

FINAL PROJECT PUBLICATION



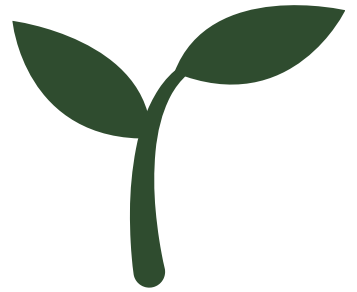


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THE SEED COMMUNITIES PROJECT



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CALL, RATIONALE, NEEDS

The Sustainable Empowered Ethical Democratic Communities (SEED Communities) Project, is a Town-Twinning project, funded under the CERV Programme of the European Union.

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme provides funding for citizens' engagement, equality for all and the implementation of rights and EU values.

In particular, Town Twinning projects aim at promoting exchanges between people from different countries to reinforce mutual understanding and tolerance and to give them the opportunity to broaden their perspective and develop a sense of European belonging and identity.

The CERV programme helps to promote intercultural dialogue by bringing people of different nationalities and different languages together and giving them the opportunity to participate in common activities.

Within this context, Town-Twinning projects raise awareness of the richness of Europe's cultural and linguistic environment and promote mutual understanding and respect, contributing to the development of a respectful, dynamic and multifaceted European identity and the respect of common values, democracy and fundamental rights.

In relation to SEED Communities, the rationale of the project came by the acknowledgment that sustainability is often linked with urban and stimulant environments. If it is taken into consideration small communities and hard-to-reach groups, sustainability comes not as a priority.

Therefore, the project SEED Communities aims to address the habits of the communities and **re-think them in a sustainable way from a grassroots level**, especially involving the older generations and the hard-to-reach groups, reflecting, on the same time, on the link between sustainability and human rights.

The project is relevant to the scope of the call in the context of **promoting sustainable and inclusive practices in the communities, according to the principle of democratic development, that encompasses eco-friendly and sustainable practices as well.**

The project emerged from the identified need to enhance the knowledge of local people about sustainability and the green economy, with the goal of protecting the surrounding environments through strategies that start with the citizenry. It adopted an **intersectional approach**, in which climate justice come along with social justice. The issues tackled by SEED Communities had as one of the core themes the link between discrimination and climate justice.

THE PARTNERSHIP



THE PARTNERSHIP

LIGHTHOUSE LANGUAGES (COO)

Lighthouse Languages was established in Orte, Italy, about 30 km from the city of Viterbo (Lazio Region), in 2012.

Its founders are experts in the field of intercultural mediation and language training for children, adolescents and adults. In its first years of activity, the association aimed to carry out intercultural mediation, dialogue and social integration, and language courses for young people and adults.

The organisation works at local and national level to promote youth exchanges and participation activities for young people, the dissemination of European values of citizenship, equality, democracy, freedom and security and active democratic engagement.

The main objective is to promote social inclusion, multiculturalism, multilingualism and the democratic participation of young people in a changing society.



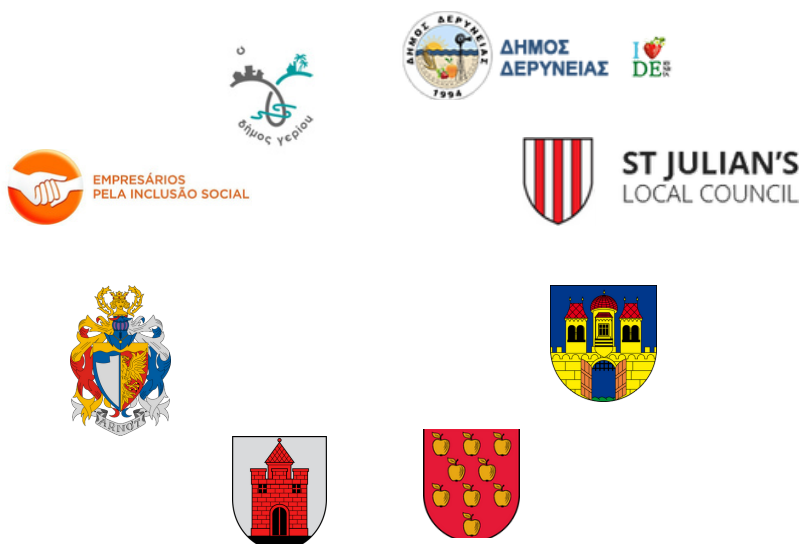
In the SEED Communities Project, Lighthouse Languages assumed the role of coordinator, managing an already established partnership, which worked synergistically for the realization of the project.

In particular, together with the local teams, it coordinated project activities, communication and dissemination, as well as on-site activities.

The partnership strengths are linked with its cooperative approach, determined by an established knowledge of each other and thus of the expertise that each partner could bring and also by the geographical and cultural diversity of each partner: indeed, in the project was involved the organization APPIS from Portugal, the St. Julians Local Council from Malta, Deryneia and Yeri Municipalities from Cyprus, Krimulda from Latvia, Arnot Municipality from Hungary, Panevezys Municipality from Lithuania and Jevišovice Municipality from Czech Republic.

Each partner elected a Local Team, responsible for the management of local activities, organisation, dissemination and communication.

In addition, the teams from Portugal and Cyprus hosted the two International Meetings, organising with the PAs, the local community and civil society, as well as introducing the delegations to the local cultural heritage.



FIRST INTERNATIONAL MEETING



FIRST INTERNATIONAL MEETING - ENVIRONMENTAL EU POLICIES: SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

From the 26th of September to the 3rd of October 2024, delegations from Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic and Hungary gathered in Paredes, Portugal, for the first International Meeting of the Town Twinning Project funded by the European Union, SEED Communities: Sustainable, Empowered, Ethical Democratic Communities.

The rationale behind this project stemmed from recognizing that sustainability is often associated with urban areas and more dynamic environments, while small, rural communities and hard-to-reach groups tend to view sustainability as a lower priority.

SEED Communities sought to address this gap by rethinking local habits and practices in a sustainable way, engaging older generations and marginalized groups. It also emphasizes the connection between sustainability and human rights, ensuring a just and inclusive transition for everyone.

The event featured a series of seminars, workshops, debates, and practical activities designed to tackle key topics related to sustainability and social justice. The main focus was on „Environmental EU Policies: Sustainability and Social Justice,” encouraging participants to discuss how European environmental policies could be implemented at the local level in a socially equitable manner.

The exchange of good practices among the participants was one of the key outcomes of this gathering. For example, the delegations shared information on potential EU funding opportunities that could be leveraged to develop local, sustainable, and socially just projects. This exchange of knowledge proved invaluable in helping communities understand how to access financial resources that would allow them to implement sustainability projects tailored to their specific local needs.

In return, delegates from each country also provided insights into the local issues they faced concerning sustainability.

Participants from Portugal, for example, highlighted the challenges faced by rural communities in adopting green energy solutions, while Italy shared strategies for engaging generations in sustainability efforts.

SECOND INTERNATIONAL MEETING



SECOND INTERNATIONAL MEETING - SUSTAINABILITY AND HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS: BEST PRACTICES AND GRASSROOTS DISCUSSION

From October 21st to October 28th, Ayia Napa, Cyprus, played host to the second international meeting of the SEED Communities project. This gathering brought together delegations from Cyprus, Italy, Malta, Hungary, Portugal, and Lithuania to explore and discuss the theme "Sustainability and Hard-to-Reach Groups: Best Practices and Grassroots Discussions."

The central objective of this second meeting was to explore effective methods for engaging hard-to-reach groups in sustainability efforts, while also fostering a spirit of collaboration and sharing best practices across participating countries.

The program included a series of seminars, workshops, and debates, allowing delegates to dive deep into various approaches that have succeeded in making sustainable development more accessible and inclusive at the grassroots level.

Participants shared insights into the challenges and successes of their local efforts, emphasizing how innovative projects can bring citizens, particularly those from marginalized or isolated backgrounds, into the heart of sustainability initiatives. This exchange proved invaluable in highlighting adaptable strategies that address the unique needs and circumstances of each community involved.

One of the event's most significant outcomes was the signing of the SEED Communities Joint Declaration. This declaration marks a pledge from all participating organizations to continue cooperating on sustainable and inclusive development initiatives. The partnership has committed to several key areas for future collaboration, including sustainable and inclusive development, cultural exchanges and tourism, education and youth initiatives, local governance.

The meeting in Ayia Napa has strengthened the ties between each participating delegation, solidifying a shared vision for a more inclusive, sustainable future. The knowledge and inspiration drawn from this meeting will now fuel further initiatives, enhancing collaboration across borders and empowering local communities to shape their sustainable futures.

This second international meeting has laid a strong foundation for future actions, providing a platform for community leaders, policymakers, and citizens alike to bring real change and promote sustainability across Europe.

THE JOINT DECLARATION



SIGNATURE OF A JOINT DECLARATION: THE COMMITMENT OF THE PARTNERSHIP TO BUILD A COOPERATIVE STRATEGY

The SEED Communities project culminated in a milestone with the signing of the Joint Declaration during the second international meeting in Ayia Napa, Cyprus. This document symbolizes the shared commitment of all participating organizations to continue working together toward sustainable and inclusive development. It reflects the collective insights, experiences, and aspirations that emerged throughout the project.

The declaration builds on the themes explored during the meetings, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and grassroots involvement in addressing sustainability challenges. Participants pledged to prioritize sustainable practices that are inclusive of all community members, especially those from marginalized or hard-to-reach groups. The focus is on fostering an equitable approach to sustainability—one that ensures environmental goals go hand-in-hand with social justice.

Recognizing the role of communities as drivers of change, the declaration also highlights the need for greater involvement of civil society and grassroots organizations. These groups were identified as essential partners in engaging citizens, particularly those who might otherwise be excluded from sustainability initiatives. By leveraging local knowledge and relationships, these organizations can act as bridges between policy and practice, ensuring that sustainable development is rooted in the realities of everyday life.

Education and youth engagement were another cornerstone of the declaration. Participants committed to developing programs that promote sustainability awareness and foster intergenerational dialogue. These initiatives aim to inspire younger generations while drawing on the wisdom and experience of older community members. Additionally, the declaration underscored the importance of cultural exchange, tourism, and local governance as key areas where sustainability can be integrated into broader community development.

The Joint Declaration serves not only as a commitment but as a blueprint for future collaboration. It establishes a shared vision among the participating organizations and lays the groundwork for continued partnership. **The signing of the declaration marks the start of a long-term effort to translate the project's lessons into lasting change, ensuring that the principles of sustainability and inclusion remain central to local and European development strategies.**



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN FUNDS IN ACHIEVING A JUST TRANSITION

The concept of a just transition lies at the heart of Europe's vision for sustainable development, representing the intersection of environmental responsibility and social equity. It is not merely about transitioning to greener practices but ensuring that the journey to sustainability is inclusive, equitable, and **leaves no one behind**. Throughout the SEED Communities project, this principle was a recurring theme, sparking discussions on how European funds can play a transformative role in turning this vision into reality.

A just transition requires addressing the challenges faced by communities that are often excluded from sustainability efforts—rural populations, older generations, marginalized groups, and those reliant on industries at risk of obsolescence due to green policies. European funding mechanisms, particularly those tied to sustainability and social innovation, offer immense potential to bridge these gaps. By providing financial resources, the European Union empowers local governments, civil society organizations, and grassroots initiatives to create tailored solutions that address specific community needs.

The idea of a just transition calls for targeted support to address disparities. For instance, simplifying access to funding for rural and disadvantaged areas can ensure that these communities are not left behind in the sustainability movement. Moreover, fostering partnerships between municipalities and civil society organizations can create synergies, as local groups often have the trust and insight needed to engage hard-to-reach populations effectively.

One of the most compelling reflections during the project was the realization that European funds are not just financial tools but also instruments of solidarity. They embody a commitment to shared progress, allowing diverse communities to work toward common goals while respecting their unique challenges and contexts. This alignment between funding opportunities and the principles of a just transition underscores the importance of tailoring sustainability efforts to include everyone, especially those most at risk of exclusion.

Ultimately, a just transition supported by European funds is about more than achieving environmental targets—it is about empowering communities, fostering inclusivity, and building a sense of collective purpose. As the SEED Communities project demonstrated, when local needs and European resources come together, the result is not only sustainable development but also stronger, more cohesive communities.

REFLECTIONS



INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABILITY: ENGAGING HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS THROUGH GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES

Sustainability efforts often face a critical challenge: how to engage hard-to-reach groups who are frequently left out of mainstream conversations and initiatives. These groups, which may include older adults, rural populations, immigrants, and the economically marginalized, are vital stakeholders in achieving sustainable development. Their exclusion not only undermines the inclusivity of sustainability initiatives but also represents a missed opportunity to tap into their unique perspectives, experiences, and contributions.

Grassroots initiatives play a pivotal role in bridging this gap. By operating at the community level, these efforts are uniquely positioned to connect with individuals and groups who may be distrustful of formal institutions or disconnected from broader policy frameworks. Throughout the SEED Communities project, participants shared inspiring examples of how grassroots initiatives have successfully engaged hard-to-reach populations in sustainability.

One recurring insight was the importance of trust and cultural understanding.

Community organizations, faith groups, and local networks often have established relationships with marginalized populations, making them effective channels for communication and engagement. For example, the “Eco-Parishes” initiative in Portugal mobilized faith-based communities to promote sustainable practices, leveraging the trusted role of local churches to engage older residents and rural families. Similarly, Lithuania’s “Creative Home(less)” program used art therapy as a gateway to involve homeless individuals, fostering social inclusion as a first step toward their participation in sustainability efforts.

Education and accessibility emerged as key themes. Many hard-to-reach groups face barriers such as language, limited digital literacy, or geographic isolation. Grassroots initiatives that prioritize accessibility—whether through multilingual materials, face-to-face engagement, or mobile outreach—can overcome these hurdles. Projects that integrate sustainability education with practical benefits, such as community gardens or energy efficiency workshops, often see higher levels of participation and long-term impact.

Another critical reflection was the need to view sustainability not as a stand-alone goal but as interconnected with social and economic challenges. For many hard-to-reach groups, daily survival takes precedence over environmental concerns. Successful grassroots initiatives often align sustainability goals with immediate community needs, such as creating jobs, improving living conditions, or enhancing local food security.

REFLECTIONS



Finally, the project underscored the power of collaboration. Partnerships between grassroots organizations, local governments, and larger institutions are essential for scaling impact and ensuring sustainability initiatives reach diverse populations. These partnerships can amplify the voices of hard-to-reach groups, ensuring their concerns and priorities are reflected in broader sustainability agendas.

In reflecting on these insights, it becomes clear that sustainability must be rooted in inclusivity. Grassroots initiatives offer a pathway to ensure that no one is left behind, turning sustainability from an abstract ideal into a lived reality for even the most isolated and marginalized members of society. By empowering communities at the local level, these efforts demonstrate that sustainability is not just a global imperative but a shared journey shaped by every individual and group.





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