next step and how others can join

Ethics and safeguarding:

- always consent (especially with minors)
- avoid exposing sensitive details
- focus on dignity, not “poverty stories”



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Output of Step 5:

A monthly “evidence pack” folder with:

- attendance (if relevant)
- photos
- link(s) to posts
- short summary
- feedback form responses (if collected)

Step 6: Measure, improve, repeat (monthly/quarterly)

Community involvement becomes sustainable when people see that their voice has consequences.

Monthly (30 minutes):

- review participation numbers
- review feedback
- choose 1 improvement action

Quarterly:

- partner check-in
- update the participation routes
- review inclusion progress



Output of Step 6:

A short “Improvements log”:

- feedback received
- what you changed
- when you changed it
- what you will test next

4. Tools and Templates

Tool 1: Partnership outreach message (email/DM)

Hello,


We are developing youth-led activities and initiatives in our community and would like to invite you to a short meeting to explore cooperation. Our youth space supports young people through learning activities, volunteering, and community events. We believe we can work together to increase youth participation and create positive local outcomes.

Could we schedule a 30-minute meeting next week?


Thank you in advance.

Tool 2: Quick Needs Scan (mini script)

- “What do young people actually do after school / work here?”



Community Involvement in Youth-Led Spaces in Rural Communities in Bulgaria

- “What is missing that would keep young people engaged locally?”
 - “If there was one thing we could create in a youth space that would help, what should it be?”
- 

Tool 3: Youth-led partnership agreement (micro-format)

Partner: ...

Youth space offers: ...

Partner supports with: ...

First micro-action (30 days): ...

Contact persons: ...

Visibility agreement: logo use + consent rules + link to posts

Tool 4: Monthly indicators (simple and realistic)

- total participants / first-time / returning
- number of youth-led proposals implemented
- number of partner interactions (meeting / joint action)
- satisfaction score (short form)
- inclusion marker (participation of fewer-opportunity youth)

Tool 5: Evidence checklist (report-ready)

- Clear activity title and link to project/task
- Attendance list (where required)
- 3–5 photos (with consent)
- Short summary (what/why/results/next)
- Links to visibility posts
- Feedback form + key conclusions

5. Common Pitfalls and Prevention

Pitfall 1: Adults take over “because it’s easier.”


Fix: define youth roles in every event (host, facilitator, documenter). Adults support, not lead.

Pitfall 2: Partnerships stay “friendly” but never become practical.

Fix: always agree on a micro-action with a date. Trust grows through delivery.

Pitfall 3: Low participation after the first events.

Fix: repeat formats monthly, keep them short, and use bridges (schools, coaches, youth leaders). Build routines.



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Pitfall 4: Weak documentation, last-minute reporting stress.

Fix: evidence pack routine within 24 hours after each action; standard file naming.



Pitfall 5: Visibility creates safeguarding risks.

Fix: consent-first storytelling, avoid exposing vulnerable identities, focus on process and outcomes.

6. A “ready-to-run” 30-day community involvement plan (starter)

Week 1: quick needs scan + stakeholder list

Week 2: publish participation routes + schedule open day

Week 3: 5 partner outreaches + 2 meetings + agree micro-actions

Week 4: first co-creation event + feedback + evidence pack + improvement action



7. Sustainability: how involvement continues after the project

Community involvement becomes sustainable when it is embedded into routines:

- a youth board meeting monthly
- one co-creation action monthly
- partner check-in quarterly
- visible “changes log” so the community sees progress

Over time, the youth space shifts from “a place that organises activities” to “a platform that grows leadership and solves local challenges.”

Community Involvement and Rural Innovation in Youth Spaces in Romania

Why Community Involvement Matters

In rural areas, youth spaces cannot function as isolated or closed environments. Villages and small communes operate through dense social networks, informal leadership structures, and limited institutional infrastructure. Any initiative that does not connect to this ecosystem risks being perceived as external, temporary, or irrelevant.

Community involvement gives a youth space legitimacy and social acceptance. It increases sustainability by spreading responsibility across actors. It builds local ownership so that the initiative is not seen as belonging to one organisation or one individual. It reduces resistance by creating transparency and dialogue. It also opens access to resources such as space, volunteers, knowledge, and informal support networks.

Without intentional community engagement, rural youth spaces risk marginalisation or dependency on short term funding or political goodwill.

The Case of Troianul, Teleorman County

The youth space created by Filiala Asociației Se Poate in Troianul offers a practical example of rural youth work connected to community development. Troianul is a rural commune facing

common structural challenges: youth migration, limited extracurricular infrastructure, economic constraints, and strong informal social dynamics.

The youth space was developed in partnership with the municipality and the safe space of the commune: the local priest, who already had experience in community support and non-formal education. This partnership embedded the initiative within existing local structures instead of positioning it as an external project. From the beginning, the space was presented as a community asset, not only a youth NGO initiative.

Key Elements of the Model

A defining feature of the Troianul model is partnership-based governance. Cooperation with local authorities, educational institutions, volunteers, and other community actors created shared responsibility. This reduced institutional resistance and increased long term stability. When multiple actors are involved, the initiative becomes part of the local system rather than dependent on a single leader.

Another central element is the youth led approach. Young people are involved in designing activities, volunteering, participating in mobility projects, and representing the space in community events. Their role is practical and visible. Youth voice is not only declared in documents but expressed through action and responsibility.

Innovation in this context is social rather than technological. In rural environments, innovation often means reframing existing



resources. It may involve activating unused community spaces, building intergenerational dialogue, or connecting local youth to European opportunities. In Troianul, change emerged through participation, collaboration, and exposure to new experiences rather than through digital infrastructure or advanced equipment.

A Framework for Community Involvement

The experience in Troianul suggests a practical process that can be adapted elsewhere. First, community mapping is essential. This means identifying institutions, informal leaders, existing tensions, and available assets.

Second, stakeholder engagement must be intentional. Meetings with the municipality, school representatives, parents, and local actors help clarify expectations and build trust.

Third, youth co creation ensures relevance. Young people should help define priorities, rules, and activities. This builds ownership and long-term engagement.

Fourth, visible community action strengthens legitimacy. Implementing initiatives that benefit the wider community, not only youth participants, shifts perception and demonstrates value.

Finally, sustainability planning must include diversified funding and long-term partnerships to reduce dependency on single sources.

Risks and Impact

Rural youth spaces face risks such as political instrumentalization, volunteer burnout, financial dependency, and community scepticism. These risks can be reduced through transparent governance, clear role distribution, consistent communication, and diversified resources.

Community impact can be measured through increased youth participation, growth in partnerships, youth led initiatives implemented, volunteer retention, and improved perception among local stakeholders.

Transferability

The experience of Troianul demonstrates that rural youth spaces can act as hubs of community innovation when involvement is structured and intentional. Youth leadership, partnership with local institutions, and visible community engagement strengthen long term sustainability.

While each rural context is different, the core lesson remains consistent: youth spaces that integrate into the local ecosystem and activate community assets can contribute not only to youth development, but also to broader local growth.





Asociația SE POATE (Romania) — a youth-centred non-governmental organisation founded in 2014, dedicated to fostering active citizenship, social inclusion, non-formal education, intercultural learning and sustainable community engagement. SE POATE plays a pivotal role in designing and delivering international projects that build skills, promote youth employability and strengthen cross-border cooperation.



Young Improvers for Youth Development – YIYD (Bulgaria) — a grassroots youth organisation established in 2015, deeply engaged in non-formal education, volunteerism and international exchanges. YIYD works to expand opportunities for young people to learn, connect and co-create change both locally and across Europe, fostering active participation, personal development and community cohesion.



Spoleczna Grupa Medialna / Media Group (Poland) — a partner organisation skilled in youth mobility, capacity building and practical training for youth workers. Its engagement in this project includes provision of thematic mobilities and support for peer learning experiences that enhance competencies in youth space management, inclusion practices and cross-cultural cooperation.



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