



VOL SINII-E



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presents

The Booklet

A collection of final reflections on the project



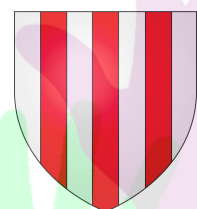
Ajuntament de Lloret
de Mar



Gemeinde
Volkertshausen



Comune di Bolsena



St. Julians Local
Council

VOLSINII-E: a reflection

The European Union is built on solidarity: solidarity between people, solidarity between countries and solidarity across Europe. The solidarity action, which nowadays is much needed, is at the core of the project VOLSINII-E. When talking about solidarity, we talk about mutual help and mutual understanding, volunteering and cohesion. These values, which are part of the milestones on which the European Union is funded, need to be shared and cultivated together in order to create and develop cohesive and inclusive communities, as well as an interconnected society where citizens feel to belong to wider network on which they can rely. For this reason, citizens need to engage in public actions, in volunteering services and get involved in the decision-making processes at local, national and European level. The importance of active and aware participation is indeed a factor that we should never underestimate when considering a social change and improvement. Young people are the main target and at the same time the main drivers of this shift: nothing can happen without them raising their voices; the future of Europe is in their hands.

A cohesive society translates to an inclusive community, where everyone is treated with equal dignity and respect. Inclusion is another fundamental value of the European Union and of the CERV programme. Unity depends on integration: integration of ethnic minorities, integration of foreigners, mobile Europeans, people with fewer opportunities and with special needs. Integrating does not mean cancelling the existing things; it means enriching them. Therefore, a diverse community is something to cherish and

appreciate as an important and beautiful added value. Bringing together different cultures and traditions can indeed open people's minds and expand their horizons and life perspectives; to tell it with a metaphor, integrating is like travelling while being still.

In this sense, volunteering and social organisations carry out a very important and complicated work, striving to reduce social isolation and discrimination and fostering a sense of belonging for all members of society. Volunteering organisations play a vital role in society, contributing to the well-being and progress of communities by addressing local needs and challenges, providing support to vulnerable populations and fostering a sense of unity and social responsibility. They also stand for advocacy and awareness, by advocating for social issues and raising awareness about pressing matters: they strive to bring attention to important causes, promoting positive change and encouraging community involvement.

Projects like VOLSINII-E are essential to encourage citizens to develop a global citizenship, to take an active part in society, to volunteer for more harmonious communities and to get constantly and actively involved in aid actions and in the decision-making processes of their town, their country and Europe. Joint citizens' actions, developed by European projects, benefit the whole European community.

Thanks to VOLSINII-E project, participants have had the possibility to exchange best practices on volunteering and inclusion, learn from each other cultures, creating long-lasting friendships and reliable bonds.

VOLSINII-E: priorities and objectives

The project wanted to support twinning bonds and encourage the enlargement of EU networks for the exchange of EU citizens with the objective of promoting awareness of the value of diversity and of the common values and heritage shared by all Europeans. In this regard, the general objectives of VOLSINII-E are in line with those of the call and of the CERV 2021-2027 Programme, as the project intended to:

- Support and promote exchanges between citizens of unlike EU countries;
- Raise awareness of EU common values and EU cultural heritage, as well as of the diversity in Union, to create reflection on the common future of Europe;
- Foster citizens participation and engagement at local, national and EU level;
- Establish and support friendship bonds among citizens across borders and peaceful relations among public institutions at national and European level;
- Promote the exchange of best practices and experiences between municipalities and between communities;
- Support the improvement and internationalization, as well as good governance, of local authorities in the frame of the European Integration process.

VOLSINII-E activities and debates contributed to the call's priorities:

- Raising awareness of the importance of reinforcing the European integration process based on solidarity: VOLSINII-E focused on the value of solidarity, starting from grassroots volunteering actions, addressing regional and national level social programmes and then reflecting on solidarity across Member States and on the European Integration Process. Activities were implemented with the objective to overcome local and national perception, fostering mutual understanding and stimulating debate and active exchange of proposed solutions on relevant themes. In this frame, relevant topics were tackled such as the Green Deal, Next Generation EU, Covid Crisis, Ukrainian War, etc.

- Raising awareness on the richness of the cultural and linguistic environment in Europe: VOLSINII-E fostered intercultural exchange, valorizing cultural and linguistic diversity across EU Countries (also at minorities level), and highlighting common history and values. The leading motto of VOLSINII-E has been the same as the EU: “United in diversity”, “Diversity is richness” to build a network that is based on mutual understanding, respect and equality, with no discrimination of sociocultural background, gender, religion, ability, political orientation.

This project wanted to answer the need of a deeper reflection on the value of European Citizenship, focusing on the mutual understanding and promotion of cross-border solidarity, through the valorization of diversity and the reflection on the Integration Process from a bottom-up perspective. Moreover, the partners involved in VOLSINII-E are active parts in the European context and they act with the aim to analyse the solidarity at local and EU level, as one of the most pure example of citizenship and as one of the greatest values upon which Europe is created.

The project specific objectives were to:

- involve at least 50% of people between 18 and 35 y/o and at least 50% of female participants; this participation was granted in project's activities, as well as speakers and project staff;
- engage the local community in the hosting and logistic organization of the IE through local volunteers;
- foster the participation of local and regional stakeholders and PA in the IE;
- debate on EU relevant themes from a bottom-up perspective;
- create a safe space for citizens to have their voice heard, gender friendly and based on principles of equality and non-discrimination.

VOLSINII-E: impacts and outcomes

VOLSINII-E has had positive and successful outcomes on the participating communities, enriching the local traditions and inviting people to forge long-lasting relationships with fellow Europeans and engage in a constructive intercultural dialogue on themes of global importance.

The project impacts that were observed, can be summed up as follows:

- an enhanced awareness of the importance of citizens engagement and participation in the decision-making processes in their communities;
- a larger tolerance, respect for diversities and perception of the others, mutual comprehension and intercultural dialogue;
- an enhanced comprehension of the EU policies, funding opportunities and policy initiatives;
- a better involvement of national and international authorities in the debate;
- the creation of a space for citizens engagement and empowerment on relevant themes.

Considering and observing the immediate impacts, other effects are foreseen in the near and distant future:

- an enhancement and enlargement of the existing twinning network to cooperate on future European initiatives;

- a better aptitude towards cross-fertilisation of best practices and better knowledge among EU countries;
- the improvement of the perception of the value of European Values, diversity, common history and heritage;
- the creation of a lasting group of international volunteers to promote the twinning activities and to propose future actions in the field of this project;
- an enhancement of the sense of belonging and ownership towards the EU.

Overall, the participants benefited from VOLSINII-E thanks to an engaging methodology, that allowed their hands-on involvement in the activities and gave them the opportunity to familiarise with an international environment of exchange and community participation. Participants that took part for the first time to activities at EU level benefited from the project gaining enhanced skills for integration, mutual understanding, awareness of the functioning of the EU, the integration process and of the advantages given by EU citizenship in everyday life.

VOLSINII-E: future recommendations

VOLSINII-E is leaving space for future projects, developing the following recommendations:

1. Sustaining and deepening cultural connections, to encourage ongoing cultural exchanges between the towns. Establishing cultural programs, festivals, or events can showcase the rich heritage and traditions of each participating municipality.
2. Establishing educational partnerships means fostering educational collaborations between towns. This could involve student exchanges, joint projects, or language learning initiatives to strengthen educational ties.
3. Promoting sustainable tourism, meaning developing sustainable tourism initiatives that promote responsible travel between the twinned towns. This can include joint marketing efforts, travel packages, and shared tourism experiences.
4. Continue Youth Engagement: Maintain and expand youth engagement programs, such as youth forums, workshops, or sports events. These activities can help cultivate a sense of unity among the younger generation.
5. Regularizing the information exchange by establishing a framework for regular information exchange between the municipalities. This could involve sharing best practices, municipal policies, and updates on local initiatives.

6. Supporting the common digital platform: supporting the website and the Facebook page dedicated to the town twinning project. This platform can serve as a hub for sharing information, updates, and resources between the municipalities.

7. Facilitating language learning: supporting language learning initiatives to enhance communication between the towns. This could involve language exchange programs, online courses, or language immersion opportunities.

8. Fostering environmental initiatives: collaborating on environmental projects to address common challenges and promote sustainability. This may include joint efforts in waste management, renewable energy, or conservation initiatives.

9. Formalizing institutional relationships: considering establishing formal agreements or memoranda of understanding between the municipalities to solidify the commitments made during the twinning project.

10. Encouraging citizen participation: involving citizens in the ongoing activities and decision-making processes related to the town twinning project. This could be achieved through citizen fora, town hall meetings, or community engagement initiatives.



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The participating municipalities thank everybody for the active participation and support during the project duration.

United we stand!



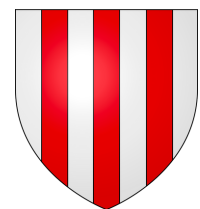
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