

CANTABRIA: EUROPA INFINITA

FINAL REPORT



This report is realized by Sara Pettinelli under the supervision of Andréa Rodríguez Pérez

Introduction

The event "Cantabria: Europa infinita", co-organised by Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) and Interreg Sudoe, took place on October 16th in the University of Cantabria. In the framework of the the European Cooperation Day, this event aimed to give voice to youngsters, understanding their needs and listening to their opinion about Europe through debates on European Cohesion Policy. Firstly, European projects financed in Cantabria by the Cohesion Policy were presented in order to show the students what Europe does, specifically for Cantabria. The youngsters invited to participate debated on the way to improve European communication, focusing on 3 specific fields: contents, format and youngsters inclusion. Through this report, we want to shape the conclusions of these debates and propose some ideas inspired by this event to improve the image and the awareness on Europe among youngsters.



Projects

The event was opened by the speech of María Sánchez, Economic Affairs and Finance Advisor of the Government of Cantabria and Managing Authority of the Interreg Sudoe Programme, who stressed the European vocation of Cantabria. Moreover, Agnés Monfret, Head of the Communication Unit of the Regional and Urban Policy (DG Regio) of the European Commission, introduced herself and the Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) Programme, created in 2017 by DG Regio with the support of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). Then, Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Secretary General of AEBR, was present through a video explaining the nature of this association and how IVY developed. Therefore, European projects financed in Cantabria through different funds were presented in order to show the students the impact of the European funds in Cantabria.

SUDOE STOP CO2

María González Pereda, director of **Cantabria Foundation Technological Centre in Integral Logistics**, presented this project financed by the Programme Interreg Sudoe. Developed with French and Portuguese partners the project aims at reducing the energy and the environmental impact of bus and train stations.

BOUND4BLUE

presented by **Jose Miguel Bermudez Miquel** and financed by the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**, developed a foldable and autonomous wingsail system to be integrated onto a wide range of vessels. Thanks to a complementary propulsion system, it produces effective thrust from existing winds, reducing the main engine power required and, therefore, delivering fuel consumption and pollutant emissions reductions.

EL SHOW DE LA PALABRA

is a project financed thanks to the **European Social Fund (ESF)** and developed by **Mónica Bóveda** who showed how the European funds supported her to create a new profession: a training programme that helps children and professional to improve public speaking and overcome stage fright

EL GRUPO DE ACCIÓN LOCAL VALLES PASIEGOS

represented by **Ana Manrique**, presented several projects financed by the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**

EL GRUPO DE ACCIÓN COSTERA ORIENTAL

represented by **Roberto Gutiérrez Alquegui**, showed the work developed in Cantabria thanks to the **European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)**

World Café

After the presentation of the projects, the youngsters participated in a debate activity with the aim of suggesting tools to improve the communication of the Cohesion Policy. This activity was developed through a "World Café" format: 3 groups were formed and each group debated during 20 minutes about 3 different fields of the Cohesion Policy's communication:

- content
- format
- youngsters inclusion





CONTENT

The debates on the Cohesion Policy's communication highlighted the lack of knowledge about this topic among the youngsters but, on the other side, the desire to have more information about it.

After the presentation of the projects, the students were surprised about the quantity of projects realized with the contribution of the European funds that improve the companies' activities, the R&D and the citizens' quality of life. **They explained they have no knowledge of the functioning of the European Institutions and of the European funds.** Everyone agrees that the information they get about Europe is always negative, everything is "Europe's blame". They state that in no event they heard about the European funds presented during this event.

However, everyone knew the Erasmus+ Programme and expressed their desire to take part of it. According to the students, **the school curricula do not include the study of the European Union.** For this generation, Europe is "something" that does exist but it does not know its origins, purposes and does not appreciate that is a project for which should be further work at political, economic and social level.

However, **they recognise themselves as Europeans and are curious to meet other Europeans and eager to spend some months in another country.** The interest for the Erasmus+ forces them to look for information about the programme and what to do to benefit from it. They make the first step to search information, the information does not to them. Despite the Cohesion Policy funds might affect their lives, they do not search for them. Information signs about European co-financing projects do not attract their attention. The regulatory communication do not generate interest and it is difficult to understand it without a general knowledge of how European funds and the Cohesion Policy.

For this reason, the communication content of the Cohesion Policy should develop toward the presentation of real cases, testimonies of beneficiaries and reach the youngsters through the communication channels mostly used by them.

FORMAT



As far as it concerns the format of European communication, during the debates proposals rose mainly in 2 areas:

- **Web and social networks**

Social networks are the most used media to get information and entertainment between the youngsters who participated in the debate. **Instagram** and **Twitter** are the most used networks. Thus, a way to get the attention of the youngsters can be through few seconds' advertisements that catch and raise the interest of the users, for instance in the Instagram stories.

Youtube is another frequently used network. Short entertaining explicative videos on European affairs and testimony interviews (for instance in the European volunteer field) are examples of awareness tools. Moreover, youtubers dealing with different topics and who are points of reference for youngsters, can also address European matters. Finally, after a first hooking to European matters, **blogs** remains a mean for a more complete information. It is highlighted the idea of a testimony blog, for instance of European volunteers.

- **Local communication**

In European communication, local communication is essential to reach citizens. It is necessary to inform about Europe in **schools** through lessons or courses that focus on European topics and propose more **projects** and **exchanges** between schools and universities. Moreover, direct testimonies result to be one of the most efficient tools for providing information about Europe to citizens.

Lastly, the language preferred to communicate is Spanish or at most English.

YOUNGSTERS INCLUSION



Despite the efforts made, youngsters' inclusion continues to be a pending issue in the European policies. Youngsters perceive they have both an active and a passive role in the European policies, considering the promotion of the policies as a duty and the collection of information as one of their rights. However, **the majority of the youngsters participating in the debate realize they do not strive to collect this information, asking themselves if the forms in which this information is transmitted this information is proper for this audience.** Everyone agrees the need for more education in this respect, from younger age, so that citizens feel more Europeans. On the other hand, they complain the negative image of the European Union promoted through the means of communication. As a result of the event, **they stress the need to communicate the opportunities provided by Europe using personal experiences, storytelling and direct testimonies.**

Among the more notable criticisms, **it is worth noting the feeling that they do not feel listened to.** Many highlight that they are not being asked, as in this debate, and they are not taken seriously. They complain about this attitude, considering that they have lots to say and they are the citizens in charge of the future of Europe. They consider essential their inclusion in topics such as the condition of women or climate change and **their opinions can be useful in order to contribute with new ideas and support what is already been done.**

In order to get more involved, they suggest **a more attractive and intense communication.** They believe that efforts in the field of education should be intensified as well as resorting to **more participative formats such as open assemblies or public consultations.** They highlight the **key role of schools, universities and the media.** Furthermore, they welcome the idea of **working with new technologies such as APPs, social networks.** On the other hand, the role of celebrities and influencers can be used to promote the European project. Moreover, it is stressed the importance to arouse emotions.

As a conclusion, **everyone has big expectations regarding Europe.** Youngsters expect concrete solutions for key issues such as a further political integration, a better social equality, Schengen area, climate change, job opportunities, etc. They want more visible good practices exchange, stressing the importance of "bringing Europe to the living room of your house". Finally, they do not forget the fundamental role of Europe: guaranteeing peace in our territories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the debate pointed out the need to bring Europe closer to youngsters. There is no doubt that the opportunities provided by Europe, work, training, volunteer and other opportunities, attract youngsters' interest. However, we realized that the information does not reach them and the approaches employed often do not fit their situations and expectations.



Thus, the few times European matters are addressed, they are faced with a negative image, the mass media give visibility – almost exclusively to problems such as the migration issue. However, the image youngsters have of the European Union as institution is a trustworthy one and youngsters respect it. Finally, here the tolls suggested for a better inclusion of youngsters in Europe:

- Further propose content on traditional social networks and explore new social media
- Increase the use of open assemblies or public consultations giving an influential value to the results
- Use more attractive communication tools such as podcasts, augmented reality, virtual reality, APPs, etc.
- Include an European compulsory training in the education of children and teenagers (e.g. a subject, training courses, etc.)



Watch the video of the event!
[Click here!](#)

