

LuminaCity

Illuminating Urban Identity

LuminaCity Handbook: *Empowering Young People to Shape the Cities of Tomorrow*



Project No: 2024-1-EL02-KA154-YOU-000241170



Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Youth Participation and Active Citizenship in Urban Development 03

Chapter 2. City Branding as a Tool for Youth Engagement 18

Chapter 3. Practical Methods for Engaging Young People 32

Chapter 4. From Ideas to Action: Building Youth-Friendly Cities 47



Understanding Active Citizenship

Active citizenship is the foundation of strong, democratic, and inclusive societies. It refers to the willingness and ability of individuals to participate in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of their communities. Rather than simply enjoying the rights associated with citizenship, active citizens also recognise their responsibilities and contribute to the common good through informed participation, volunteering, advocacy, and collaboration. In today's rapidly changing world, active citizenship empowers people to become agents of positive change rather than passive observers.

At its core, active citizenship is based on the values of democracy, equality, respect for diversity, and human rights. It encourages individuals to engage with issues that affect their daily lives and to work together in finding solutions to shared challenges. Whether through participating in local consultations, joining community initiatives, volunteering for social causes, or voting in elections, active citizens strengthen democratic institutions and foster more resilient communities.

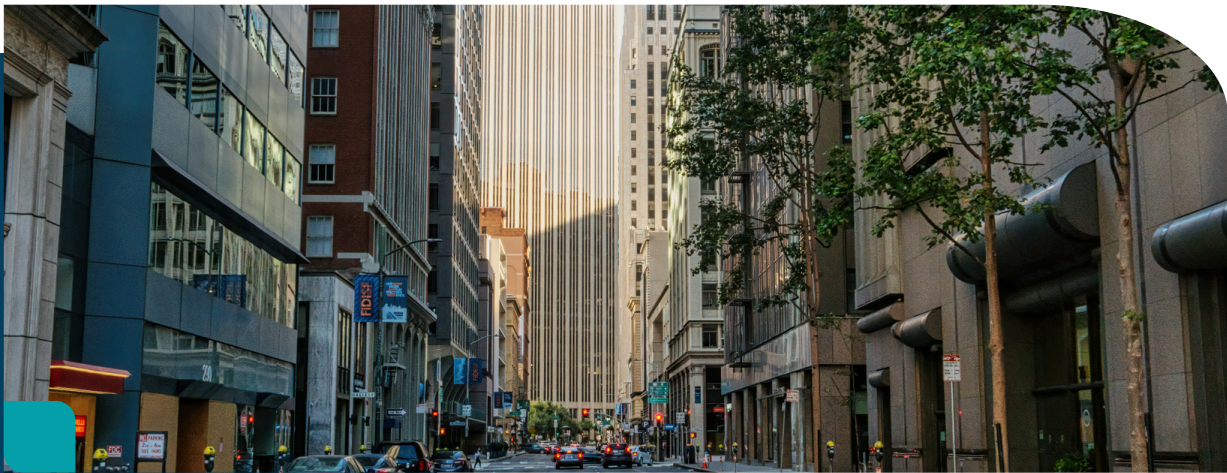


For young people, active citizenship provides valuable opportunities to develop confidence, leadership skills, and a sense of responsibility. By participating in community projects, youth organisations, and civic initiatives, young people gain practical experience in teamwork, communication, critical thinking, and decision-making. These experiences not only contribute to their personal development but also prepare them to become responsible and engaged members of society throughout their lives.

Active citizenship is not limited to political participation. While voting and engaging in democratic processes are important aspects, citizenship also includes everyday actions that improve the lives of others. Supporting local businesses, protecting the environment, participating in neighbourhood activities, promoting inclusion, or helping vulnerable groups are all examples of active citizenship in practice. Every individual can make meaningful contributions regardless of age, education, or professional background.

Communities benefit significantly when citizens actively participate in local development. Citizens often possess valuable knowledge about the needs, challenges, and opportunities within their neighbourhoods. Their ideas and experiences can help local authorities design more effective public services, create inclusive public spaces, and develop policies that better reflect community priorities. Active participation therefore strengthens trust between citizens and decision-makers while improving the quality of public governance. In urban environments, active citizenship plays an essential role in shaping vibrant, sustainable, and attractive cities. Young people, in particular, bring fresh perspectives, creativity, and innovative ideas that can influence urban planning, cultural initiatives, environmental projects, and community development. Their participation helps ensure that cities evolve in ways that respond to the aspirations of future generations while preserving local identity and heritage.

Digital technologies have expanded the opportunities for active citizenship by making participation more accessible than ever before. Online consultations, social media campaigns, digital petitions, collaborative platforms, and virtual community meetings allow citizens to express their opinions, exchange ideas, and engage with public institutions regardless of geographical barriers. Digital participation complements traditional forms of civic engagement and encourages broader involvement, especially among younger generations who are highly connected through digital platforms.



However, becoming an active citizen also requires developing important civic competences. Individuals need access to accurate information, critical thinking skills, intercultural understanding, communication abilities, and confidence in expressing their views. Education, youth work, and non-formal learning all play a crucial role in equipping citizens with these competences and encouraging lifelong participation in democratic life.

Active citizenship is closely connected to the principles promoted by the European Union, particularly through the EU Youth Strategy and the European Youth Goals. These frameworks encourage young people to participate actively in democratic life, contribute to sustainable development, promote social inclusion, and cooperate across cultures. Erasmus+ projects such as LuminaCity provide practical opportunities for young people to develop these competences by engaging directly with their communities and collaborating with peers from different countries.

Ultimately, active citizenship is about recognising that everyone has the power to contribute to positive change. Whether through volunteering, participating in local decision-making, promoting social inclusion, supporting environmental sustainability, or helping shape the future of cities, every action matters. By encouraging young people to become active citizens, projects like LuminaCity help build stronger communities, foster democratic participation, and inspire a new generation of engaged citizens who are committed to creating more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable cities for everyone.

The EU Youth Goals and Democratic Participation

The European Union recognises young people as essential contributors to democratic societies and sustainable development. Through the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, the European Commission has placed youth participation at the centre of its policies, aiming to empower young people to become active citizens and influential decision-makers. The strategy encourages governments, educational institutions, civil society organisations, and local communities to create opportunities for meaningful youth engagement. Rather than viewing young people solely as beneficiaries of public policies, the EU promotes them as partners who can actively shape Europe's future.

A key component of the EU Youth Strategy is the 11 European Youth Goals, which were developed through an extensive consultation process involving thousands of young people from across Europe. These goals reflect the priorities, aspirations, and concerns of young Europeans and provide a shared vision for improving their lives. They serve as a framework for policymakers, youth organisations, and local authorities to develop initiatives that respond to the real needs of young people while promoting inclusion, equality, sustainability, and democratic participation.

Among the eleven Youth Goals, "Space and Participation for All" (Youth Goal #9) is particularly relevant to democratic engagement. This goal calls for greater involvement of young people in decision-making processes at local, national, and European levels. It emphasises that participation should not be symbolic but meaningful, allowing young people to influence policies that affect their lives. Creating inclusive spaces where young people feel heard and respected is fundamental to strengthening democracy and building trust between citizens and public institutions.

Democratic participation extends far beyond voting in elections. Although voting remains one of the most important civic rights, democracy also depends on continuous dialogue, consultation, and collaboration between citizens and decision-makers. Young people can contribute by participating in youth councils, public consultations, community forums, citizen assemblies, volunteer initiatives, advocacy campaigns, and local development projects. These forms of engagement help ensure that public policies reflect diverse perspectives and address the evolving needs of society.



The EU Youth Goals also recognise that participation must be accessible to everyone, regardless of social background, gender, ethnicity, disability, or geographical location. Many young people continue to face barriers that prevent them from engaging in democratic life, including limited access to information, financial constraints, discrimination, or lack of confidence. Promoting inclusive participation requires removing these barriers and creating environments where every young person has equal opportunities to express their opinions and contribute to community development.

Education plays a crucial role in achieving the European Youth Goals. Schools, universities, youth organisations, and non-formal education providers help young people develop civic competences such as critical thinking, media literacy, communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving. These skills enable young citizens to participate responsibly in democratic processes, evaluate information critically, and engage constructively in discussions about social, political, and environmental issues. Lifelong learning therefore becomes an important pillar of active democratic participation.

Digital transformation has significantly expanded opportunities for civic engagement across Europe. Social media platforms, online consultations, digital petitions, and participatory platforms allow young people to engage with public institutions more easily than ever before. At the same time, the EU recognises the importance of promoting digital citizenship by encouraging responsible online behaviour, combating misinformation, and strengthening media literacy. Digital participation should complement traditional democratic processes while ensuring that young people can engage safely and effectively in online public spaces.

Several European programmes actively support the implementation of the Youth Goals. Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and other EU-funded initiatives provide young people with opportunities to participate in international exchanges, volunteer activities, training courses, and youth participation projects. These experiences strengthen intercultural understanding, develop leadership skills, and encourage participants to become more engaged in their own communities after returning home. By connecting young people from different countries, these programmes also reinforce the European values of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual respect.

The objectives of the LuminaCity project closely align with the EU Youth Goals, particularly by encouraging young people to participate in shaping their cities and influencing local development. Through workshops, digital storytelling activities, public forums, and dialogue with local authorities, participants are encouraged to express their ideas, collaborate with stakeholders, and contribute to urban planning and city branding initiatives. These experiences demonstrate that democratic participation is most effective when young people are actively involved in designing solutions rather than simply being consulted after decisions have already been made.

Ultimately, the European Youth Goals provide a long-term vision for building stronger, more inclusive democracies across Europe. They remind us that democracy flourishes when young people are informed, empowered, and given genuine opportunities to participate in public life. By investing in youth participation, promoting civic education, and creating inclusive spaces for dialogue, communities can foster a new generation of active citizens who are prepared to address future challenges with creativity, responsibility, and a strong commitment to democratic values.



The EU Youth Goals and Democratic Participation

Cities are constantly evolving to respond to social, economic, environmental, and technological changes. As urban populations grow and communities become more diverse, it is essential that the needs and aspirations of all citizens are reflected in the planning and development of urban spaces. Young people represent a significant proportion of the population and are among those who will live with the long-term consequences of today's decisions. For this reason, their perspectives should be considered an essential part of creating sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities.

Young people experience cities differently from older generations. They use public spaces for education, recreation, employment, social interaction, sports, and cultural activities, giving them unique insights into how urban environments function in everyday life. They often identify challenges that may be overlooked by traditional planning processes, such as the accessibility of public transport, the availability of safe recreational spaces, affordable housing, digital connectivity, and opportunities for social participation. Their lived experiences provide valuable information that can contribute to more effective urban policies.

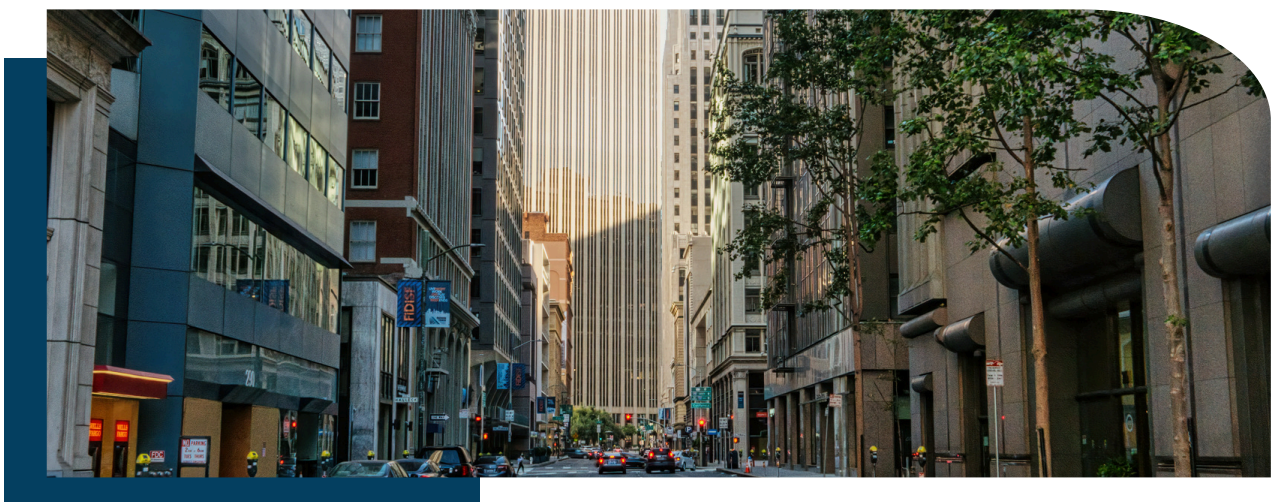
One of the greatest strengths young people bring to urban development is their creativity and willingness to embrace innovation. Growing up in a rapidly changing technological world, they are often quick to adopt new ideas and explore innovative approaches to solving complex urban challenges. Whether through digital technologies, environmental initiatives, social entrepreneurship, or creative industries, young people frequently propose fresh solutions that can improve the quality of urban life. Their ability to think differently makes them valuable partners in designing cities that are adaptable and future-oriented.



Youth participation also strengthens democratic governance by making urban planning more transparent and inclusive. When local authorities involve young people in consultations, workshops, advisory councils, and community projects, decision-making becomes more representative of the entire population. This collaborative approach helps build trust between public institutions and citizens while encouraging greater civic responsibility. Young people who feel that their opinions are respected are more likely to remain engaged in community life and contribute positively to future local initiatives.

Sustainable urban development requires long-term thinking, and young people naturally have a long-term perspective because they will inherit the cities being built today. Decisions regarding climate action, green infrastructure, mobility, housing, education, and public services will shape their future opportunities and quality of life. By involving young people in planning processes, cities can develop strategies that not only address present-day needs but also anticipate future challenges. Their participation supports more sustainable policies that benefit both current and future generations.

Inclusive cities are built by recognising and valuing diversity. Young people come from different cultural, social, economic, and educational backgrounds, bringing a wide range of experiences and perspectives. When municipalities actively engage young people from diverse communities, including those with fewer opportunities, they ensure that urban development reflects the needs of all residents rather than only a limited group of stakeholders. Inclusive participation helps reduce inequalities and creates public spaces where everyone feels represented and welcomed.

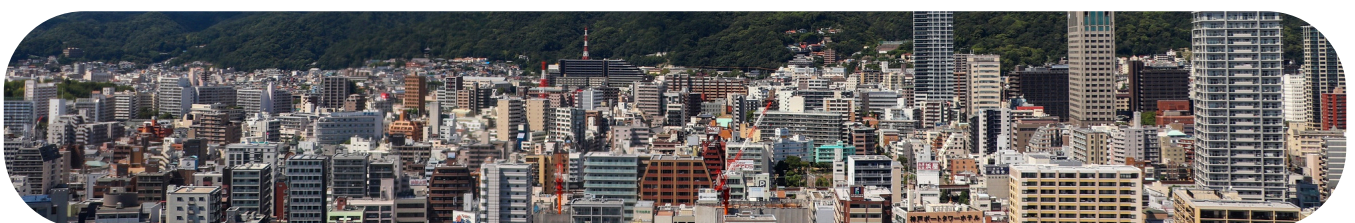


Modern cities also benefit from the digital knowledge and communication skills that young people possess. Many are highly familiar with digital technologies, social media, geographic information systems, and online collaboration platforms. These skills can support innovative approaches to citizen participation, allowing municipalities to gather feedback more efficiently and communicate more effectively with local communities. Young people can therefore act as important bridges between traditional urban planning practices and emerging digital participation methods.

Another important reason for including youth voices is that participation fosters a stronger sense of belonging and local identity. When young people contribute to shaping parks, cultural events, sports facilities, neighbourhood projects, or city branding initiatives, they develop a deeper emotional connection with their communities. This sense of ownership encourages them to care for public spaces, respect local heritage, and actively participate in community life. Strong local identity also contributes to social cohesion and creates more vibrant, attractive cities.

Across Europe, many municipalities have already demonstrated the benefits of youth participation in urban development. Youth councils, participatory budgeting initiatives, co-design workshops, digital consultations, and community-led projects have enabled young citizens to influence decisions related to mobility, sustainability, cultural activities, and public spaces. These examples show that when young people are treated as genuine partners rather than passive beneficiaries, urban policies become more innovative, responsive, and widely supported by local communities.

The LuminaCity project embraces this vision by placing young people at the centre of city branding and urban development. Through workshops, public forums, digital storytelling activities, and dialogue with local authorities, participants are encouraged to share their ideas, collaborate with decision-makers, and contribute to shaping the identity and future of their cities. By empowering young people to participate actively in urban development, LuminaCity demonstrates that successful cities are those that listen to their younger generations, value their creativity, and provide meaningful opportunities for them to influence the communities in which they live.



Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities

Social inclusion is a fundamental principle of democratic societies and a key objective of the European Union. It refers to the process of ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background or personal circumstances, has equal access to opportunities, resources, services, and participation in community life. An inclusive society values diversity and works actively to remove barriers that prevent people from fully contributing to social, economic, cultural, and political life. Equal opportunities are essential for enabling individuals to realise their potential and participate as active members of their communities.

Despite significant progress in many areas, inequalities continue to affect the lives of many young people across Europe. Factors such as economic hardship, geographical isolation, disability, migration background, gender inequality, discrimination, and limited educational opportunities can create barriers to participation. Young people facing these challenges often have fewer opportunities to engage in civic activities, access quality education, secure employment, or influence decisions that affect their lives. Addressing these inequalities requires coordinated efforts from governments, educational institutions, civil society organisations, and local communities.

Equal opportunities do not mean treating everyone in exactly the same way. Instead, they involve recognising that individuals have different needs and may require different forms of support to achieve similar outcomes. Creating equal opportunities often means providing additional resources, accessible environments, targeted training, mentoring programmes, or financial assistance for those facing greater barriers. By adopting this approach, communities can create fairer conditions that enable everyone to participate fully, regardless of their circumstances.

Young people are particularly important beneficiaries of inclusive policies because they are in a crucial stage of personal, educational, and professional development. Access to quality education, non-formal learning, volunteering opportunities, cultural activities, and democratic participation helps young people build confidence, develop new skills, and expand their social networks. When these opportunities are equally accessible, young people are better equipped to contribute positively to their communities and pursue successful futures.

Inclusive communities benefit everyone, not only those facing disadvantages. Diversity brings together people with different experiences, perspectives, cultures, and ideas, leading to greater creativity, innovation, and social cohesion. When people from various backgrounds collaborate, they develop mutual understanding, reduce stereotypes, and strengthen trust within society. Inclusive participation therefore contributes to stronger communities that are better prepared to address complex social and economic challenges through collective action.

Urban development provides significant opportunities to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities. Well-designed public spaces, accessible infrastructure, affordable transportation, community centres, sports facilities, libraries, and cultural venues create environments where people from all backgrounds can interact and participate. Cities that prioritise accessibility and inclusion encourage social interaction, reduce exclusion, and foster a stronger sense of belonging among residents. Inclusive urban planning ensures that no group is left behind when communities grow and develop.

Youth participation initiatives play an important role in promoting inclusion because they create spaces where young people can express their ideas, share experiences, and work together regardless of their differences. Participatory workshops, youth councils, community projects, and intercultural exchanges allow young people to learn from one another while developing respect for diversity. These experiences strengthen social cohesion and encourage young people to become advocates for equality, inclusion, and human rights within their own communities.

Digital technologies have also become valuable tools for advancing equal opportunities. Online learning platforms, virtual consultations, social media campaigns, and digital participation tools make it easier for young people to access information, develop new skills, and engage in civic life regardless of their geographical location. However, ensuring equal digital access remains essential. Closing the digital divide by improving internet access, digital literacy, and technological infrastructure is necessary to guarantee that all young people can benefit from these opportunities.

The Erasmus+ Programme strongly promotes inclusion and diversity as one of its core priorities. Projects are encouraged to actively involve participants with fewer opportunities and create learning environments that are accessible, welcoming, and respectful of individual differences. By supporting mobility, non-formal education, intercultural dialogue, and youth participation, Erasmus+ helps reduce inequalities while strengthening European values of solidarity, equality, and mutual respect. These principles are reflected in projects such as LuminaCity, which seeks to engage young people from diverse backgrounds in shaping the future of their communities.

The LuminaCity project demonstrates that inclusive participation leads to stronger and more vibrant cities. By encouraging young people with different experiences, abilities, and cultural backgrounds to contribute to discussions on city branding, urban identity, and community development, the project ensures that multiple perspectives are represented in local decision-making. This collaborative approach not only empowers young people but also supports the creation of cities that are more inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all citizens. Through social inclusion and equal opportunities, communities become places where every individual can participate, contribute, and thrive.



The Role of Youth in Local Decision-Making

Young people play a vital role in shaping the future of their communities. As active members of society, they possess unique perspectives, innovative ideas, and a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist within their local environments. Their involvement in local decision-making ensures that policies and initiatives reflect the needs of all generations rather than focusing solely on the priorities of older populations. By including young people in governance processes, communities can build more inclusive, democratic, and forward-looking societies.

Local decision-making encompasses the policies, plans, and actions that directly affect people's daily lives. Decisions related to education, public transportation, environmental protection, housing, sports facilities, cultural activities, public spaces, and local economic development all influence the well-being of young people. Since they are among the primary users of these services and spaces, it is both reasonable and necessary that they have opportunities to contribute to the discussions that shape them. Their participation helps ensure that local policies are practical, relevant, and responsive to community needs.

Young people bring fresh ideas and creative approaches to solving local challenges. Having grown up in an increasingly digital, interconnected, and rapidly changing world, they often approach problems with innovation and openness to new technologies and alternative solutions. Their perspectives can help municipalities develop more sustainable urban strategies, improve public services, and introduce modern approaches to communication, environmental protection, and community engagement. By embracing youth innovation, local authorities can strengthen their capacity to respond effectively to contemporary challenges.





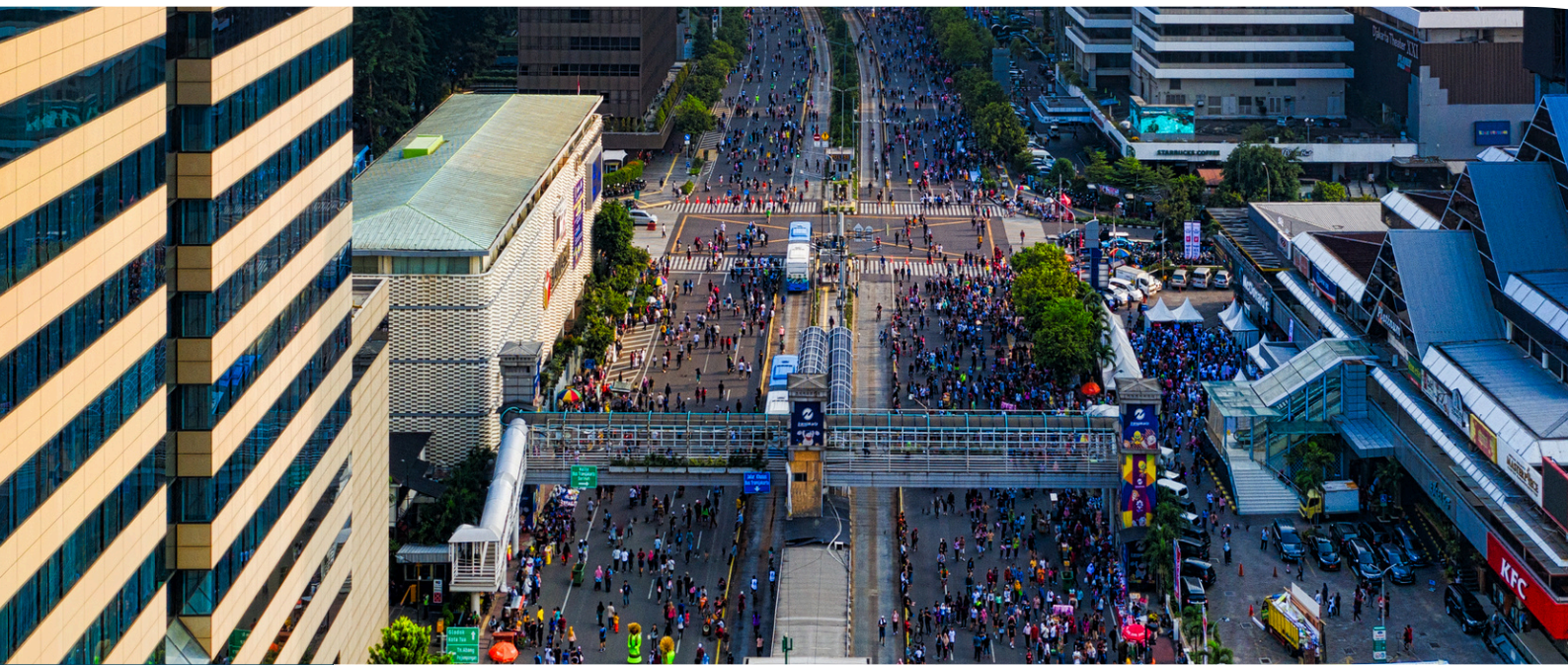
Participation in local decision-making also contributes significantly to young people's personal and professional development. Through involvement in consultations, youth councils, public forums, volunteer initiatives, or participatory budgeting processes, young people develop valuable skills such as leadership, communication, negotiation, teamwork, critical thinking, and public speaking. These competences not only prepare them for future careers but also strengthen their confidence and ability to contribute constructively to society throughout their lives.

One of the most effective ways to encourage youth participation is by establishing structured mechanisms that facilitate continuous dialogue between young people and local authorities. Youth councils, advisory boards, community forums, and citizen panels provide formal spaces where young people can express their views, propose initiatives, and collaborate with decision-makers. These mechanisms move beyond one-time consultations by creating long-term partnerships that enable young citizens to participate regularly in shaping local policies and community development.

Meaningful youth participation requires more than simply inviting young people to meetings. Their contributions must be genuinely valued, carefully considered, and reflected in final decisions whenever possible. When young people see that their ideas have influenced policies or community projects, they develop greater trust in public institutions and become more motivated to engage in future civic activities. Conversely, participation that is merely symbolic can discourage future involvement and weaken confidence in democratic processes.

Local authorities have an important responsibility in creating environments where young people feel encouraged to participate. This involves providing accessible information about public consultations, organising youth-friendly engagement activities, offering opportunities for capacity building, and ensuring that participation processes are inclusive and representative. Municipalities should actively reach out to young people from diverse backgrounds, including those facing social, economic, or geographical barriers, so that all voices are heard in local governance.

Digital technologies have created new opportunities for youth participation in local decision-making. Online surveys, interactive mapping tools, social media discussions, mobile applications, and digital consultation platforms enable municipalities to engage young people in flexible and accessible ways. These digital tools complement traditional face-to-face participation by allowing larger numbers of young citizens to contribute ideas, provide feedback, and stay informed about local initiatives. When used responsibly, technology can significantly strengthen democratic engagement at the local level.



Across Europe, numerous municipalities have successfully integrated young people into local governance through participatory budgeting, youth assemblies, urban design workshops, environmental initiatives, and city planning consultations. These experiences demonstrate that involving young people leads to more innovative solutions, stronger community ownership, and increased public trust. They also show that youth participation is not only beneficial for young citizens themselves but also contributes to more effective and inclusive local governance for the entire community.

The LuminaCity project fully embraces the principle that young people should be active partners in shaping their cities. Through activities such as the Youth Urban Planning Workshop, Youth Empowerment Forum, Round Table discussions, Digital Storytelling Youth Workshop, and Public Forum on City Development, participants are encouraged to collaborate directly with local stakeholders and decision-makers. By providing practical opportunities for dialogue, creativity, and civic engagement, the project demonstrates that meaningful youth participation is essential for building cities that are more inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the aspirations of future generations.



City branding is the strategic process of creating, communicating, and managing the identity and reputation of a city. Much like a company develops a brand to distinguish itself from competitors, cities also seek to establish a unique identity that reflects their values, culture, history, and aspirations. A strong city brand helps people understand what makes a place distinctive and why it is an attractive location to live, work, study, visit, or invest in. However, city branding goes far beyond designing a logo or creating a promotional slogan, it is about shaping the overall perception of a city through authentic experiences and meaningful engagement.

Traditionally, city branding focused primarily on attracting tourists, investors, and businesses by promoting economic opportunities and cultural attractions. Many cities invested heavily in marketing campaigns designed to increase visitor numbers, encourage investment, and improve international visibility. While these objectives remain important, modern city branding has evolved into a much broader concept that also considers the needs and expectations of local residents. Today, successful city brands are built not only for external audiences but also for the people who call the city home.

A city's identity is shaped by many interconnected elements, including its history, architecture, natural environment, cultural heritage, traditions, public spaces, economy, educational institutions, and community values. These characteristics combine to create a unique sense of place that distinguishes one city from another. Effective city branding highlights these authentic qualities rather than attempting to imitate other destinations. Authenticity is essential because people are more likely to trust and connect with a city that genuinely reflects its character and identity.

Local communities play a central role in defining and strengthening a city's brand. Residents are not simply passive recipients of branding campaigns; they are the city's most important ambassadors. Their everyday experiences, interactions, and stories contribute significantly to how the city is perceived by visitors, investors, and future residents. When citizens feel proud of their city and actively participate in promoting its strengths, they help create a positive and credible image that cannot be achieved through marketing alone.



Culture and heritage are among the most powerful components of city branding. Historic buildings, local traditions, festivals, gastronomy, arts, and creative industries help cities express their unique identities while fostering a sense of belonging among residents. At the same time, modern innovation, entrepreneurship, universities, technology hubs, and environmental initiatives also contribute to shaping contemporary urban identities. The most successful city brands combine respect for local heritage with a forward-looking vision that embraces innovation and sustainability.

In recent years, digital technologies have transformed the way cities communicate their identities. Social media platforms, websites, virtual tours, digital storytelling, podcasts, videos, and user-generated content enable cities to reach global audiences instantly. Citizens themselves increasingly shape city brands by sharing photographs, personal experiences, recommendations, and local stories online. This shift means that city branding has become a collaborative process where every resident can influence the city's image through their digital presence and community engagement.

An effective city brand also promotes social cohesion by encouraging residents to develop a shared sense of identity and pride. When people identify with their city, they are more likely to participate in local events, volunteer activities, cultural initiatives, and community development projects. This stronger emotional connection enhances civic engagement and encourages collaboration between citizens, local authorities, businesses, educational institutions, and civil society organisations. City branding therefore contributes not only to economic development but also to stronger and more resilient communities.

The LuminaCity project embraces this contemporary understanding of city branding by placing young people at the centre of the branding process. Rather than treating city branding as a marketing exercise, the project views it as a participatory approach that empowers young citizens to shape the identity and future of their communities. Through workshops, public discussions, digital storytelling, and dialogue with local authorities, participants explore how urban identity can reflect the values, creativity, and aspirations of the people who live there. By encouraging young people to contribute actively to city branding, LuminaCity demonstrates that the strongest city brands are created not only by institutions but by engaged communities working together toward a shared vision of the future.

Building Urban Identity Together

Urban identity is the unique character, personality, and sense of belonging that distinguishes one city from another. It is shaped by the interaction of people, places, history, culture, architecture, traditions, and shared experiences. Unlike a logo or marketing campaign, urban identity develops naturally over time through the everyday lives of residents and their relationship with the places they inhabit. A strong urban identity enables citizens to feel connected to their city, fostering pride, trust, and a shared commitment to its future. Building this identity is therefore not the responsibility of local authorities alone, but a collaborative process involving the entire community.

Cities are constantly evolving in response to demographic changes, technological advances, environmental challenges, and cultural transformations. As urban environments change, so too does their identity. New neighbourhoods emerge, public spaces are redesigned, cultural events evolve, and new communities contribute their own traditions and perspectives. Building urban identity requires recognising this dynamic nature while preserving the elements that make a city unique. It is a continuous process of balancing tradition with innovation and ensuring that development reflects both the city's history and its future aspirations.

Collaboration is essential for creating an authentic urban identity. Local governments, educational institutions, businesses, civil society organisations, artists, entrepreneurs, and residents all contribute valuable knowledge and experiences. When these stakeholders work together, they create a shared vision that reflects the diversity of the community. Participatory planning processes, public consultations, workshops, and collaborative design initiatives provide opportunities for citizens to express their ideas and influence how their city develops. Such cooperation strengthens trust and encourages a greater sense of collective ownership over local development.

Young people play a particularly important role in building urban identity because they experience cities differently from previous generations. Their daily interactions with schools, universities, sports facilities, cultural venues, digital technologies, and public spaces provide fresh perspectives on urban life. Young people often identify emerging needs, changing lifestyles, and innovative opportunities that may not yet be visible to policymakers. Their ideas help cities remain attractive, inclusive, and adaptable to future challenges while ensuring that urban development reflects the expectations of younger generations.

Public spaces serve as the physical foundation of urban identity. Parks, squares, pedestrian streets, waterfronts, cultural centres, libraries, sports facilities, and neighbourhood gathering places are where communities interact and create shared memories. Well-designed public spaces encourage social interaction, cultural exchange, recreation, and civic participation. They become symbols of local identity and contribute to residents' emotional attachment to their city. When communities participate in designing and improving these spaces, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility for their urban environment.

Culture is another essential element in shaping urban identity. Local festivals, music, gastronomy, traditional crafts, museums, artistic performances, and community celebrations reflect the values and history of a city while bringing people together. These cultural expressions create opportunities for dialogue between generations and strengthen social cohesion. At the same time, contemporary creative industries, digital arts, and innovation hubs contribute new dimensions to urban identity, demonstrating that cities can celebrate their heritage while embracing creativity and change.

Building urban identity also requires inclusiveness. Every resident should have the opportunity to contribute regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic background, or cultural heritage. Cities become stronger when they embrace diversity and ensure that different voices are represented in planning and decision-making processes. Inclusive participation helps create urban identities that reflect the experiences of the entire community rather than only a limited group of stakeholders. It also promotes equality, mutual respect, and a stronger sense of belonging among all residents.

Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly important component of urban identity. Citizens increasingly associate attractive cities with clean public spaces, green infrastructure, sustainable transport, renewable energy, and environmentally responsible policies. Communities that actively participate in environmental initiatives such as tree planting, urban gardening, recycling campaigns, and climate action projects contribute directly to shaping a city's identity as a sustainable place to live. These initiatives not only improve the quality of life but also strengthen civic engagement and collective responsibility.





Digital technologies have expanded the ways in which urban identity is created and shared. Social media platforms, interactive maps, community storytelling projects, digital archives, and virtual participation tools enable citizens to contribute their experiences and ideas more easily than ever before. Residents can share local stories, promote hidden cultural treasures, document neighbourhood history, and participate in online consultations regarding urban development. Digital participation complements traditional forms of civic engagement and helps cities reach wider audiences while strengthening community involvement.

The LuminaCity project reflects the principle that urban identity should be built collaboratively by the people who live in the city. Through activities such as urban planning workshops, public forums, digital storytelling initiatives, and dialogue with local authorities, young people are encouraged to contribute actively to shaping the image and future of their communities. By bringing together citizens, decision-makers, and local stakeholders, the project demonstrates that successful city branding begins with a shared sense of identity created through participation, cooperation, and mutual respect. When communities work together to define what makes their city unique, they build stronger, more resilient places that inspire pride, encourage civic engagement, and create lasting opportunities for future generations.

Young People as Ambassadors of Their Cities

Young people are among the most influential representatives of their communities. Through their daily interactions, creative work, educational activities, volunteer initiatives, and online presence, they shape how others perceive the places where they live. Whether speaking with visitors, participating in international exchanges, studying abroad, or sharing content on social media, young people communicate stories about their cities that influence public perception. For this reason, they should be recognised not only as residents but also as active ambassadors who contribute to building and promoting a positive urban identity.





An ambassador is someone who represents and promotes the values, culture, and identity of a place or organisation. In the context of city branding, young people become ambassadors by sharing authentic experiences of their communities and encouraging others to discover what makes their city unique. Unlike traditional marketing campaigns, which often focus on promotional messages, young ambassadors provide genuine and personal perspectives that are often considered more trustworthy and relatable. Their enthusiasm, creativity, and authenticity make them powerful advocates for their hometowns.

Young people possess a deep understanding of their city's everyday life. They know the local cafés, parks, cultural venues, sports facilities, artistic spaces, festivals, and hidden attractions that may not appear in official tourism brochures. Their experiences reflect the real character of the city and provide valuable insights into what it is like to live there. By sharing these experiences with visitors, exchange participants, international students, or online audiences, they help create a realistic and appealing image of their community.

Digital communication has significantly strengthened the role of young ambassadors. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn allow young people to reach audiences far beyond their local communities. Through photographs, short videos, blogs, podcasts, and personal stories, they showcase local traditions, cultural events, environmental initiatives, entrepreneurship, and everyday urban life. These digital narratives contribute to the city's reputation while encouraging tourism, investment, and cultural exchange. In many cases, user-generated content has become one of the most influential forms of city promotion.

Participation in European programmes such as Erasmus+ further enhances the ambassadorial role of young people. International exchanges, training courses, youth participation projects, and volunteering activities provide opportunities for participants to present their cities to peers from different countries. During these experiences, young people naturally become representatives of their local communities, sharing their culture, traditions, customs, and values while learning about those of others. These intercultural encounters strengthen mutual understanding and contribute to building positive international relationships.





Being a city ambassador also involves demonstrating active citizenship. Young people who volunteer, participate in environmental campaigns, organise cultural events, support local charities, or contribute to community development projects send a strong message about the values of their city. Their actions reflect a commitment to social responsibility, inclusion, sustainability, and civic engagement. Visitors and other residents often associate these positive behaviours with the overall identity of the city, reinforcing its reputation as an active and welcoming community.

Educational institutions, youth organisations, and municipalities play an important role in supporting young ambassadors. Schools and universities can encourage civic education, cultural awareness, and local history, helping students better understand the identity of their communities. Youth organisations can provide opportunities for leadership, volunteering, intercultural learning, and international cooperation. Local authorities can involve young people in promotional campaigns, cultural festivals, tourism initiatives, and city branding strategies, recognising them as valuable partners rather than passive beneficiaries.

Young ambassadors also contribute to strengthening local identity among their peers. By participating in community projects, organising local events, creating digital content, or promoting cultural heritage, they inspire other young people to become more engaged in the life of their city. This creates a ripple effect where increasing numbers of young citizens develop a stronger sense of belonging and pride in their communities. Such engagement encourages greater participation in local decision-making and contributes to building more cohesive and resilient societies.

One of the most valuable qualities that young ambassadors bring to city branding is their ability to combine tradition with innovation. They appreciate local history and cultural heritage while embracing new technologies, creative industries, environmental sustainability, and entrepreneurship. This balance allows cities to preserve their unique identity while adapting to contemporary challenges and opportunities. Young people help present cities as places that respect their past while confidently looking toward the future, making them attractive to residents, visitors, investors, and future generations alike.

The LuminaCity project recognises young people as essential ambassadors of urban identity. Through activities such as digital storytelling, youth forums, urban planning workshops, and dialogue with local authorities, participants are encouraged to discover the unique qualities of their cities and communicate them to wider audiences. They learn how their personal experiences, creative ideas, and civic engagement contribute to shaping the city's image both locally and internationally. By empowering young people to become ambassadors of their communities, LuminaCity demonstrates that successful city branding is built not only through institutional strategies but also through the authentic voices, stories, and actions of the people who proudly call the city their home.

Cultural Heritage, Innovation and Sustainability

Cultural heritage, innovation, and sustainability are three interconnected pillars that shape the identity and future of modern cities. While cultural heritage preserves the stories, traditions, and values of previous generations, innovation introduces new ideas and solutions that respond to contemporary challenges. Sustainability ensures that urban development meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to enjoy the same opportunities and resources. Together, these three elements create cities that are attractive, resilient, and capable of adapting to a rapidly changing world.

Cultural heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible assets that define the identity of a community. Historic buildings, monuments, traditional architecture, museums, archaeological sites, local crafts, music, cuisine, festivals, languages, and customs all contribute to the distinctive character of a city. These cultural resources connect residents with their history, strengthen community identity, and provide visitors with authentic experiences. Protecting and promoting cultural heritage is therefore not only a matter of preservation but also an investment in social cohesion, education, and local development.



Young people play an important role in safeguarding and revitalising cultural heritage. While heritage is often associated with older generations, its long-term preservation depends on the interest and involvement of younger citizens. Through educational activities, volunteering, cultural projects, digital storytelling, and community events, young people can rediscover local traditions and reinterpret them for contemporary audiences. Their participation ensures that cultural heritage remains relevant, accessible, and meaningful in modern society rather than becoming a static record of the past.

Innovation complements cultural heritage by enabling cities to respond creatively to emerging social, economic, and environmental challenges. Innovative thinking encourages communities to develop new approaches to urban planning, mobility, education, tourism, public services, and citizen participation. Rather than replacing tradition, innovation builds upon existing strengths to improve quality of life and strengthen local competitiveness. Cities that successfully combine heritage with innovation are often better equipped to attract talent, investment, visitors, and new economic opportunities.

The creative industries demonstrate how heritage and innovation can work together. Designers, artists, architects, entrepreneurs, filmmakers, digital creators, and cultural organisations frequently draw inspiration from local history and traditions while using modern technologies to reach new audiences. Digital exhibitions, augmented reality experiences, virtual museums, interactive city tours, podcasts, and creative festivals allow communities to present their heritage in engaging and accessible ways. These initiatives help preserve cultural identity while encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning.

Sustainability has become an essential consideration in urban development and city branding. Sustainable cities aim to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being through responsible planning and resource management. Green public spaces, renewable energy, sustainable transport, circular economy practices, waste reduction, and climate adaptation strategies all contribute to creating healthier and more resilient urban environments. Citizens increasingly associate these initiatives with high quality of life and responsible local governance, making sustainability an important component of a city's identity.

Young people have emerged as leading advocates for sustainable development across Europe and around the world. Through environmental campaigns, climate initiatives, recycling programmes, sustainable mobility projects, and community volunteering, they actively promote responsible lifestyles and encourage positive environmental change. Their engagement demonstrates that sustainability is not only a governmental responsibility but also a shared commitment involving citizens, educational institutions, businesses, and civil society. Empowering young people to participate in sustainability initiatives strengthens both environmental awareness and democratic participation.

The integration of cultural heritage, innovation, and sustainability creates opportunities for inclusive urban development. Historic buildings can be renovated using environmentally friendly technologies, abandoned industrial sites can be transformed into creative and cultural centres, and traditional public spaces can be redesigned to improve accessibility and environmental performance. Such initiatives preserve the unique identity of cities while meeting contemporary social and environmental needs. They also encourage collaboration between architects, urban planners, historians, environmental experts, entrepreneurs, artists, and local communities.

European policies increasingly recognise the importance of combining these three dimensions in local development. The European Green Deal, the New European Bauhaus initiative, and various Erasmus+ projects promote sustainable, inclusive, and aesthetically attractive communities where cultural heritage, creativity, innovation, and environmental responsibility reinforce one another. These initiatives encourage citizens, particularly young people, to participate actively in shaping urban environments that are both culturally rich and environmentally sustainable. By integrating these principles into local policies, cities can strengthen their resilience while improving the quality of life for all residents.





European Examples of Successful Youth-Led City Branding

Across Europe, many cities have recognised that young people are not only beneficiaries of urban policies but also valuable contributors to the way cities are perceived, developed, and promoted. By involving young citizens in cultural initiatives, digital campaigns, urban planning, and community projects, municipalities have strengthened local identity while encouraging civic participation. These examples demonstrate that successful city branding is most effective when it reflects the authentic experiences and creativity of the people who live there. Youth-led initiatives have become powerful tools for showcasing local culture, promoting innovation, and creating stronger connections between communities and their cities.

One notable example is Ghent, Belgium, where the city has actively involved young people in shaping its image as an innovative, sustainable, and inclusive urban centre. Through youth councils, participatory budgeting, cultural festivals, and creative workshops, young residents regularly contribute ideas for public spaces, mobility, environmental initiatives, and community events. The municipality encourages collaboration between young citizens, universities, artists, and entrepreneurs, allowing youth perspectives to influence both local development and the city's public identity. This participatory approach has helped Ghent become recognised as a city that values innovation, sustainability, and active citizenship.

Another inspiring example is Helsinki, Finland, where youth participation forms an integral part of local governance. The city operates youth councils and consultation platforms that enable young people to participate in decisions related to education, public spaces, climate action, and cultural development. Helsinki has also invested in digital participation tools that allow young citizens to submit ideas and vote on community projects. By integrating youth perspectives into urban planning and public communication, the city reinforces its international reputation as a forward-thinking, democratic, and people-centred capital.



In Barcelona, Spain, young citizens have played an increasingly important role in shaping neighbourhood development and cultural life. Through participatory urban planning workshops, youth associations, creative hubs, and digital innovation centres, young residents contribute to decisions affecting public spaces, cultural programmes, and social inclusion initiatives. Barcelona also supports youth entrepreneurship and creative industries, encouraging young artists, designers, and innovators to contribute to the city's international image. These initiatives reinforce Barcelona's reputation as a vibrant, creative, and culturally diverse city while strengthening young people's connection to their communities.

Tallinn, Estonia, provides an excellent example of combining digital innovation with youth participation. As one of Europe's leading digital societies, Tallinn encourages young people to engage with local governance through online participation platforms, hackathons, innovation competitions, and civic technology projects. Youth-led initiatives have contributed to improving digital public services, promoting entrepreneurship, and increasing citizen engagement. By actively involving young innovators, Tallinn has strengthened its image as a smart city that embraces technology while maintaining strong democratic values and community participation.

Another successful case is Cork, Ireland, where young people have been actively involved in cultural festivals, public art initiatives, community storytelling, and heritage projects. Through collaborations with schools, youth organisations, artists, and local authorities, young residents contribute to preserving local traditions while introducing contemporary cultural expressions. Digital storytelling projects, music festivals, and creative workshops allow young people to share their personal perspectives on the city's identity. These activities have enhanced Cork's reputation as a city where culture, creativity, and community engagement go hand in hand.

The success of these cities demonstrates several common characteristics. First, they recognise young people as partners rather than passive participants. Second, they create structured opportunities for continuous dialogue through youth councils, consultations, and collaborative projects. Third, they encourage innovation by supporting digital technologies, creative industries, environmental initiatives, and social entrepreneurship. Finally, they understand that authentic city branding emerges from the lived experiences of residents rather than from marketing campaigns alone. These principles contribute to stronger civic engagement and more resilient urban communities.



These European examples also illustrate that youth-led city branding extends beyond tourism promotion. It contributes to social inclusion, democratic participation, environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and economic development. When young people actively participate in shaping their city's image, they develop a stronger sense of belonging and responsibility toward their communities. At the same time, cities benefit from fresh ideas, greater innovation, and stronger connections with younger generations. This mutually beneficial relationship creates urban environments that are more inclusive, dynamic, and responsive to future challenges.

The LuminaCity project builds upon these successful European experiences by encouraging young people to become active contributors to the identity and future of their own cities. Through urban planning workshops, digital storytelling activities, public forums, and dialogue with local authorities, participants develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to influence local development and promote their communities. By learning from successful practices across Europe while creating solutions adapted to their own local contexts, young people become ambassadors of positive change. LuminaCity demonstrates that the most successful city brands are created through collaboration, participation, and shared ownership, where every young citizen has the opportunity to help shape a city that is inclusive, innovative, sustainable, and proud of its unique identity.



European Examples of Successful Youth-Led City Branding

Participatory Workshops

Participatory workshops are one of the most effective methods for encouraging young people to become actively involved in community development and local decision-making. Unlike traditional meetings or lectures, participatory workshops place participants at the centre of the learning and discussion process. They encourage dialogue, collaboration, creativity, and shared problem-solving, allowing every participant to contribute ideas and experiences. By creating an open and inclusive environment, these workshops empower young people to take ownership of discussions and actively shape the outcomes.

The primary objective of a participatory workshop is to ensure that every participant has an equal opportunity to express their views. Rather than receiving information passively, young people are encouraged to ask questions, analyse local challenges, generate solutions, and work together toward common goals. This collaborative approach not only improves the quality of discussions but also strengthens participants' confidence and communication skills. When individuals feel that their opinions are valued, they become more motivated to engage in future civic and community initiatives.

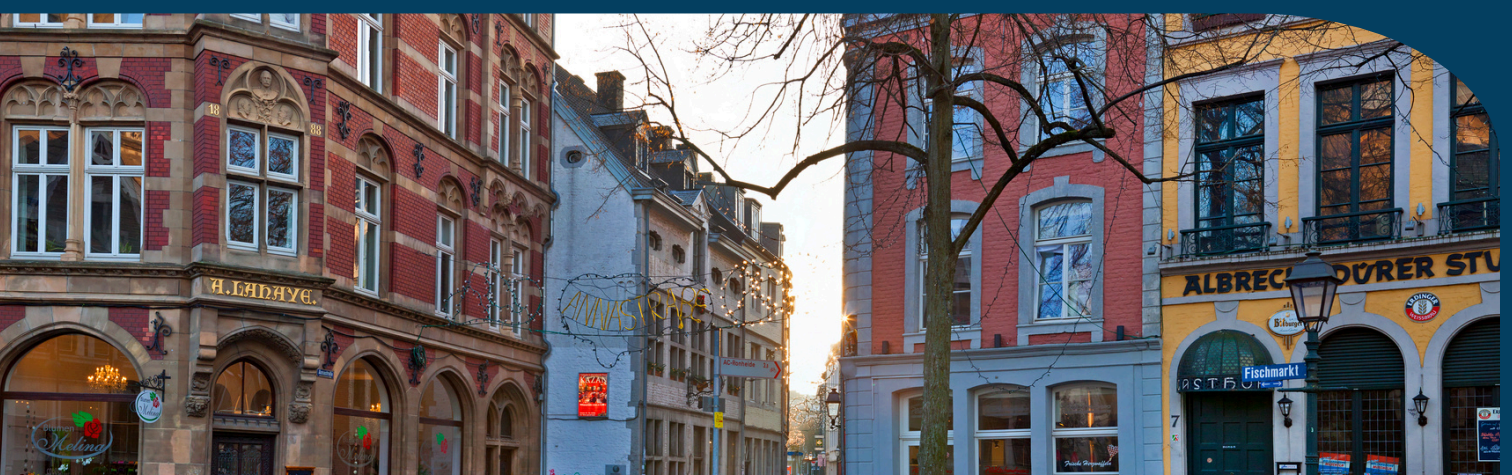
Participatory workshops are particularly valuable in projects related to urban development and city branding because they allow young people to share their personal experiences of living in their communities. Participants can identify the strengths and weaknesses of their cities, discuss opportunities for improvement, and explore innovative ideas for creating more inclusive, sustainable, and attractive urban environments. Their perspectives provide valuable insights that may not emerge through conventional planning processes, helping local authorities and stakeholders better understand the needs of younger generations.

One of the greatest strengths of participatory workshops is their flexibility. Depending on the objectives of the activity, facilitators can use a wide range of interactive methods, including brainstorming sessions, group discussions, role-playing exercises, world cafés, design thinking, problem-solving challenges, simulations, and collaborative mapping activities. These methods encourage participants to think creatively, exchange knowledge, and develop practical solutions while maintaining a high level of engagement throughout the workshop.

Successful participatory workshops require careful planning and skilled facilitation. Facilitators play a crucial role in creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive atmosphere where every participant feels comfortable contributing. They encourage equal participation, manage group dynamics, guide discussions, and ensure that different perspectives are respected. Rather than providing ready-made answers, facilitators support participants in exploring ideas independently and reaching shared conclusions through dialogue and cooperation.

Inclusivity is a key principle of participatory workshops. Activities should be designed to accommodate participants with different educational backgrounds, cultural experiences, abilities, and levels of confidence. Facilitators should use accessible language, encourage quieter participants to contribute, and adapt activities to meet diverse learning needs. When everyone has an equal opportunity to participate, workshops become richer in ideas and more representative of the wider community.

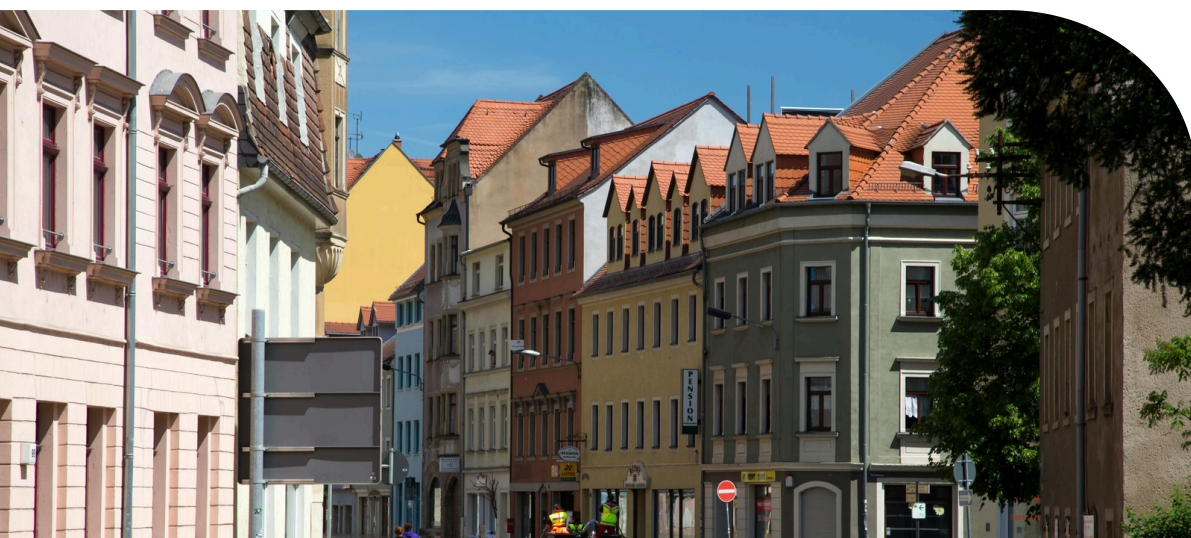
Participatory workshops also contribute significantly to the development of essential life skills. Throughout the process, young people strengthen their communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, negotiation, creativity, and decision-making abilities. They learn how to listen respectfully to different opinions, build consensus, resolve disagreements constructively, and present their ideas with confidence. These competences are valuable not only for civic participation but also for education, employment, and personal development.



Digital technologies have expanded the possibilities for participatory workshops. Online collaboration platforms, interactive whiteboards, virtual brainstorming tools, digital surveys, and collaborative mapping software enable participants to engage regardless of their location. Hybrid workshops, combining face-to-face and online participation, have become increasingly common and allow a broader range of young people to contribute. These digital tools complement traditional facilitation techniques while increasing accessibility and encouraging innovative forms of collaboration.

Within youth participation projects, participatory workshops often produce tangible outcomes that can support local decision-making. Participants may develop action plans, policy recommendations, community project proposals, communication campaigns, or creative concepts for improving public spaces and strengthening urban identity. These outputs provide local authorities and community organisations with practical ideas that reflect the genuine priorities of young citizens. As a result, workshops become not only educational activities but also valuable mechanisms for informing public policy and community development.

The LuminaCity project places participatory workshops at the heart of its methodology for engaging young people in city branding and urban development. Through activities such as the Youth Urban Planning Workshop, Digital Storytelling Workshop, and collaborative discussions with local stakeholders, participants are encouraged to analyse their cities, exchange ideas, and develop innovative proposals for strengthening urban identity. These workshops demonstrate that meaningful participation begins with dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. By giving young people the opportunity to actively contribute to shaping their communities, LuminaCity fosters active citizenship, strengthens democratic participation, and empowers a new generation to become co-creators of more inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant cities.



Public Forums and Community Dialogues

Public forums and community dialogues are essential mechanisms for promoting democratic participation and strengthening the relationship between citizens and local decision-makers. They provide structured opportunities for people to discuss community issues, exchange ideas, and contribute to the development of policies and initiatives that affect their daily lives. Unlike one-way communication, public forums encourage open dialogue where participants can ask questions, express concerns, and collaboratively explore solutions. By creating spaces for meaningful conversation, communities become more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs of their citizens.

For young people, public forums represent an important opportunity to participate actively in local governance. Many decisions regarding education, employment, public transportation, environmental protection, sports, culture, and public spaces directly influence their lives. Community dialogues allow young citizens to share their experiences, identify challenges, and propose innovative solutions alongside local authorities and other stakeholders. This participation helps ensure that youth perspectives are considered during decision-making processes and demonstrates that young people are valuable contributors to community development.

One of the greatest strengths of public forums is their ability to bring together diverse groups of people. Residents, municipal representatives, educators, business owners, civil society organisations, youth workers, and community leaders all have different experiences and perspectives that enrich discussions. By encouraging dialogue among these groups, forums promote mutual understanding and help identify shared priorities. Collaborative discussions often lead to more balanced and effective decisions because they consider the interests of multiple stakeholders rather than focusing on a single viewpoint.





Successful community dialogues are based on the principles of respect, openness, and inclusiveness. Every participant should feel comfortable expressing their opinions without fear of discrimination or criticism. Facilitators play an important role in creating a positive atmosphere, encouraging equal participation, and ensuring that discussions remain constructive and solution-oriented. When participants feel listened to and respected, they are more willing to contribute openly and engage in meaningful conversations about the future of their communities.

Public forums also strengthen transparency and accountability within local governance. When municipalities openly discuss plans, policies, and development projects with citizens, they demonstrate a commitment to participatory democracy. Citizens gain a better understanding of how decisions are made, while local authorities receive valuable feedback before implementing new initiatives. This exchange of information builds trust between institutions and communities and helps create policies that are more responsive to local needs.

Youth participation in public dialogues contributes significantly to developing civic competences. By participating in discussions with policymakers, community leaders, and fellow citizens, young people improve their public speaking, active listening, negotiation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. They also gain confidence in expressing their ideas and learn how democratic processes function in practice. These experiences encourage lifelong civic engagement and help young people recognise that their opinions can influence positive change within their communities.

Community dialogues are particularly valuable in the context of urban development and city branding. Discussions about public spaces, environmental sustainability, mobility, cultural heritage, tourism, social inclusion, and local identity benefit greatly from the perspectives of young residents. Young people often use urban spaces differently from older generations and can provide valuable insights into how cities can become more accessible, attractive, and innovative. Their contributions help municipalities develop urban strategies that reflect the needs of both current and future generations.

Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for public participation by making community dialogues more accessible. Online town hall meetings, virtual consultations, interactive surveys, livestreamed discussions, and digital participation platforms allow citizens to contribute regardless of geographical location or personal circumstances. These digital tools are particularly effective for engaging young people, who are generally comfortable using online communication platforms. Combining face-to-face meetings with digital participation creates more flexible and inclusive opportunities for civic engagement.

For public forums to have a lasting impact, they must lead to concrete actions. Participants should receive feedback on how their recommendations have been considered and what decisions have resulted from the discussions. When citizens, particularly young people, see that their ideas contribute to real changes in policies or community projects, they develop greater trust in democratic institutions and become more motivated to participate in future initiatives. Effective follow-up transforms dialogue into action and strengthens the credibility of participatory processes.

The LuminaCity project places public forums and community dialogues at the centre of youth participation in urban development. Through activities such as the Public Forum on City Development, Round Table discussions, and meetings between young people and local stakeholders, participants are encouraged to share their visions for the future of their cities and engage directly with decision-makers. These activities create opportunities for constructive dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and mutual learning, demonstrating that sustainable city branding and urban development can only be achieved when communities work together. By empowering young people to participate in public dialogue, LuminaCity strengthens democratic participation, fosters social inclusion, and helps build cities that genuinely reflect the aspirations and needs of their citizens.



Round Tables with Decision-Makers

Round table discussions are an effective method for promoting meaningful dialogue between young people and those responsible for making decisions within local communities. Unlike formal meetings, round tables are designed to encourage open communication, equal participation, and collaborative problem-solving. Participants sit together as equals, creating an environment where every opinion is respected and every voice has the opportunity to contribute. This format helps reduce barriers between citizens and public authorities, fostering mutual understanding and trust.

One of the primary objectives of round table discussions is to create direct communication between young people and decision-makers. Local authorities, municipal representatives, educators, business leaders, youth workers, and representatives of civil society organisations have valuable knowledge and experience, while young people bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Bringing these groups together enables constructive conversations about community priorities, allowing decision-makers to better understand the expectations and concerns of younger generations.



Young people often possess first-hand knowledge of the challenges affecting their daily lives. Issues such as access to education, employment opportunities, affordable housing, public transportation, environmental sustainability, cultural activities, and recreational spaces directly influence their well-being and future prospects. Round table discussions provide a platform where these experiences can be shared openly, helping policymakers gain valuable insights that may not emerge through traditional consultation processes. This exchange of perspectives contributes to more informed and responsive decision-making.

Round tables also promote a culture of dialogue rather than confrontation. Participants are encouraged to listen actively, respect different viewpoints, and work collectively towards practical solutions. Instead of focusing solely on problems, discussions are structured to identify opportunities, explore innovative ideas, and develop recommendations that benefit the wider community. This collaborative approach strengthens relationships between citizens and institutions while demonstrating that complex challenges are best addressed through cooperation rather than conflict.

For young participants, engaging in round table discussions provides valuable learning opportunities. They develop important civic competences such as public speaking, negotiation, critical thinking, active listening, teamwork, and consensus-building. They also gain a better understanding of how local governance operates, how policies are developed, and how decisions affect community life. These experiences increase their confidence and encourage them to remain engaged in democratic processes beyond the duration of individual projects or activities.

Decision-makers also benefit significantly from participating in round table discussions. By engaging directly with young people, they gain access to new ideas, identify emerging community needs, and receive immediate feedback on existing policies and initiatives. This interaction helps build public trust and demonstrates a commitment to transparent, participatory governance. It also allows policymakers to design more effective strategies by incorporating the perspectives of those who will be most affected by future decisions.



Successful round tables require careful planning and skilled facilitation. A clear agenda, well-defined objectives, and balanced representation of participants contribute to productive discussions. Facilitators play a key role in ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak, discussions remain respectful, and conversations stay focused on finding solutions. Creating an inclusive atmosphere where all participants feel comfortable expressing their opinions is essential for achieving meaningful outcomes.

Modern technologies have expanded the possibilities for organising round table discussions. In addition to traditional face-to-face meetings, online platforms now enable virtual and hybrid discussions that connect participants from different locations. Digital tools such as video conferencing, collaborative whiteboards, live polling, and shared documents allow broader participation and make discussions more accessible, particularly for young people who are already familiar with digital communication. These technologies complement in-person dialogue while increasing flexibility and inclusiveness.

The outcomes of round table discussions often extend beyond the meetings themselves. Recommendations, action plans, policy proposals, and collaborative initiatives developed during discussions can inform municipal strategies, youth policies, community projects, and urban development plans. It is important that participants receive feedback on how their recommendations have been considered and implemented. This follow-up reinforces the value of participation and demonstrates that dialogue can lead to tangible improvements within the community.

The LuminaCity project recognises round table discussions as a key mechanism for strengthening youth participation in urban development and city branding. By bringing together young people, local authorities, urban planners, community organisations, educators, and other stakeholders, the project creates opportunities for meaningful dialogue about the future of cities. Participants are encouraged to share their ideas, discuss local challenges, and collaboratively develop solutions that reflect the needs and aspirations of their communities. Through these discussions, LuminaCity demonstrates that sustainable urban development is most successful when young people are treated as equal partners in decision-making and when collaboration between citizens and institutions becomes a permanent feature of local governance.





Chapter 4. From Ideas to Action: Building Youth-Friendly Cities

Designing Community Action Plans

Community action plans are practical roadmaps that transform ideas into concrete actions capable of producing positive change within a community. They provide a structured framework for identifying local challenges, defining objectives, assigning responsibilities, establishing timelines, and evaluating results. While discussions, workshops, and consultations generate valuable ideas, meaningful change only occurs when these ideas are translated into well-organised plans that guide implementation. For young people, developing community action plans is an opportunity to move from participation to leadership by becoming active contributors to local development.

An effective community action plan begins with understanding the needs of the community. Before proposing solutions, young people should identify the issues that affect local residents through observation, research, surveys, interviews, focus groups, or public consultations. Gathering information from different stakeholders helps ensure that the proposed actions respond to real challenges rather than assumptions. This evidence-based approach increases the relevance and credibility of the final plan while encouraging collaboration from the earliest stages of the process.



Once community needs have been identified, the next step is to establish clear objectives. Objectives should describe the desired outcomes and provide a shared direction for everyone involved. Effective objectives are realistic, measurable, and achievable within the available resources and timeframe. Rather than attempting to solve every challenge simultaneously, action plans should focus on a limited number of priorities where meaningful progress can realistically be achieved. Clear objectives help participants remain focused throughout the implementation process and make it easier to evaluate success later.

Developing practical actions is one of the most important stages of the planning process. Each objective should be accompanied by specific activities that explain how it will be achieved. These actions may include organising community events, improving public spaces, launching awareness campaigns, creating digital platforms, establishing partnerships, or implementing educational programmes. Every activity should have clearly defined responsibilities, expected outcomes, required resources, and implementation deadlines. This level of detail ensures that the action plan becomes a practical working document rather than simply a collection of ideas.

Young people should actively participate in every stage of designing the action plan. Their involvement should extend beyond consultation to include planning, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. By taking ownership of projects, young people develop leadership skills, strengthen their sense of responsibility, and gain practical experience in project management. This participatory approach also increases motivation, as participants are more committed to implementing initiatives that they have helped design themselves.

Collaboration is essential for successful community action plans. Although young people may lead many initiatives, sustainable change requires cooperation between municipalities, schools, universities, youth organisations, local businesses, cultural institutions, civil society organisations, and community members. Each stakeholder contributes different expertise, resources, and networks that strengthen the implementation process. Building partnerships also increases the long-term sustainability of community initiatives by creating shared ownership and mutual commitment.



Resource planning is another important element of every action plan. Successful initiatives require careful consideration of financial resources, human capacity, equipment, facilities, and communication tools. Not every project requires significant funding; many successful community initiatives rely on volunteers, partnerships, donated materials, or existing public spaces. Identifying available resources early in the planning process helps ensure that proposed activities remain realistic and achievable while encouraging creative and cost-effective solutions.

Every community action plan should include mechanisms for monitoring progress and adapting when necessary. Circumstances may change during implementation, requiring adjustments to activities, timelines, or responsibilities. Regular meetings, progress reports, participant feedback, and simple performance indicators help project teams assess whether objectives are being achieved. Flexibility allows communities to respond to unexpected challenges while maintaining momentum and ensuring that the overall goals remain achievable.

Communication is equally important throughout the implementation process. Keeping community members informed about planned activities, progress, achievements, and opportunities for involvement encourages transparency and public support. Social media, local newspapers, municipal websites, community noticeboards, newsletters, and public meetings all provide effective channels for communicating with residents. Celebrating milestones and recognising the contributions of volunteers and partners also helps maintain motivation and encourages wider community participation.

Conclusion

Cities are more than buildings, streets, and infrastructure—they are living communities shaped by the people who inhabit them. Their identity is built through shared experiences, cultural heritage, innovation, and the active participation of citizens. Among these citizens, young people have a particularly important role to play. Their creativity, energy, and fresh perspectives make them valuable contributors to local development, democratic governance, and the creation of inclusive, sustainable, and resilient communities. By empowering young people to participate meaningfully in shaping their cities, communities invest not only in the present but also in a stronger and more prosperous future.

Throughout this handbook, we have explored the importance of active citizenship, democratic participation, and youth engagement in urban development. We have examined how city branding extends beyond marketing to become a collaborative process that reflects the identity, values, and aspirations of local communities. We have also presented practical methods—including participatory workshops, public forums, round table discussions, digital storytelling, and community action planning—that enable young people to transform their ideas into meaningful actions capable of generating lasting positive change.

Meaningful participation requires more than consultation; it requires partnership. Young people should be recognised as equal stakeholders whose ideas, experiences, and ambitions can contribute to better decision-making and stronger local communities. At the same time, municipalities, educational institutions, youth organisations, businesses, and civil society must work together to create accessible opportunities for participation, remove barriers to engagement, and foster a culture of collaboration and mutual respect. Sustainable urban development can only be achieved when all members of society are given the opportunity to contribute.

The LuminaCity project reflects this vision by placing young people at the centre of city branding and urban development. Through international cooperation, non-formal education, intercultural dialogue, and participatory activities, the project has demonstrated that young people are not only future leaders but also active changemakers today. By working alongside local authorities, community organisations, and other stakeholders, participants have developed the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to influence the future of their cities and strengthen their local communities.

This handbook is intended to serve as a practical resource for young people, youth workers, educators, municipalities, and organisations seeking to promote active citizenship and youth participation. It is not the end of a journey, but the beginning of new initiatives, partnerships, and ideas that can continue to grow long after the project has concluded. Every community is unique, and every young person has the potential to make a meaningful contribution. The methods and recommendations presented here can be adapted to different local contexts, inspiring communities across Europe to create opportunities for greater participation and collaboration.

Ultimately, youth-friendly cities are not created by chance. They are built through dialogue, shared responsibility, and the willingness to listen to the voices of younger generations. When young people are empowered to participate in local decision-making, celebrate their cultural identity, embrace innovation, and contribute to sustainable development, cities become stronger, more resilient, and better prepared for the challenges of the future.

The future of our cities belongs to everyone, but it will be shaped by the decisions we make today. By investing in young people, encouraging their participation, and recognising them as partners in urban development, we lay the foundations for communities that are inclusive, innovative, democratic, and sustainable. Let this handbook serve as an invitation to continue working together, transforming ideas into action, and ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to help illuminate the future of their city.



LuminaCity

Illuminating Urban Identity

LuminaCity Handbook: Empowering Young People to Shape the Cities of Tomorrow



Project No: 2024-1-EL02-KA154-YOU-000241170

