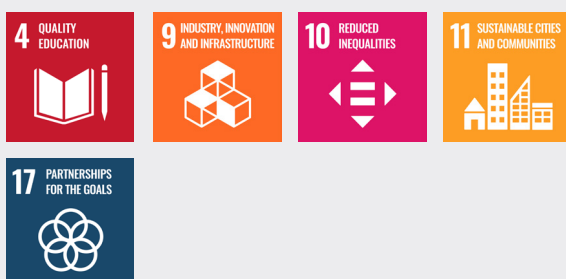


VRATSA YOUTH CENTER



AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

3. CULTURE AND EDUCATION
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
8. CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

**YOUTH, EDUCATION, CAPACITY, TRAINING,
HUMAN RIGHTS, PARTICIPATION, LEADERSHIP,
SKILL, LIFE-LONG LEARNING, EQUITY**



1. Vratsa and culture

Vratsa is a city in Bulgaria and has 49,569 inhabitants (in 2022). The municipality of Vratsa contributes to the preservation and enrichment of the cultural and historical heritage, Bulgarian language, customs and traditions, investing in and preserving the Bulgarian culture and cultural monuments to preserve its place in a united Europe.

State and municipal cultural institutes which operate in the municipality of Vratsa are the Community Center "Razvitie", Library "Hristo Botev", Center for Work with Children, Vratsa Youth House and Youth Center - Vratsa. Youth Center – Vratsa works with children and youth providing opportunities to develop new skills and enrich their knowledge. However, there are a few main challenges that stay in front of Vratsa. The first one is how to involve young people in the cultural and social life of the city more effectively. The second one is how to make them an active part of the process of creating and organizing events and the last one is how to inspire the youth to stay and live in Vratsa.

THE YOUTH CENTER WAS BORN TO CREATE AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY THAT CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF VRATSA.

The municipality of Vratsa contributes to the preservation and enrichment of the historical heritage and culture, Bulgarian language, and traditions. The Center promotes non-formal education by using different kinds of tools like arts and culture through different kind of events. For example, the Center promotes education and culture through board games in the Historical Museum, where youngsters can play educational games. The Youth Center and its volunteers organized workshops for making traditional Bulgarian costumes and knowing more about their culture. As educational institution, we also support human rights education and tolerance between different ethnic groups.

2. Objectives and implementation of the project

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The general aim of the project of Youth Center-Vratsa is to create an active community that can participate in the cultural and social life of its town by using the non-formal educational methods. For young people Youth Center – Vratsa is a place where they can develop themselves. Trainings like "BEZ PLAN" and "Summer Youth Academy" help young people to learn more about human rights and equality, how to work in a team and how to organize cultural and social events by using the non-formal educational methods. The youth initiative "Creating Together" brings benefits for the young people who participate in the implementation process but also stands as a good example for all people. These initiatives show local people that young people can be an active part of the community and take care of the place they live in. This project helps to increase young people's faith in their own abilities.



THE IMPACT OF THE YOUTH CENTER IS HUGE: IT HAS INCREASED YOUNG PEOPLE'S FAITH IN THEIR OWN ABILITIES.

2.2. Development of the project

Before this project, youngsters did not have so many opportunities to express themselves. Now, they can participate in different kind of clubs and youth initiatives. For the Youth Center, the most important thing is young people to have opportunities to share their ideas and make them in reality. We organize non-formal training, which helps youth learn more about cultural diversity and human rights.

The initiative came from Youth Center - Vratsa, Vratsa Municipality and the Ministry of Education and Science.

The project was part of the Project BGLD -1.003 - 0004 - C01 "Youth Centre Vratsa - a factor for development of the North-West", funded under the Programme "Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Improved Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups", with the financial support of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area 2014 – 2021. It was planned for a period of 36 months with an approved grant of BGN 1 587 473,97. The priority group is young people aged 15 to 29, including representatives of vulnerable groups. The partner organizations are FITT (Timis County Youth Fondation) - ENYC from Romania and Youth Center Hamarinn, Hafnarfjörður, Iceland.

Some of the activities included in the project are:

- » Research on the current interests and needs of young people living in small and remote settlements or economically less developed areas.
- » Organization of motivational talks and prevention campaigns aiming to motivate young people from rural areas and at risk of social exclusion to continue their education and achieve their life goals.
- » Conducting non-formal trainings to encourage young people to develop themselves and become a vital part of the local civil society.
- » Implementing 40 youth initiatives in areas such as sport, ecology, culture, education, youth spaces and art, where young people will be the leaders of positive change.
- » Organization of consultation forums and guidance in the search for suitable employment.
- » Conducting non-formal educational training activities and youth exchanges with partner organizations from Romania and Iceland.



- » Creating a useful handbook for youth workers, trainers and Roma mediators.
- » Creating youth clubs according to the interests of young people where additional education activities will be carried out. There are 6 clubs: Talents Club, Board Games Club, Development and Entrepreneurship Youth Club, Japanese Culture Club and Vlogger Club.

The clubs of the Youth Center improve the social skills and the knowledge of youth about human rights, culture, languages, and entrepreneurship by organizing indoor and outdoor events on these topics and by participating in non-formal training. Through this project, the team of Youth Center Vratsa and the partner FITT -Timisoara created the handbook Participatory Arts which shows new methods for activation of youth through arts and board gaming.

With partners from Romania, the handbook "Participatory Art" has been published: it provides a platform for self-expression, empowerment, and personal growth by actively involving youth in the creative process. Thanks to this, we can promote cultural diversity and traditions strengthening the voice of young people and empowering them to participate in the local social and civil life.

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

One impact is territorial: the Youth Center now works on a regional level with partners from villages and small cities. Creating opportunities for youth from rural areas. Thanks to this, young people are visiting the Center and the staff can organize more initiatives outside the city.

Another impact is self-confidence: young people feel more prepared for life's challenges by taking part in trainings related to ecology, human rights, soft skills and culture. As an example, the youth starts to act more responsibly about climate change by organizing eco-training among their peers. Also, young people see Youth Center Vratsa as a safe place to grow and institutions and NGOs as trustworthy partners.



3.2. Evaluation

The project has several sets of targets and indicators:

- » 40 youth initiatives. 36 organized, and 4 are under implementation.
- » Creating a methodology, the handbook Participatory Arts, with the partner from FiTT - Timisoara. A digital version in Bulgarian and English language is available here: <https://bit.ly/HandBo0k>.
- » Partnership with a donor country, the Youth Center Hammarin, in Iceland. They will translate the handbook into their native language.
- » During the project, the team, to share good practices and gain knowledge on how to improve our work on a local level, visited other youth centers in Bulgaria and Europe.
- » International youth exchanges with partners from Romania and Iceland. Strengthening international communication and expanding young people's perspective about the world.
- » Working in our National Network of Youth Centers is also the key to the success of our projects. Sharing ideas and good practices.

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3.3. Key factors

The key factors to the success of our project is the quality of the governance and the quality and variety of the events organized by the Youth Center.



Also, another key factor is capacity to listen to young people. The youth workers and Roma mediators know the interests of their volunteers because they have good communication and trust. The youth initiatives give young people chances to organize events which they have always wanted.

3.4. Continuity

Municipality Vratsa will continue supporting the work of Youth Center - Vratsa by annually giving a budget to work with youth according to the local youth plan. The Center will continue organizing non-formal educational trainings and events as a good practice that was created under the project searching not only the support of the Municipality but also the local and national stakeholders. Events, such as Board Game Jam and Vratsa Game Night, have become part of the cultural calendar of our city. Through training based on the created handbook Participatory Arts, we will continue supporting all young people and minorities. With the support of Vratsa Municipality, we will try to encourage young people to participate and also to create new ideas for festivals and cultural events. This recognition by UCLG as a good practice becomes a very strong instrument for attracting new partners and cultural institutions to organize more interesting events in our city.

The good communication between the local state and the civic sector created the Open Vratsa platform as the new cultural and touristic platform. Thanks to the good collaboration the information for our events reaches bigger audiences. An advice that we can give to other municipalities is to create a better communication with local NGOs.

4. Further information

Vratsa was a candidate for the sixth UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (November 2023 – March 2024). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June 2024, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

This article was written by PhD Marieta Zhivkova and PhD Nikola Zhivkov, youth workers at Youth Center - Vratsa, Vratsa, Bulgaria.

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