

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONAL THINKING

How can we rethink public facilities in Barcelona to ensure they remain locally driven spaces of connection, belonging, and inclusion?



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**Explore how the
challenge of
generational renewal in
associations is
addressed in other
countries**

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Introduction

Civic associations across Europe (and beyond) face an aging membership and struggle to attract younger people.

In response, governments and communities are piloting youth-targeted initiatives, institutional reforms and intergenerational programs to revitalize these associations.

This research aims to explore how different countries address generational renewal in associations, identifying effective strategies and potential solutions.

Generational Renewal in Community Associations-Global Perspective

Aging Membership:

- 71% of U.S. professional association members are over 40 (2022 survey).
- In Sweden, membership is decreasing, especially among younger people.

Underlying Causes:

- **Time Constraints & Career Paths:** “Jungle-gym” careers; limited free time versus traditional 30-year tenures.
- **Digital Expectations:** Preference for fast, interactive, personalized experiences over paper newsletters and lengthy in-person meetings.

Barriers to Youth Engagement:

- **Perceived Irrelevance:** Lack of visibility on issues that matter to Millennials/Gen Z.
- **Intimidating Culture:** Dominance of veteran activists, hierarchical structures, and rigid schedules.
- **Awareness Gap:** Many young adults don't know associations exist or feel out of place when they do.

Challenges to Generational Renewal in Barcelona's Community Associations



Youth Housing Instability: Frequent moves and precarious tenancy make long-term neighborhood ties difficult for younger adults.



Meeting Fatigue: Traditional two-hour meetings deter time-pressed young professionals.



Rigid Structures & Formats: Hierarchical decision-making and fixed schedules



Awareness & Relevance Gaps: Many youth are unaware of traditional associations or feel drawn instead to issue-specific groups (e.g., housing, water remunicipalization).



Limited Digital Engagement: Reliance on paper newsletters and in-person assemblies falls short of young peoples' expectations.



Cultural Barriers: Perception that veteran-led groups are closed to new ideas discourages young leadership.



Issues in Maintaining Political Independence



Changing Patterns of Youth Participation

“It is important to recognize that lower youth involvement in traditional associations does not necessarily mean younger generations are apathetic about their communities or the issues.”

Guiding Questions

What kinds of structures or practices are other countries using to give young people real decision-making power in community associations?

How are associations in other countries dealing with tensions between older members and younger newcomers, especially around leadership and cultural change?

Field work/ conducted interviews

- Juan Camilo Ramos Barón from the FAVB



- Cora Althusmann – finance representative from mosaïque e.V. in Lüneburg, Germany

- community space that brings people from different cultures together through events, art, and social engagement



- Input from the visits of different spaces in Barcelona

- Canòdrom, Espai Jove Garcilaso, Biblioteca Trinitat Vella

Kultur macht stark - Bündnisse für Bildung



GEFÖRDERT VOM



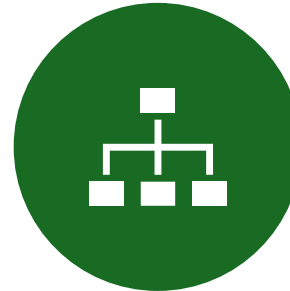
Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

- Federal state financial aid from the ministry for culture and education
- Supports projects for children (ages 3-18) from vulnerable backgrounds
- Has reached around 1,1 million children since it launched in 2013
- Favours creativity, communication skills and cultural interest in children
- Weaknesses like missing leading positions for vulnerable groups and high bureaucratic hurdles

Learnings from the fieldwork



Trust and responsibility empower youth: Young people engage more when they are trusted and given real responsibilities



Hierarchies block dialogue: Power imbalances and bureaucracy hinder open, eye-level conversations



Intergenerational dialogue is easy, but rare: It's simple to create, yet rarely implemented in practice (*Educommunication*)



Compassion can build access to marginalized youth: Compassionate presence and attentive listening are key to reaching less-involved young people (*Biblioteca Trinitat Vella*)

Proposal 1 – Youth-Led Committees or Advisory Boards



Giving young members real authority and responsibilities



Give young people active ownership



Authentic participation builds ownership and commitment



Research shows that moving beyond symbolic roles to real decision-making power significantly boosts motivation and long-term engagement.

Proposal 2 – Intergenerational Dialogue

- Facilitated Dialogues inspired by the Climate Café Model (used to combat climate anxiety)
- flexibly structured, e.g. starting with an informational input followed by small-group discussions guided by key questions to encourage exchange of perspectives, experiences, and ideas
- This can be used to:
 1. To tackle problems of the neighborhoods to find solutions
 2. Within the associations to help generations exchange knowledge and expertise as intergenerational learning
- Could also include a reward system for participating in each meeting to steer interest

Conclusion

- Our fieldwork revealed that the absence of intergenerational exchange often stems from a lack of shared encounters which is further compounded by a series of other structural and cultural barriers such as social economic problems (housing is one example), traditional methodologies used by associations in their campaigning, and political partisanship.
- In various visits, it became evident that fostering dialogue across generations is not inherently complex—*Educommunication*, for instance, demonstrated that simple tools like a microphone and camera sufficed—yet many initiatives fail to create inclusive formats that engage all age groups.
- Particularly at the *Biblioteca Trinitat Vella*, we observed that engaging with young people in vulnerable situations requires a compassionate approach grounded in listening, observing, and respectful dialogue.

- These insights informed two complementary strategies:
 1. A regulatory framework aimed at ensuring accessible and inclusive decision-making processes.
 2. The creation of participatory spaces that enable encounters at eye level, free from hierarchical structures.
- We argue for the necessity of combining top-down and bottom-up approaches: opportunities must be both institutionally enabled and meaningfully taken up at the grassroots level to foster sustainable engagement.

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Thank You!