Empowering Neighbourhoods: Generational Renewal in Community Associations

Stream 4: Explore how the challenge of generational renewal in associations is addressed in other countries

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1. Introduction

Community and civic associations around the world are facing a demographic challenge: their membership is aging, while younger generations are under-represented. Many traditional neighborhood, cultural, or volunteer associations report difficulties attracting and retaining youth participation. For example, a 2022 survey of professional associations in the United States found that on average 71% of members were over the age of 40, highlighting the tilt toward older generations (Glisson, 2022). In parallel, longitudinal data indicate that youth membership in associations has declined in many countries. In Sweden, the share of young people (ages 16–29) belonging to at least one association fell from 76% in 1998 to 59% by 2020 (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society [MUCF], 2021), a much sharper drop than that seen among older adults. This pattern is repeated in other contexts, indicating concerns that without "generational renewal" i.e. infusion of new, younger members and leaders; community associations may stagnate or even fold.

It is important to clarify that lower youth involvement in traditional associations does not necessarily link to lack of concern or lack of civic engagement among younger generations. Research increasingly shows that while fewer young people join formal membership organizations, many are active in alternative forms of civic and political participation (Van Leeuwen, 2025). Globally, youth are often at the forefront of social movements, online advocacy, and cause-oriented networks, even as they stay away from joining established clubs or resident committees. Thus, the challenge for community associations is double: adapting to contemporary forms of youth engagement and addressing the barriers within associations that prevent youth involvement.

Given this context, our research sets out to tackle the challenge of generational renewal in civic associations. We want to understand what can be done to bring more young adults into community organizations and to give them real roles alongside older members. To do this, we explored how different countries are approaching the issue and see what lessons we can draw for associations like Barcelona's FAVB (Federación de Asociaciones de Vecinos de Barcelona or Federation of Neighborhood Associations of Barcelona). The research report begins by reviewing key barriers to youth involvement in associations in the context of Spain (More specifically Barcelona). Next, it highlights international best practices from Canada's youth advisory councils to Germany's Kultur macht stark program. Finally, it applies these insights to Barcelona's context, with proposals to promote youth-inclusive models in the city's associations.

2. Guiding Questions and Context

Community associations worldwide face significant challenges related to aging memberships and the difficulty of engaging younger generations (Putnam, 2000). Today's younger generation typically participate less frequently in formal organizations, opting instead for more informal, flexible, or digital forms of civic engagement (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). This shift poses a risk not only to the sustainability of individual associations but also to the broader fabric of community life. Addressing these concerns requires understanding how associations

elsewhere are effectively engaging youth and handling the complexities of intergenerational dynamics.

Research Questions

This project is guided by two main questions aimed at understanding both structural solutions and social dynamics:

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

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

These questions will direct us to examine concrete mechanisms for youth inclusion (for example, youth boards, co-management schemes, national service programs, etc.) as well as strategies for managing that often delicate relationship between established older members and incoming youth.

Local Context: Barriers to Youth Involvement in Community Associations in Barcelona:

Why are many young people hesitant to join or lead traditional community associations? The article by (Tebar, 2022) points to a combination of structural barriers (how associations are organized), cultural barriers (norms and climate within associations), and socio-economic barriers (challenges arising from young people's life conditions) in relation to the lack of young people participation in community associations. These factors, often interlinked, can make traditional associations unattractive or inaccessible to youth.

Table 1: Key Structural, Cultural, Socio-Economic, and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Young Adults' Participation in Barcelona Community Associations (Tebar, 2022)

| Barrier Category	Specific Barrier	Barcelona Context
Structural	Meeting Duration	Board meetings lasting two hours exhaust young people, making participation impractical.
Structural	Long-Term Commitment Requirement	FAVB requires groups to demonstrate a willingness for permanence, conflicting with youth mobility and housing instability.
Cultural	Issue Relevance	Young people prefer single-issue assemblies (housing, water, pollution) over broad neighborhood councils that address multiple topics at once.
Cultural	Hierarchical Culture	Traditional associations need to shed the "centre of the neighbourhood" mindset and work as equals with newer, youth-led groups to feel inclusive.

Socio-economic	Housing Instability & Mobility	Difficulties accessing affordable housing and frequent moves undermine the rootedness needed for sustained youth involvement in local associations.
Socio-cultural	Partisan Legacy	Historic ties to PSUC and other political parties signal an ideological test, deterring moderate or non-partisan youth; associations must break from partisanship.

More studies on youth engagement in Barcelona and wider Spain also highlighted variety of other barriers. According to Wirthwein and Carbonell (2023), found that "democratic institutions lagged severely behind in… effective digital communication" and relatable language for youth. This communication gap makes associations seem outdated. By not offering online participation options (for example, live-streamed meetings, online polls, or active Instagram accounts), associations lose the opportunity to engage tech-savvy young people on familiar platforms. Similarly, in cities like Barcelona, housing instability is a significant factor. Young people often cannot afford to buy homes and instead face high rents, short term leases, or must live in shared apartments. Many move frequently in search of affordable housing or due to temporary work, disrupting their neighborhood ties. A recent demographic study in Spain found that over half (53.9%) of households headed by people under 45 feared losing their home in the near future due to economic instability (Antonio Módenes, 2019). Together, these factors form a complex barrier landscape that undermines sustained, meaningful youth participation in Spain's traditional community associations.

3. Theoretical Framework

In order to interpret our findings and shape proposals, we will draw on several bodies of theory and research related to civic engagement and organizational change across generations. This theoretical framework will help explain why younger people participate (or don't) in civic groups, what barriers and opportunities exist in intergenerational settings, and how associations can adapt structurally to be more inclusive. The key themes include: (a) civic engagement across generations, (b) intergenerational solidarity, and (c) organizational change in associations.

Theoretical Framework for Generational Renewal
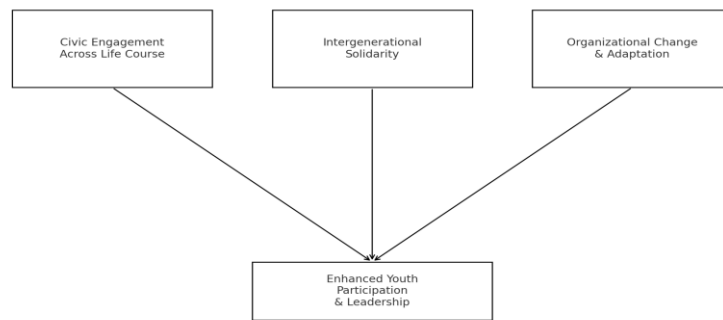
Civic Engagement Across the Life Course: Civic engagement is dynamic and evolves as people move through different stages of life. Flanagan and Levine (2010) emphasize that civic participation changes with age due to life transitions, economic conditions, and social norms. Today's younger generations often delay traditional forms of civic participation like joining community associations because they are spending more time in education, facing economic uncertainties, and engaging differently, often preferring flexible, digital, or short-term commitments (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

Young adults might be passionate about social causes but prefer informal, issue-based activism rather than structured, long-term association memberships (Dalton, 2008). This shift does not mean they are unconcerned; instead, they engage differently, making it crucial for associations to adjust their approaches to attract and retain younger members. For example, digital engagement or occasional volunteering opportunities may resonate more with younger generations (Putnam, 2000).

Intergenerational Solidarity: Bengtson and Roberts' (1991) theory of intergenerational solidarity originally focused on family relationships but offers valuable insights for community associations as well. The core idea is about fostering mutual respect, shared values, and collaboration between different generations. In practical terms, this solidarity can create environments where older and younger members actively learn from each other, sharing experiences and perspectives.

Strong intergenerational solidarity within associations helps build a community that values each member's contribution regardless of age. For instance, older members can pass on organizational knowledge, historical context, and community traditions to younger participants. On the contrary, younger members can introduce fresh ideas, digital skills, and new methods for community organizing (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). Associations that successfully foster intergenerational solidarity find it easier to manage generational transitions, build cohesive memberships, and sustain their missions over time (Kaplan, 2002).

Organizational Change and Adaptation: Organizational change theory, as proposed by Greenwood and Hinings (1996), offers a critical lens for understanding how community associations can respond to declining youth participation. Associations must adapt when their existing structures no longer fit the external environment, such as changing demographics or

shifts in civic engagement preferences. This adaptation could mean revisiting membership structures, governance models, or communication strategies.

For example, associations traditionally structured around regular, long-term membership and face-to-face meetings might need to integrate digital platforms, embrace flexible participation formats, or adopt more inclusive governance practices that give younger members meaningful decision-making power (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). The need for organizational adaptation becomes especially apparent when new generations, with distinct communication styles and expectations for involvement, enter civic spaces. Associations unwilling or slow to adapt risk becoming irrelevant to younger generations, while those proactively adjusting can thrive by attracting new, diverse members (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005).

To sum up, effectively addressing generational renewal in community associations involves understanding shifting patterns of civic engagement (Flanagan & Levine, 2010), actively fostering intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991), and embracing necessary organizational change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). This theoretical framework guides our exploration of practical strategies and solutions to enhance youth participation and leadership within community associations.

4. Methodology

As the goal of this research stream was to compare different responses to the challenge of generational renewal across countries, a qualitative and inductive research design fit this purpose best. Primary fieldwork was carried out through interviews to gain first-hand insights into the challenges targeted in the research and to gather data and solutions from practices that had already proved successful. By interviewing cultural institutions in Germany, the *Kultur macht stark. Bündnisse für Bildung* and the example from the Vancouver Foundation (Canada) were selected as key cases due to their broad national scope, longevity, and focus on youth participation in cultural education. Additionally, secondary data were drawn from case studies and policy documents of other institutions. Secondary data had also been used in Chapters 2 and 3 to elaborate on guiding questions and context.

Interviews were conducted in Barcelona with a former board member of the FAVB, who was selected for his long-standing involvement with the FAVB and insight into generational dynamics within neighborhood activism there. For this interview, only verbal consent was obtained regarding transcription and data use. For the second interview, a consent form was sent, and verbal consent was collected. That interview was held with the finance representative of mosaique e.V. Lüneburg, an organization in northern Germany focusing on intercultural, accessible, and inclusive cultural projects and a long-term partner of *Kultur macht stark*. All interviews were added in English to facilitate understanding and were transcribed and translated with the help of AI tools.

5. Research Results

Findings from Interviews and Kultur macht stark Program (Germany)

In our first interview (Transcript 1), the key message for our team can be divided into two parts. Firstly, there are currently no structures actively involving young people in the FAVB and their decision-making processes. However, in their most recent board change, they attempted to include younger voices and representatives by inviting them to join the board without being elected into these positions. This was achieved by reaching out to neighborhoods in the hope of rejuvenating perspectives and attracting more people to join the FAVB. It is not particularly clear whether this initiative has been successful so far. Additionally, neither the FAVB nor the *Ajudament de Barcelona* nor the *Generalitat de Catalunya* have any clear policies for involving young people.

Secondly, regarding generational renewal on a small scale, the interviewee believes the best way to involve young people in neighborhood structures and volunteering is: „Pues yo dejándolos hacer", which roughly translates to „Well, I would [just] let them do their thing." According to him, young people lack trust, funding, and spaces to use. This mainly applies to routine activities like meetups and reunions, but also sports, as he notes that many sports and leisure facilities are often unused and empty but tied to institutions, making them inaccessible to the public.

While young people tend to have specific issues they fight for, ranging from environmentalism to the housing shortage and mass-tourism crisis of Barcelona, they participate less in communal organizations. Here, it is also pointed out that in areas where organization and volunteering work well, like the neighborhood Eixample, so to speak, richer areas, young people also participate more, but in poorer and socially unjust areas like the Nou Barris in the outskirts of Barcelona, motivating and integrating seem to be an ongoing challenge.

Concluding from this information, young people need structures they can relate to a certain point, and expertise from older people in coordination and gestion, but in the end, they will do things their own way, wanting not to have other people intervene in their ideas and projects. A lack of trust from older generations can hinder young engagement by trying to make them fit a box that younger generations have no interest in being put in.

 The main comparing case study is the German *Kultur macht stark. Bündnisse für Bildung.* (Culture makes strong. Alliances for education) program, a financial aid program targeted towards local and small-scale projects and events to strengthen local culture. It was created in 2013 by the Ministry for Education and Research to financially support non-school projects of cultural education for children and teenagers that have limited access to funding. 27 partners nationwide help to realize or initiate projects, while the ministry provides up to 50 million euros each year (BBF, 2025). The requirements are that each project must target children and teenagers between 3 and 18 years, who are growing up in a social, financial or educational situation of risk. It especially emphasizes collaboration and innovation. Since the project started in 2013, there have been around 1.1 million children between the ages of 3 and 18 reached, with a sum of 22.800 projects in the second funding phase (2018–2022) alone (BBF,

2025; Theel, 2025). This great success is reflected and evaluated on multiple levels, as a strengthening in creative skills, personal development, and social skills. This is not only experienced by the participating children but also enriches their lives at home and partially transfers onto their families (BBF, 2025; Theel, 2025).

While the project succeeds in many aspects, as quantitative outcomes highlight the program's broad reach and success, there are also some barriers brought along. In the second interview (Transcript 2), the interviewee pointed out some aspects, like the focus on sole participation of children in situations of risk rather than all peers together, as this may unintentionally reinforce separation rather than integration. Also, the amount of funding and requirements often lead to having too little coordinators in projects, where they have to rely on volunteers to meet the diverse needs of participating children.

Gerards (2019) finds additional struggles in his research project *FluDiKuBi* on migrant integration in Germany, as his results call for caution that the successes may overshine deeper issues of representation and agency. His analysis reveals that young people with migration backgrounds are mostly included as participants, but not as co-creators or decision-makers. This challenges the assumption that participation automatically equates to empowerment. In this way, the program risks reinforcing paternalistic structures, unless critically reoriented to truly redistribute cultural and organizational power.

While top-down solutions to participation and representation remain problematic, the second interviewee nonetheless concludes that the program is meeting financial and organizational needs and therefore proves to be consistently important to make a change in cultural understanding and belonging for young people from marginalized groups and vulnerable backgrounds.

Additional field research was conducted in the visits in the week of the 30.06. – 04.07. in Barcelona, where all participants visited different neighborhood institutions. Concerning generational integration and participation, four key takeaway messages were identified: Many institutions are missing events or offers that favor intergenerational dialogue, which is essential for generational renewal. Although such formats are relatively easy to design, they are rarely implemented (as presented by *Educommunicació*). Secondly, trust and responsibility empower youth; when trusted and given real responsibility, young people engage more. Furthermore, we saw in the *Biblioteca Trinitat Vella* how marginalized youth were able to be reached through compassionate presence and attentive listening. Lastly, hierarchies block intergenerational dialogue and learning, as power imbalances and bureaucracy hinder open conversations held at an equal eye-level.

To conclude the results, several key challenges were identified in the conducted research. As confirmed by the interviews, even if the possibilities of support from older generations are good and well-planned, young people have to want and use them. Effective engagement requires more than accessible structures; it also demands trust, compassion, and culturally embedded participation. It was observed in Barcelona but also in the *Kultur macht stark* program, that the hierarchy of generations within associations complicates the empowerment

of young voices, so creating flat hierarchies (or ideally none at all) is inevitable to enable and promote participation.

Youth Advisory Councils and Shared Governance: The Vancouver Foundation (Canada)

One notable example of youth inclusion comes from the Vancouver Foundation, one of Canada's largest community foundations. In the 2010s, the Vancouver Foundation launched youth engagement initiatives that embedded young people in decision-making roles within its programs. Central to this was the creation of Youth Advisory Councils/Teams for specific initiatives, giving diverse young people real authority over grantmaking, programming, and advocacy priorities (Vancouver Foundation, 2018).

In 2011 the foundation convened "Fresh Voices," a forum for immigrant and refugee youth to discuss issues affecting their communities in British Columbia. Rather than make this a one-off event, the Foundation sustained the effort by establishing the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team, composed of newcomer youth (ages roughly 14–24) along with adult allies. Over the next several years, the foundation "supported the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team with significant time, energy, ideas and funds to bring together immigrant and refugee youth, listen to them, and empower them to address issues that affect their lives." This youth team was not a token committee; it led the design of forums and campaigns and advised the Foundation's granting in related areas. Similarly, by 2018, Fresh Voices was transitioned out of the foundation to become an independent, fully youth-led entity which is a great example of how much ownership youth had gained through this advisory council. Observers noted that Fresh Voices not only influenced decision-makers but also built confidence and leadership skills among a new generation of young advocates (Vancouver Foundation, 2018). In the words of one Vancouver Foundation staff member, the process "changed the story of newcomer youth to one grounded in community pride and connections."

The Foundation applied a similar model in its "Fostering Change" initiative, focused on improving outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. A Youth Advisory Circle of young people with lived experience in care was established to guide this initiative. This council directly shaped grantmaking and strategy with notable outcomes. According to the foundation's evaluation, "The Fostering Change Youth Advisory Circle helped shift the landscape of support for youth aging out of foster care: $5 million in grants to community organizations created better connections and support for youth (Vancouver Foundation, 2018)." In other words, youth advisors decided how significant funding was allocated, ensuring resources went to projects that the youth themselves identified as crucial (such as peer mentorship programs, housing support, etc.). By providing power to those young experts, the foundation achieved more relevant and impactful results. The Youth Advisory Circle members also gained policy experience and professional skills through their role. Vancouver Foundation's broader youth engagement report notes that these youth advisory councils became a "resource for the community: a stream of young leaders skilled in engagement" who have gone on to influence other organizations.

Several best practices emerge from the Vancouver Foundation model. First, authentic decision-making power was given to youth; they were not just consulted but had budgetary and

programmatic control. Second, adult allies were present but in supportive roles (each council had a few adult supporters/facilitators, but they did not dictate the outcomes). Third, the initiatives were structured around issues youth were passionate about (immigrant youth inclusion, foster care reform), which helped sustain motivation. And fourth, the foundation invested in training and compensating young people for their time (including honoraria and a dedicated training budget for skill-building), which indicate that they were being treated as valued contributors. The success of this model illustrates that when institutions move beyond symbolic youth roles and genuinely share power, they can attract and retain young talent while achieving program goals. It aligns with wider research on youth-adult partnerships showing that organizations benefit from youth perspectives and energy when youth are truly empowered (Brion-Meisels et al., 2023).

6. Proposed Solutions

Proposal 1:

A key recommendation is for Barcelona's associations to establish youth-led committees or advisory boards as a formal part of their structure. This proposal is meant to provide young members with real authority and "active ownership" of certain areas. For instance, a neighborhood association could establish a Youth Committee tasked with organizing events to engage younger residents (block parties, skill-sharing workshops, etc.) or tackling issues that particularly affect youth (like rental housing conditions, nightlife and safety, etc.). Crucially, this committee should have a budget and decision-making authority delegated to it (not just a discussion forum). If the association allocates even a small portion of its funds to projects decided by the Youth Committee, it demonstrates trust and signals that youth's ideas will be respected. International experience indicates this significantly boosts motivation (Vancouver Foundation model): research shows that when youth move from symbolic roles to real decision-making power, it significantly boosts motivation and long-term engagement (Yunita et al., 2023). In Barcelona, where bureaucracy can be a hurdle, creating a space where youth can be authoritative and creative (with less red tape) could also showcase innovative approaches that the whole association can learn from.

If associations feel they don't have enough young members to form a committee, they might partner with local youth organizations to create a joint advisory group. For example, a neighborhood association could collaborate with the local Espai Jove (Youth Space, a city-supported youth center) to form a neighborhood youth council that serves both. This could bring in non-member youth to advise the association on how to attract more young neighbors, effectively acting as a bridge. As they advise, some of those youth might then choose to formally join the association. The Vancouver Foundation Youth Advisory Council model is useful: they began by reaching out to diverse youth communities to populate the council, rather than only from existing members, thus attracting fresh perspectives. Barcelona associations can similarly recruit young people who are active in the community (even if in different ways) to join these youth panels with the promise that their ideas will influence association strategy.

Proposal 2:

In conversation with an organizer of the climate cafe in Budapest (Transcript 3), the impact of community driven exchange was brought to our attention. While climate cafes are community-led interventions offering spaces where *climate feelings* or *climate anxiety* are discussed and explored, they prove to be effective in reduced isolation, decreased anxiety, and increased hopefulness in participants (De Jong, 2025). As they are informally organized and aim to facilitate conversations on expression of emotions, trained facilitators guide sessions while promoting active listening rather than debates, fostering emotional resilience, mutual understanding and community bonds. These beneficial effects of support within a safe space can be used to create open communication and guided exchange of related topics.

This model can be adapted to address specific topics relevant to either local neighborhood residents or volunteers in associations. These two formats serve distinct but complementary purposes. It can either be used to make decisions within a neighborhood by opening the conversation for affected groups. Within the space, they can exchange ideas on topics important to the area, where projects or problems can be discussed and either solutions or decisions can be made by including the impacted people directly. The other way this can be used is for knowledge and expertise exchange within an association or organization, so generations can come together and share their ways of organizing, management of finances or how they communicate events. This intergenerational learning can help to deconstruct hierarchical structures within organizations, especially driven by perceived authority rooted in long-standing presence or tradition. These structures have been identified as especially hindering generational renewal through fieldwork, so creating non-hierarchical formats like this can make all the difference.

End Note:

In the end, all visits and interviews helped to conclude that what is missing the most in all different places to have intergenerational dialogue is not the people to work with nor means, but mere opportunities of encounter where intergenerational exchange can happen.

As generational renewal is a complex problem, the combination of top-down (Proposal 1) and bottom-up (Proposal 2) approaches can be crucial to finding sustainable long-term solutions for generational renewal. As our fieldwork revealed, the absence of intergenerational exchange often stems from a lack of shared encounters which are 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, 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: A top-down approach as a regulatory framework aimed at ensuring accessible and inclusive decision-

making processes. Additionally, the creation of participatory spaces that enable encounters at eye level, free from hierarchical structures.

With the results of this research stream, we argue for the necessity of combining top-down and bottom-up approaches: on one hand institutions must provide accessible frameworks for participation, and on the other, communities have to come together at the grassroots level to foster sustainable engagement and create lived and lasting intergenerational dialogue.

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8. Annex

Plagiarism and AI Statement

We confirm that this report is our own work, created collaboratively by our group. All sources we used are properly cited, and we took care to avoid plagiarism. We used AI tools only to help improve sentence clarity and grammar. The ideas, analysis, conclusions, and content presented here are entirely our own original research and independent thinking. We fully take responsibility for whatever is written in this report.

Work Distribution and Organization

Throughout the course, we had multiple meetings to discuss our project, with at least five meetings taking place before the in-person mobility week. The overall research idea and guiding questions were developed collectively. For detailed write-up and fieldwork:

- **Salah ud din** contributed to the Introduction, Guiding Questions and Context, and Theoretical Framework sections.

- **Josephine** worked on the Methodology section and conducted the primary and fieldwork, including interviews and transcription.

The Results and Proposed Solutions chapters were collaboratively developed. Salah specifically worked on the Canadian example, while Josephine handled the German example and interview data. Finally, the first proposed solution was developed by Salah, and the second proposed solution by Josephine.

Group Reflection on Learning Outcomes

This research project was a valuable experience for our team. We gained a deeper understanding of generational renewal challenges within community associations by looking at both local and international examples. Conducting fieldwork and analyzing various case studies helped us better understand how young people can be effectively engaged and how to create meaningful intergenerational connections. Working together, we improved our analytical and problem-solving skills, particularly by exploring innovative practices like youth advisory committees and intergenerational dialogue. The process also boosted our intercultural understanding and teamwork abilities, as we learned to communicate clearly, distribute tasks effectively, and support each other throughout the project.

Interview Transcript

Former representative of the FAVB – 20.06.2025 (Interview)

Okay, so my group is focused on […] young people, how they are included and how it's possible—well, I don't know—but how they can be included and what is being done to, I don't know, how to attract young people for volunteer or neighbourhood work. Yeah, I don't know. Yeah, what's the situation now?

Well, it's complicated because—are you asking about what has happened within the federation or more broadly?

Yeah, I'll give a bit of context. So, the idea of the interview is first to understand, on one hand, the situation of the FAVB—the federation—both in terms of young people and the main challenges or projects you're working on right now, and then what you can tell us about community-managed spaces. So, I'd ask a few questions about that situation, what the FAVB's perspective is on those spaces, what information you have (though I know it's limited), and what relationship the associations within the FAVB have with those spaces—but these two parts. So, regarding the FAVB, what is the relationship with young people? What's the situation?

Well, it depends on the area. The FAVB as a federation includes, I think, about 105 neighbourhood associations now. So, the associations operate mostly at the neighbourhood level—though there are neighbourhoods with two or three. For example, I'm from Sant Andreu and there's Sant Andreu North, Sant Andreu South, and Sant Andreu del Palomar. What's true is that the FAVB was created even before Franco's death and is a collective space that fights for neighbourhood needs and also for the achievement of democracy as a common goal.

Nowadays, the issue is that social and technological changes—even in the 70s, 74–75—meant that in the working class, almost nobody went to university, at least here in Spain. So people's lives were closely linked to their neighbourhoods. All these changes have led to two things. First, a change in how people relate to their neighbourhood, which lasts more or less until the end of secondary education. But then, most young people don't build their lives around the neighbourhood, especially with phones, computers, etc. And even the young people who do spend time in their neighbourhood don't really have referential places to do so. In some areas—like in my area—it's typical that if you ask young people aged 16–17 where they hang out, they won't name a place in the neighbourhood, they'll say the Maquinista Shopping Center.

So all these changes have also led to a trend where young people organise more around specific struggles or focused topics. For example, in the ecology movement—it's very transversal—or the housing movement, and maybe those are their meeting points. But those interests don't really find space in neighbourhood relationships. On top of that, neighbourhood associations have been ageing. Generally speaking, the people involved in neighbourhood associations are from older generations.

Regarding the internal organization of the FAVB, we already know it's difficult to reach young people, to get them involved, and those spaces hardly exist. So, within the FAVB itself, I assume it's also a rather aged organization. Yes. Well, we just held an assembly—I was president until then—and what we proposed was that we need to rejuvenate the board. So we did an exercise, and our bylaws allowed it, where we reached out to associations that had young people and said, "Come join the board," even without voting rights, for a certain time, in hopes they'd stay. And actually, the new board does have a small group of younger people. But it's true there's no youth policy, strictly speaking, from the FAVB right now.

And there isn't one from the FAVB, or really from anywhere. There are specific policies, like in the tenants' union, about housing. Or environmental policies, which affect more young people. But there aren't comprehensive youth policies. So we're thinking about it—but I don't know if it's possible—because humans tend to... As soon as we create organisations, we also create leaderships that compete with others, instead of collaborating. That's a very complex situation.

And a question from someone in my team: in the new board, is there any youth representation, or at least a youth perspective?

No, there are young people, but not a youth representation, as such. So it's true that in some neighbourhood associations, we've managed to get a core of young people that's pretty strong. In Congreso, in Reunida Alta, in Balacarca, the majority are young people. But the process is going to be very slow.

And what outreach strategies are you planning to strengthen neighbourhood ties?

Well, basically we're trying to work on topics within broader networks. For example, around housing, we're part of a space that includes the tenants' union, the big workers' unions—CCOO and UGT basically—the CGT, and different social organisations. What we try to do is, at least, coordinate mobilizations around certain issues under minimum agreements.

Right. So related to this, what relationship does the FAVB have with new associations focused on very specific demands, like housing or ecology? Beyond these minimum agreements, how do you cooperate or work together?

Through these meetings. For example, in housing, we have occasional meetings—usually when there's a protest coming up—and in those actions we all participate to the extent possible. We haven't always been able to keep those mobilizations as joint efforts—sometimes there's been competition over visibility, and we've said, "okay, fine."

It's a very complex situation. There's a big difference, for example, between the tenants' union or ABTS—the tourism-related one—and us. From the beginning, we've fought for democracy as a broad collective objective, but we're not ideological organisations. The tenants' union, ABTS, they include a strong ideological element—you have to agree with that. But we want to keep working as neighbourhoodassociations. I personally have my political opinions, but the federation's only fundamental value is defending human rights. Beyond that, the scope is very broad. So we work around concrete neighbourhoodneeds, which can be defended from different political ideas. Sometimes one approach wins, sometimes another.

Regarding that, it might be subjective, but do you think that with increased tourism and the "touristification" of the city, more young people are getting involved?

I think there's a core of more ideologically motivated youth that is involved, and then there's a social majority that's not.

Right. How do you perceive young people's willingness to participate? Ah, no. I've already got that one. But do you think youth participation is being weakened by immigration and the crisis that's changing neighbourhoods, or not?

Well, I think young people—look, I'm no longer young myself, so it's hard for me to say how they move. I have a 20-year-old daughter. What was the question exactly?

Yes, for example, whether young people who are children of immigrants—or what I might call "foreigners"—whether these young people are getting involved in neighbourhoods and activities here, or whether it's mostly people born in the neighbourhoods?

That has a lot to do with the present. The FAVB, for example, has a tradition of people who have lived in the same neighbourhood for a long time, which can sometimes be limiting. And that's a big challenge. In some places, it's going quite well. For example, in Trinitat Vella, there's a very strong participation. They do things their own way, but they show up. Most immigrants there are Arab. But they attend all the events. And in some areas, that integration happens. But it's also a general problem—not just for the FAVB—but for most social organisations: we don't reflect the current composition of Barcelona's population.

I've got maybe one or two more questions. One is again about the FAVB. Are there any... I don't have the word. How are you recruiting young people? Do you go to schools or use social media? Any projects to attract youth?

There's social media. That's handled by the communications team. But the problem is reaching young people from here, which is hard in two ways.

Basically, people need to be familiar with the idea of neighbourhood associations, which is now very rare. There is starting to be more work and more young people involved in interculturality. But it's still a pending task.

I can't really say much. There's been this situation where—because of the people we've had and their experience in specific struggles—there's a structural challenge that's very hard: the neighbourhoods that do this work best are the ones that least need it. Meaning, wealthier neighbourhoods with well-educated residents, like the Eixample or traditional neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, in low-income neighbourhoods, the educational level within the associations themselves is very low.

Now we're trying to provide services to support that. But it's true that many people in the federation—and in the associations—have old ideas about what public facilities should be. And on that front, young people are contributing quite a lot. And I get it. But also not.

From my experience, I don't think youth centres or senior centres are the solution. It'd be better to have self-managed or intergenerational spaces—spaces managed jointly by young people and older people. Because the older ones have experience, and the younger ones have creativity. Those elements should complement each other.

Well, that's what I think about young people right now. It's true it's really hard—and it's happened to the neighbourhood associations. Some of the older folks complain that young people don't show up, and they're people who have children themselves, who get excited about stuff, but their kids go to other kinds of organisations.

And I tell them: if I were your son, I wouldn't go either. I think many organisations and associations need to say: a generation needs to step aside. But the other generation should also recognise there's valuable experience to be passed on.

Are there any officials in the Barcelona City Council or the Generalitat of Catalonia who support or address this issue, or is it something that's just left to common sense?

The city council—in my neighbourhood—a youth centre was just opened. But in the end, they all start out as things made and run by the administration, where young people just attend.

And the ones who go are usually young people who don't mind that setup. But most young people want to manage their own organisations and do things their own way.

Yes, of course.

And one last thing, just because I'm very interested: do you notice any gender differences among the young people participating? Can we say that one gender dominates, or something like that?

That's very subjective and probably varies a lot. But I'd say nowadays… more women participate than men. More women than men.

Okay. I think that's all my questions for now. Yeah, I'd like to keep talking about the FAVB.

But earlier you mentioned—are you part of any organisation?

Yeah, in my neighbourhood… I'm from Guinardó. From Guinardó. I participate… For me, neighbourhood associations—well, it's hard to connect with them, you know? It's hard for them to reach young people, I talk to in my neighbourhood. So we usually go more through civic centres, libraries, and during exams. Those spaces we do share. But yeah, it's really hard to get to the associations. For example, learning about the FAVB seems super interesting to me. I'd like to know where they are, what the different associations do. But it's really hard to participate.

I think it's more of a communication issue. That things don't get through or... Or the people involved are older, right? Yes, what happens is that there's something I think organisations... The retirees' union is starting to realise. That is, sectorial organisations also have many limitations.

And the neighbourhood association, despite all the problems, is still the only place that addresses issues in a global way. Of neighbourhoods or of Barcelona's problems, in the case of the FAVB. And there... Another thing is, I think there should be some sort of refoundation and unification of some kind of... But... That's up to another generation.

And to keep going a bit with the FAVB, before I ask you about community management spaces, earlier, you mentioned ideological neutrality. That you don't take a position or define yourselves. And the idea is demands and problems of the city…

Well, we define ourselves around human rights. Or, for example, I think that... The issue of housing has helped us, for instance, recently, to define a... a common action as an organisation. The problem here, too, is that everyone has focused on... The problem of *my* neighbourhood and not the rest. Whereas today, most things go beyond just a neighbourhood. And that's starting to get into people's heads. We're now trying to organise coordinators at the district level.

At the district level, so they have a broader vision. And we—I, for example—am part of something called the Coordinadora Veïnal del Barrio Esos. We formed it with five local federations.

That's us, Santa Coloma, Sant Adrià, Montcada, and Badalona. To bring together the problems of a whole group of very low-income neighbourhoods.

Right. The question, which you've already started to answer, is... What diagnosis does the FAVB make of these needs? These problems the city faces. You've mentioned housing, of course, which is one of them. But what other areas are you focusing on? Or do you want to work on?

Look, I'll give you my impression, which is the last thing I said when I left the presidency three months ago. Today, I think the city has two big issues. One is housing.

But the other, and I believe it's a core issue, is the defence of democratic freedoms right now. And so, I think... What happens is it's very difficult to work on this with certain organisations that are, so to speak, more radical in media terms. And I'm very Gramscian.

And so I believe we have to slowly build hegemony. And that requires more cultural work, which is a topic that neither young people nor older people really address. And what we've lost right now is the cultural battle and the hegemony of discourse.

And to me, that's the core issue right now. Let's forget all the divisions in the face of the need to preserve important concepts like human rights, democratic freedoms. And right now, we're under brutal attack.

And that, to me, should be the core part of our work.

And do you think the FAVB currently doesn't share those priorities? Based on what you've said. It hasn't taken them on?

I think there are some organisations that do, because the FAVB itself is being heavily attacked. There's a whole discourse from FOP, from Vox, echoed in the city council, attacking the FAVB, trashing us. But right now, a federation of Venezuelan entities close to the PP and Vox is about to be launched. That's it.

Yes, I think we've more or less covered what we wanted to know about the FAVB. Regarding community-managed spaces, what's the FAVB's relationship with them? Are there any associations managing them?

What's the perspective? I think in the talk with the UAB I already said it—the problem is the concept of what a community-managed space is. To me, that comes with many uncertainties, because here, when people talk about "spaces," they're usually referring to self-managed spaces, Ateneus, but those have the same difficulties as always—the economic dependency on the administration is brutal.

And that conditions you so much—it conditions you to the point that, I can tell you, right now I was asking about the agreement between the FAQ and the city council, and it's June and it hasn't been approved yet. And there are people working there.

That limits you. And the Ateneus and all of that also depend economically on the administration. And the administration hasn't realized that it needs to create spaces to transfer to the community itself to manage.

But what doesn't work for me is that, just because there are spaces—especially squatted ones—then it's like, "Well, now I manage it and you give me the money." Well, sort it out. Back in the day, in semi-clandestine situations, people were in an organisation or a political force and paid for resources.

Because otherwise, you'll always end up being dependent. So yes, on one hand it's good, because you can do certain things you want to do, but the dependency is still brutal. And there will never be a youth policy from the administration made from the perspective of youth.

Because the people in power are already older, and their vision is not ours. I'd be the same. Like, now I'm here, you guys show up, but I'm not going to tell you what to do.

The new Board had to present its program and do whatever they want. So, in terms of impact from these... I understand there's dependency on local governments. Because in most cases we've studied, they have to be accountable or they depend economically. But in terms of impact or social benefits they can offer...?

Yes. So, what potential do you see in these spaces? Especially in more vulnerable neighbourhoods, like the ones in the north of Barcelona. In terms of community self-management, except for the Ateneu de Nou Barris and a few spaces...

And even the Ateneu de Nou Barris is being criticized now. Because the younger generation—the people who achieved the Ateneu de Nou Barris, 20 years have passed—they now see it as just another space... And we can't stop each generation from figuring out its own life.

It's very complicated. Because at that age, I wasn't thinking about sharing life either... So then, for example, libertarian Ateneus are usually spaces built and maintained by them. I may agree or disagree with what's done inside, I don't know, but at least...

So I think there's a certain complacency because it's true that since democracy, people have gotten used to a certain level of comfort.

So, how do you think we can approach young people in terms of participating in public life, social issues—those things we always worry about?

By letting them do it. Telling them: here's the space, and that's it. I think neighbourhood associations... The problem, in any case, is that neighbourhood associations now... Take this one, because it's a federation space—well, it's also from the city council—so it's also conditional.

Every four years, you have to negotiate what you do with it. If they're angry, they tighten the screws. But I think neighbourhood associations should open up and say: here's a venue.

Maybe not every day, because there are activities, but well, Mondays and Fridays—Friday afternoons usually don't have many activities—that's when young people have... So you get the venue, do whatever you want with it. Make your life, and... totally. And in the case of sports spaces? That's huge.

What? That's huge. I knew you'd have something interesting to say about that. What's the FAVB's perspective?

One, we need an economic audit of all sports policy in terms of space allocations, financial resources... And it's also true—I think I mentioned this—that when direct management has been allowed in some places, because there were sports organisations, for example in Trinitat Vella, there were grassroots sports groups, born from the community and all that—once they had decent facilities, they took them over. They made them their own.

And from that point on, I've seen people kicked out, money going missing, and all that. I mean, yes, we tend to think of cultural entities—we see most are cultural and struggle to attract people and stay alive—but we also think of sports entities as having certain potential to bring in people, or types of people who usually don't get involved in these issues.

Yes, but there's something vital to me about sports entities, which is the management of the place, whether it's a field... You know Can Dragó, the athletics tracks.

Yes. One thing is managing a space during specific times, when the members use it... But there are lots of times when those facilities are completely empty, and during those times, the space should belong to the neighborhood, not to the entity. Or it should.

If you're not a member of a sports entity but you want to run, why can't you use the Can Dragó track when it's empty? Instead, you have to run outside—which is fine, too, but still.

What happens is that sports entities, in the end, when they're given management, they're not given it as neighbourhood organisations, but for *all* time. And clearly, you build a pool for the neighborhood, not for the sports entity. The examples you know haven't worked out...?

No, I don't know of a single one, I can tell you—tracks that are absolutely empty during the day at INEF.

If you go to INEF, here in Montjuïc, and enter the sports facilities—they're quite good—but most of the time they're empty, and there are loads of people in the area wanting to play. Also, sports organisations are very male-dominated. That's the other big issue. And it's true that women's participation in sports has grown enormously, but you won't find a single female-run organization managing a sports facility in the whole city.

And in the case of northern Barcelona neighborhoods, Sant Andreu or Nou Barris—you were telling me that it's hard because there's less participation, people don't get involved—how should we approach this situation? I understand that, in general, civic participation is decreasing, but if these community-managed spaces aren't there, they don't manage to...

Look, I'll tell you what I'm starting in my neighbourhood now. I've come to the conclusion—maybe too late—that the administration's community plans have partially killed us. And that the initiative for community work must come from the community. And we have to go—if we call it something else—to popular plans, whatever, developed from the ground up.

Of course, these things will later have to be discussed with the administration, and some ideas will be good and others maybe impossible, because in popular plans there's often a lack of knowledge of economic capacities, technical aspects... Is this a project you want to start now? What?

Is this something you want to start? Yes, yes. In the Sant Andreu district, I think it's very necessary, because it's another issue.

Municipal decentralization is dead. Municipal decentralization led to administrative decentralization initially, which some said had political overtones, but today decentralization is dead—at a time when we're talking about building Metropolitan Barcelona, and it's more necessary than ever for districts to be like small town halls with the capacity to decide their destiny within this larger metropolitan structure. Did you have another question about community-managed spaces? I can continue.

Yes, one thing I wanted to know more about. Earlier I asked you about the FAVB's demands and challenges, you mentioned housing, then democratic freedoms. Can you elaborate more on that idea? How do you see representation and what do you think the FAVB should do in that regard?

I'm worried. I don't think we realize the imminent danger that's emerging in Barcelona and the entire metropolitan area in that regard. Because the security issue and all that is being pushed as the main issue by far-right groups.

And it resonates most in low-income neighborhoods.

There we need a coordinated agreement among many people around a more or less common discourse. We should involve administrations too—if they really want to defend democracy, though sometimes I'm not even sure. And we start to plan activities with people—multicultural ones.

In areas with a mix of people from many different places. And there I think there's an idea—I think I mentioned it—I want to at least work on that, in my area. I mean, with the local coordinator.

And it's that, for example, we have problems mostly in La Mina, in Sant Adrià. They're starting to arise in neighborhoods like Ciutat Meridiana, Torre Baró, Baró de Viver, where Vox is now the second party in almost all of them. And there, when... I gave the example of Prosperitat, when they were going to build a mosque.

Well, Vox obviously jumped on the opportunity to stir up trouble, and with the neighbors—"the Arabs are coming"—and all that. And in the end, there was one idea that really worked: going to talk to the Catholic priests. Because there, among South Americans, there's a lot of tension with Arabs.

And well, the priest played a very important role with his sermons at church and in the demonstrations held in their favor. The Catholic Church stood with them.

And I think we often don't understand each other. Because we always—or almost always—speak from a secular perspective, at least I do. But these people—the Arabs in this case—don't speak from a secular perspective, they speak from a very religious one.

And so, either we also understand things interreligiously—what happens in these neighborhoods, how to create interreligious bonds of coexistence—or it's going to be very difficult. Because I think Vox's discourse isn't the same when I attack it, with my secular and political perspective—we all know each other here—as it is when the opposition comes from their own religious conception, and that's what really kills Vox.

And regarding studies the FAVB might have done, or reports you may have, I don't know if you have any documentation you can share— especially about northern Barcelona neighborhoods, which I think you said had those studies.

Yes, Alisa, the other colleague who works with me, is supposed to come here later, and we have to talk about that. There are studies, but they haven't been published yet, though I'll talk to her because we really should send them already.

About those neighborhoods—for example, if you go to the Barcelona Metropolitan Area site and look at the different cities I mentioned, like Montcada, Santa Coloma, It's like another world entirely. The problem is that Barcelona, throughout its history, has been pushing out everything it didn't want to that periphery.

La Mina comes from when shantytowns were moved there, and in terms of infrastructure, well, Montcada is a city completely broken up by infrastructure, and all of that makes things really complicated. And then obviously, the lack of… The metropolitan area only works like a… What I call a "place for requests." A city council that has a specific need requests something, but there's no real metropolitan policy. Now they're working on a proposal for an urban master plan to eventually reform the general metropolitan plan, but everyone looks at it from their own local perspective, from their own municipality.

And in that area, with five municipalities, each one only looks out for itself. And when we tell them that things need to be globalized… For example, the housing problem—Santa Coloma has no more space, it can't offer alternatives on its own. But next to it, Badalona still has plenty… But everyone only cares about their own place.

Why?

Because there's a four-year vision. A legislative term. And that makes everything very complicated.

Well, that's happening in the districts of Sant Andreu too. What can I do in four years? What can I do?

So, I think those were the questions we wanted to ask. Unless there's something else you'd like to share that could help us.

That should be enough. No, I… More than helping you, it's the other way around. I mean, when you finish, remember that we exist. I, in the coordinator and in the Ruisoso Valley, am trying to complement things with my colleagues. I think there are a lot of people—and I told them this here too—who are no longer interested in the topic of the neighbourhood association of their own neighborhood. I'm personally no longer that interested in just the neighbourhood association of my own area. I think neighbourhood associations need to seriously rethink themselves, and there's a lot of confusion there. Or rather, I think there's a kind of confusion that could be important if we came to an agreement. Neighbourhood associations should be the backbone of community life. And the Ateneus and community organisations should be one and the same entity, along with neighbourhood associations. And I think that's where they've made a mistake. Now there's a coordinator or something like that for Ateneus too. But of course, they're also focused on their own problems. And I think neighborhoods today really lack community life that comes from within the community—not from the Administration. And that means rethinking what neighbourhood associations—or whatever we want to call them—should be. I'm not saying we should defend the old concept of a neighbourhood association from the last century. Maybe it should be called something else, but it should be more collective. Because nowadays, more time and effort goes into, for example, neighbourhood festivals. Well, I think you also mentioned this in that other meeting. That in the end, those other common spaces—plazas, markets, popular festivals—that we're so used to also end up fulfilling the function of bringing all social life together.

And probably the structures of neighbourhood associations... I can tell you, from my experience, it's hard to reach them, or people don't know much about them. To avoid everything being scattered and disconnected—in Sant Andreu we have an entity of the Generalitat that acts as a hub for various organisations in Can Guardiola. The civic center—completely dead. The Ateneu—there's a workers' Ateneu that hasn't seen a worker in 100 years. And the neighbor relationships. And I think they've just opened the Llavas center for seniors. There are three senior centers. In Fondo, for example, they've created a clientelist system with all kinds of associations, giving out their own facilities. I don't mean selling them—more like "we'll give you a space." And they've completely atomized any possible community that could have existed in the neighborhoods. And in that sense, they're less atomized, for example, in smaller neighborhoods. And well, Banco Unido, with the beautiful eternity. Now they have a community life center, the civic center, the senior center.

Do you think that's the dependency on the local administration? What? Do you think that's the dependency on the local administration—with the spaces and all that?

Wait, wait—that's something the administration has played at deliberately. It didn't just happen… Now they're trying to blame it on the state, or the PSOE... But that's structural—it's been that way since the PSC was born, and here in Barcelona...

Finance representative mosaique e.V. – 26.06.2025 (Interview)

Right, I'm here on a project that's focused on maintaining communal spaces in Barcelona, and my group is working on how generational exchange and succession work. For that, we're supposed to look at other countries and see how things work there, and we came across the "Kultur macht stark" program by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, where mosaique was also listed as a partner. That's why I chose it, and since I study in Lüneburg, it was a relatively logical decision to approach Mosaique e.V..

Although "Kultur macht stark" is actually focused almost exclusively on children and youth, so it's less about mixing young and old, and really focused on youth who come from structurally weak families. Whether it's a refugee background or financial difficulties—those are typically the problem areas they want to address and try to offer greater participation to certain children.

Exactly. It's also about how we reach children and youth through engagement programs and how we get them involved in volunteer work. From what I found in my research, that's also part of "Kultur macht stark"—that there's an interest in integrating young people long-term and not just having them as participants in projects. Right?

Let me just repeat to clarify. I believe you're asking how we can get participants involved in these projects?

Yes, exactly.

And how we can retain them long-term—that's really two separate things. One is how we reach the participants. In the first pilot phase of "Kultur macht stark," it was required to be extracurricular projects with children facing challenges. These weren't the "helicopter parents" bringing their kids; these kids would rather stay home watching TV. They had no interest in going somewhere else, and that was extremely

difficult. In Lüneburg, there's the "Am Weißen Turm" neighborhood. It's weaker compared to the neighboring "Rotes Feld," which is more homogenous. In contrast, "Am Weißen Turm" has about 46 nationalities living there, higher unemployment, and the kids are often left alone in the afternoons after school. There's no structure. We found that it's better to reach them in school. Kids are more likely to participate, but once they become teenagers, they find us boring—unless you manage to catch them. We once started video productions, which appealed to them because of the technology. Right now, I'm running a "Kultur macht stark" project in what are considered "problem schools," and the kids would never come to our courses if we didn't do them directly in the schools. Wonderful projects come out of it, and the kids are proud of their work. I always hope that through the films, they gain self-confidence because they grow through these projects. Sometimes, there's even a slight change in attitude. For example, they realized that being vegetarian doesn't kill you, and even veganism—okay, it's not necessary, but it doesn't hurt either. That was always nice to see, because no one at home deals with those topics. The unknown is often intimidating.

Also, something that bothered me a bit in the first project—though it has since been adjusted—is that "Kultur macht stark" initially created a kind of stigmatization by allowing only "disadvantaged" children. I think the mixture is what makes it valuable. We noticed that too when kids asked each other, "Which school do you go to?" One might be from a gymnasium (college-prep school), the other from a Hauptschule (vocational track), and they'd look at each other funny. But then they realized: "Hey, we can actually do a great project together!" In real life, they likely wouldn't have met. That's one of the strengths: bringing people closer together.

So, in summary, the two points of criticism so far regarding "Kultur macht stark" are: First, that it wasn't allowed to take place in schools—or was it not allowed to advertise the projects at schools? How did you reach the kids?

Yes, you are allowed to advertise—it just has to be extracurricular. It can't compete with school time. I think the reasoning is that it's meant to be an educational project. Honestly, the project is great—you get 100% funding. I don't want to criticize it too much. I just said at the time: I don't want stigmatization. I want everyone together, we want diversity. Programs like this can help people understand each other better. Even in Lüneburg—although it's a small city—there are huge differences between neighborhoods, and many kids grow up with very different challenges.

How did you become aware of the project or the funding? And what was your experience applying and working with it in the beginning?

I think someone from the film school mentioned the "Kultur macht stark" program. They knew about it through a community college. We looked into it, and in the first round, we worked with Movies in Motion as a cooperation partner. That's who we did our first project with.

There's a portal called "Komaster" where you have to enter everything—that takes some getting used to. It's pretty nitpicky. But over time I got used to it. Now we're working with the Paritätischer Bundesverband (a welfare association), and they are all extremely nice and helpful. But of course, they're also audited—I don't know by whom, maybe the federal audit office.

They really try to cooperate well, but there are always bureaucratic pitfalls, like what expenses can be reimbursed. Bureaucracy is pretty intense. Sometimes you just want to offer kids a good project they can grow from. In the current project, we have an autistic child, and some don't speak German at all. Those are small challenges, but when they work together, it works—and I always find that very moving. For me, the projects are mostly something emotional where you grow with them.

That's great to hear. What does your team look like? When you say "we," who is part of the team responsible for organizing and the bureaucracy?

With "Kultur macht stark," you usually have three project partners. I have the project lead role again, as I did in previous projects.

The partners are usually a participating school or a youth center. Once, we also had the neighborhood management at Am Weißen Turm involved—we hoped each partner would bring different access or competencies.

For example, we try to advertise through our channels, and I do all the accounting. Then we have the instructors—our film crew is from a kind of film school. I can totally rely on them; they're great with kids. They all have to provide an extended background check, which I think is right.

For sustainable food, we work with a group called "Die heißen gelben Tomaten," a kind of nutritional education club. I coordinate with them too if there are problems.

The program is pretty rigid. For example, each instructor is allowed only 8 kids, and school classes are usually 20–24. But we found that one instructor isn't enough when you have real challenges. Kids often work best in pairs—in cooking and filming. But there's also a need for someone to supervise, guide, interpret. You basically need 4 people, but that isn't funded. One person said: This doesn't work. So now we've tried bringing in a volunteer. You can't always anticipate this. Some classes just run well. But this time we don't have any gymnasium students—it's part of the program's focus to work with certain schools. That's what we're doing now.

I have to say I find all of this really interesting and such an important insight. When you research the topic, you mostly find reports that evaluate the project very positively and label it a success. I think from what you're telling me, that's also the case.

But I also read, for example, a study from someone evaluating the project in terms of refugees and migration backgrounds—from a university in Ludwigshafen, I think. They found that although many children with migration backgrounds take part, they don't later get involved as young adults to organize projects themselves. Have you had any experience with that?

Not with this project, I think. But I had another project that was funded through donations. It involved only young men with refugee backgrounds, and they cooked traditional dishes from their home countries. They were all quite different—some had come by boat, others by plane, with different backstories. Some were very resistant. We cooked with them, because cooking often reflects culture—what we eat and how we eat it.

We eat with knife and fork, others with their hands. Some cultures have one big shared bowl, we each have individual plates—so many differences. They used a lot of lemons and garlic, which was interesting—especially the lemons, I hadn't realized that. But some said: No way, we're not doing that. That's women's work, or beneath us. So, yes, there are cultural barriers too.

Something else came to mind while you were talking. At Mosaique e.V., we're also a "house of cultures." And often we need attendance lists to prove participation—like if we had a closing event and invited parents or friends. We'd be happy if they came, even if they didn't speak German. Often the kids speak better German, so we'd ask: "Can you please sign in?" Because we need to prove to the funders that people attended. But some refused to sign. I think it's because they had uncertain residency status. That wasn't something I had realized. If your country is at war and you're in a legal limbo, of course you're afraid to sign something you can't even read.

I probably would've reacted the same. I tried to explain that to the funders: "There were more people here than we can prove." But we couldn't take photos either—because of data protection rules. So it was hard to prove that these people were there.

In the end, I could only tell them what I had seen and hope they believed me. That was one of those things I only really understood once I was directly involved in the project.

Thank you! I just have to quickly glance at my list of questions, because I didn't prepare that much—we were mostly aiming for an experience-based report on the "Kultur macht stark" project and how young people are being integrated.

I don't know if you have anything else to share about involving young people as co-organizers or anything similar?

Hmm, let me think. There are two sides to it. Sometimes a class group dynamic is really important, and sometimes a single student can dominate the entire group. They'll decide who's cool and who's not, and that can be really daunting. Sometimes I wish we had smaller classes and that teachers had more support. Also, I think it's difficult to carry out a good integration process on equal footing. Most people tend to stay in their own cultural groups.

Even when you're abroad, you usually stick with your own people. Both of my kids spent time abroad, and I have to say: There's still a lot of work to do for real exchange and mutual understanding to happen. People need to let others in. They say it's the fault of social media, but I think that's too simplistic. I believe what would really help would be to promote critical thinking more. There's that old saying: "He who lies once is not believed." But on social media, the more often a falsehood is shared, the more people believe it. I think your generation is much better at checking facts. That's really great—to question things more. That would make coexistence easier. At least I hope so.

And I think we Germans shouldn't be too smug. We haven't even fully managed East-West integration in our own country. There's still a deep divide, and they don't always seem to like each other.

I'm from the West myself, born and raised, and I don't have any inhibitions—but I do find it concerning how many AfD voters there are. Anyway, that's maybe a bit personal—but I believe we can do it. It's just a lot of work, and these kinds of projects are great for that. They reach people where they are, and I think it's great that you're researching this.

Yes, personally, I'm still a bit torn about the project. Barcelona has a huge problem with gentrification and mass tourism, and I feel like when it's only viewed from an academic perspective—this university organizing it is a consortium of many European universities—then everyone flies in for a one-week in-person event.

This top-down approach, like "we'll now decide how you should solve your problems," I find that often very difficult. Because I believe a lot of solutions come from the bottom—from people figuring things out locally for themselves.

Yes, absolutely.

It's about finding what works for you personally. You can definitely draw a lot of help and inspiration from things like the "Kultur macht stark" project in Germany, but it just won't work exactly the same here or be easy to implement.

Exactly, I think what you said is right—some things need to grow from the bottom. If things are imposed from the top, it doesn't always work.

Like, imagine someone tells you that you're only allowed to wear blue every day—that's how it was in China back then.

I think with how we were raised, we'd immediately rebel.

On the other hand, politics can also create a framework for possibilities. But yes, it's a long road, and I won't live to see the end of it—but maybe you will?

Yes. I had another question: You mentioned that you're also looking for volunteers to help run your projects because you need more people for implementation.

How do you go about recruiting volunteers? Do you feel that young people get involved? Which age groups help out? How do you reach people, and are there criteria?

Right. So for Mosaique e.V. and also for this project: We brought in a volunteer because we needed another instructor but couldn't afford one. The project budget didn't allow it, and due to participant numbers, we weren't allowed to bring in more paid staff.

But normally, at our community space, you can help out as a volunteer. You can also start your own project. For example, we had someone who ran dance classes for people with disabilities. Sometimes they even do performances. We're having our summer festival on July 5th—I don't know if you'll be back by then?

Unfortunately not yet.

Ah, too bad. It's always really nice. We're hoping for good weather in the town hall garden. We've done a lot of advertising already, and I'm also the treasurer—everything I do is voluntary.

I hope we'll get some new members, because financially, it's more stable when people officially join than relying only on donations or funding.

That sounds lovely.

Yes, otherwise we're dependent on external support. A lot of students come through people like Eva or Corinna—they teach courses at the university, and we notice that some students get involved that way.

Everyone kind of finds their own area. Karen, for example, runs creative workshops, sometimes in the evenings. A lot of people just discover something they'd like to do and then get started. Honestly, that's how I got involved too.

I wanted to do something else entirely, but Corinna—our chairperson—was sitting all alone, and I thought: "Oh, she's sitting there by herself. I'll sit with her." And that's how I ended up doing finances for our organization. I never wanted to deal with money, but now I do. It's kind of like a snowball effect—someone talks about it, someone else joins in.

Of course, people come and go. Students are only here for a certain amount of time, and then they leave again. The events team is always happy to get more help—they never have enough people.

That's really interesting. I'll definitely think about it. During my first two years in Lüneburg, I was part of the umbrella organization for student initiatives—I don't know if that means anything to you?I was even one of the spokespersons for a year, responsible for university and city relations, and that's how I got to know Mosaique e.V.. I also attended one or two of your info events and found them really exciting.

When I return, I definitely want to get involved again, because I really miss that here—I haven't found the same kind of connection.

And that's also why, earlier when you mentioned staying in your own culture, I really feel that here too.

Although here, there's not much effort to integrate Germans into Catalan culture—which I totally understand—but it's easy to just stay in your bubble.

You don't really feel addressed. And that's definitely something I want to change when I'm back in Germany.

Yes, they used to say New York was a melting pot, and now people say it's a salad bowl. The tomatoes stay with the tomatoes, the cucumbers stay with cucumbers—different cultures, but they mostly stay among themselves. Maybe if we started mixing kids in kindergarten already, it would be easier. That way, you grow up more open-minded. I think it's great that you're getting involved. My daughter was in León. She found a connection through hockey— there was only one hockey team, so she just played with them. That's how she met Spanish men and their wives. Through university, she didn't meet as many people—more students from other countries, but not necessarily locals.

Yes, I agree. Having that kind of experience gives you a solid foundation.

When you return to your home country, you feel motivated to make a difference, and that's a beautiful thing.

That's nicely said—you should include that in your work.

OK, I will. I think those were all my questions. I don't know if you have any final thoughts or comments—anything I should omit or shorten?

No, that's up to you. […]

Great. Like I said, we're trying to get an understanding of participation conditions and a firsthand account—and I think we can work with this really well.

That's great. I wish you all the best—and have a great time in Barcelona. Enjoy it!

Organizer of the Climate Café in Budapest – 26.06.2025 (Voice note)

Okay, so to talk about the Climate Café, okay, so to introduce on the reason why I decided to start this initiative, I need to briefly talk about my prior experience in Barcelona, where I feel like I was quite frustrated with the fact that most... I couldn't really find a community that matched what I was looking for. Most international associations for students are more party-centered and it wasn't necessarily what I was looking for and I feel like that kind of associations in Barcelona are mostly for Catalan and Spanish-speaking people, so I felt like more difficult to enter this kind of spaces as an international student.

When I then moved to Budapest six months later, I felt like Budapest as a city was attracting more young people with socialist values at least or more interested towards these kind of topics, although most of the initiatives in Budapest were still quite Hungarian-based, but I feel like whenever I would contact them, there was more open mind in accepting people that didn't speak Hungarian, probably because Hungarian people are more used to people from outside not speaking Hungarian.

So after entering this new environment where it did feel like a more fertile ground to possibly start something, I still wasn't thinking of starting something myself until I stumbled upon this random LinkedIn post that somehow directed me to the initiative of Climacafes and I kind of found out how Climacafes are this project that is basically all over the world, there's a pretty famous one in New York, they have some in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, UK, there's a bunch, but not any in Hungary and I mean the thing is it doesn't really take that much work to start something like that.

I was before in student associations and I knew how event planning worked and it's nothing that a normal person cannot take on, it's more like daring to put yourself out there and I was lucky enough to immediately find a space in Budapest that would host these events for no further costs, so it was completely cost-free, just maybe a little bit of effort and I was lucky enough to be surrounded by people that were also interested in the cause and they started helping me out as well.

So Climacafes Budapest was born through just one email to this international centre, not international centre, but cultural centre and them accepting and basically us starting to think about how we want the events to look like and so on and yeah, I think it's difficult to talk about how it works because I feel like it's such a free form event, like kind of freestyle kind of initiative where anybody can do whatever they want with what they think a Climacafe can look like and for us, for example, we longed for community and being able to talk to people about this topic.

So the way we would design these events was mostly a small presentation and then giving the audience the ability to participate in groups and talk to each other and I think that was very much appreciated because I think that was indeed, in general, as a rule of thumb, kind of what the Climacafe initiative is about, is to kind of connect with people that are stressing about the climate and need a community to talk about it, so that was our first event, it was about eco-emotions and how does it feel to be aware of what's happening and not having somebody to talk about it with.

Then the other events were more about what can we do and does our, do we matter, does our impact matter and then more informational such as yeah, like the industry of meat or the future of social and sustainable innovation and stuff like that, it was always very, like a little bit more, how to say, theoretical sometimes but also very chill where you didn't need prior knowledge to be able to talk about these topics.