

Interspace International Youth Project Report



Socionaut



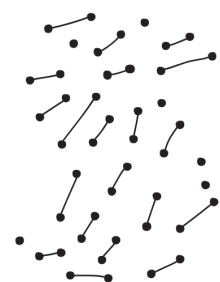
Socionaut z. s., 2025

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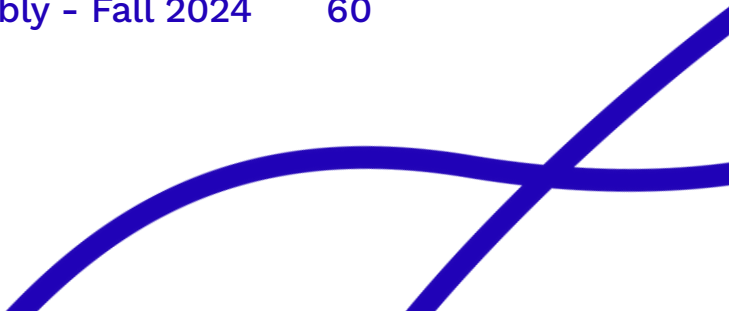
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Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who made this project possible.

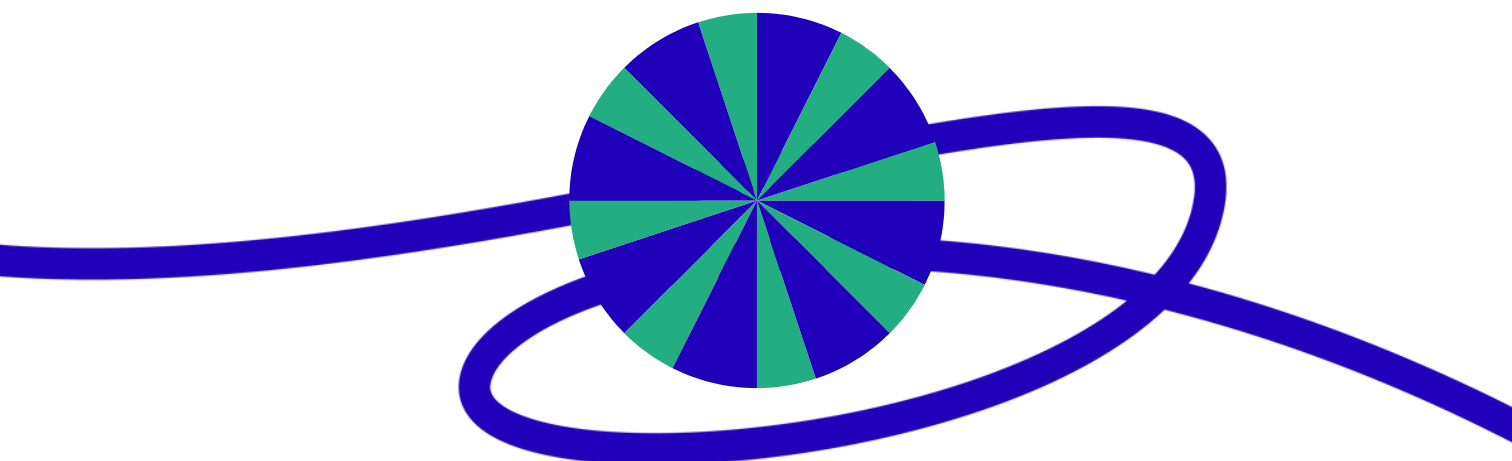
First and foremost, our deepest gratitude goes to **Chiara Ronchini**, Secretary General of the Great Spa Towns of Europe. Without her vision and leadership—from the original idea through the successful grant application to her continuous support—this project would not have come to life.

We are also grateful to all the **Site Managers and communications staff** across the participating towns, whose commitment and coordination were essential throughout. In particular, we wish to thank the site-managers **Alexandra Harrer** of Baden bei Wien and **Zuzana Stejskalová** of Mariánské Lázně, along with their teams, for the great effort they put into organizing the local events.

A heartfelt thank-you goes to all participating **teachers**, who guided and supported their students every step of the way.

We also appreciate the support of the **Lord Mayors and Mayors** of the spa towns, who welcomed the voices of young people into the GSTE's work with openness and respect.

And most importantly, we thank the **102 participating youth**, who collectively dedicated over 2,000 personhours to learning, reflecting, and imagining better futures for the towns they call home. Your energy, curiosity, and ideas made our work delightful.



Introduction & Context

The **INTERSPACE international youth exchange project** was launched by the Great Spa Towns of Europe (GSTE) to engage **young people aged 12 to 14** in shaping the future of their shared European spa heritage. Spanning from **July 2024 to June 2025**, the project brought together **102 students** from six historic spa towns across Europe—Baden bei Wien (Austria), Mariánské Lázně, Františkovy Lázně, and Karlovy Vary (Czechia), Vichy (France), and Bad Kissingen (Germany). These young participants were selected in coordination between UNESCO Site Managers and local schools for their interest, communication skills, and with attention to gender balance.

The project invited them to **explore what heritage means**—both through the lens of UNESCO and in their own lives—to reflect on the needs and future of their towns from a youth perspective. Additionally, the youth were asked to not only imagine but prototype a concrete vision for a GSTE Youth Forum and to share these ideas directly with local leaders and heritage professionals.



Introduction & Context

The core objectives of the project were to:



raise awareness of the unique UNESCO-listed spa heritage through hands-on experiences



empower a key age group often overlooked in civic engagement (12–14)



co-create a proposal for a GSTE Youth Forum to embed youth participation in future governance.

The project unfolded across four workshops—two online and two in person—anchored to the GSTE General Assemblies. **The first online workshop** in October 2024 served as an introduction: participants met each other through icebreakers, explored shared questions, and began thinking about their towns from the perspective of heritage and youth.

A week later, they travelled to **Baden bei Wien**, Austria, for their **first in-person exchange**. There, alongside visits to local heritage sites, the young people deepened their understanding of one another's towns. Divided into ten smaller groups each with representatives from all 6 participating towns, they explored what their spa towns had in common, what made each unique—and created **social media posts** to express their personal and collective views on spa heritage. The workshop also marked the beginning of their work on the Youth Forum: selected representatives began imagining what such a platform could look like and presented their **Youth Forum prototype** at the GSTE General Assembly.

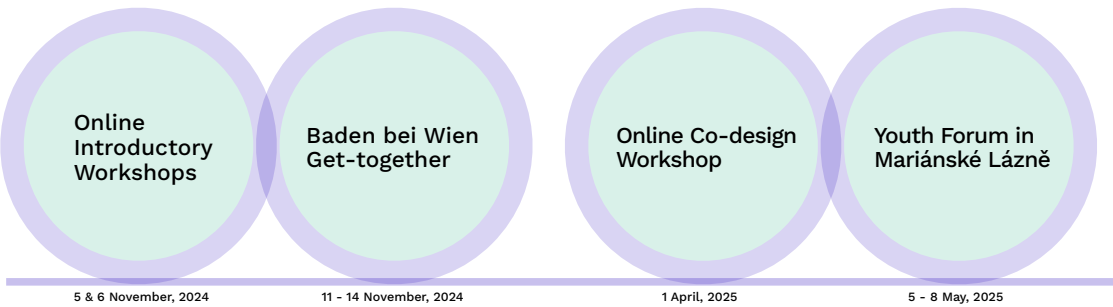
Introduction & Context

In spring 2025, a **second online workshop** brought together selected youth representatives to finalize the **co-design of the Youth Forum**. Building on the earlier suggestions, a facilitator presented a draft structure, which the youth then provided feedback to—agreeing on basic rules, roles, and principles.

The final workshop, held in **Mariánské Lázně** in May 2025, served as an opportunity to turn the prototype of the **Youth Forum into a pilot**. Working again in their ten cross-town groups, participants reflected on the strengths and challenges of their towns, identified key needs, and selected one topic per group to explore in depth. Using a wide range of methods—including discussion, theatre, memes, and emoji mapping—they developed ideas that were then synthesized by their representatives into a set of calls to action. After debate and voting, six proposals were selected, refined, and formally introduced in a **presentation at the GSTE General Assembly**.

To reflect the full diversity of ideas explored, a **pop-up exhibition** showcased each group’s work in a series of posters. Meanwhile, each group nominated a **youth reporter** to document the process from their perspective, generate content for social media, and take part in a press briefing with local media.

Alongside the workshops, participants also enjoyed site visits, excursions, and sports activities, continuing the spirit of exchange and friendship that had defined the project from the start. A **schematic overview of the project** is provided below.



Introduction & Context

Throughout the process, **Socionaut** acted as the design and facilitation partner for the project. Our role included shaping the co-design methodology, delivering all workshops, designing evaluation tools, and guiding the young participants through each stage of the process. We also supported coordination and communication efforts and ensured the experience was both meaningful and fun for all involved.

The result is not only a series of ideas, calls to action and recommendations going forward—synthesized in this report below—but also a shared experience of participating in European heritage cultivation and intercultural exchange. We hope the valuable lessons learned summarized in this report can serve as a foundation for future spa-town civic engagement as well as an inspiration for initiatives seeking to involve youth in cultural and civic life in both spa towns and beyond.





Photos illustrating the whole Youth Forum process

Executive Summary

Youth Forum Outcomes: Needs & Proposals

The Youth Forum process began with open brainstorming, where young participants shared what mattered most to them in their towns—both the positives and the challenges. While conversations were rooted in the context of UNESCO spa heritage, they extended to everyday life, aspirations, and frustrations.

A **mismatch between spa towns and youth life** emerged as a central theme. Participants expressed pride in their towns' beauty, architecture, and traditions, but also frustration that these towns often feel designed for tourists or older generations, not for young people. Many voiced a wish to find their own space within tradition—embracing both heritage and innovation, while making their towns more welcoming, modern, and fun.

Another shared concern was that of **civic disconnect**. Young people often feel overlooked by local decision-makers and disconnected from shaping their towns' future. Participants called for structured opportunities to be heard, stronger feedback loops, and recognition of their role as active citizens.

They highlighted a lack of **accessible public spaces** designed with young people in mind. While parks, nature, and peaceful spots were appreciated, neglected areas, outdated infrastructure, and the absence of safe, vibrant gathering youth places were recurring concerns. Many proposed revitalizing abandoned buildings, improving and cleaning public spaces, and creating affordable, youth-friendly facilities.

Culture and events also surfaced as both a strength and a missed opportunity. Town festivals and traditions were valued, but most events feel disconnected from youth interests. The participating young people suggested co-creating inclusive, engaging activities that bring generations together—supported by local sponsors.

Limited **job prospects and education options** contribute to young people leaving spa towns, often with no clear path to return. Youth called for better job creation, support for young entrepreneurs, and even building universities to help them stay, study, and build their future locally.

Finally, the role of **heritage and well-being** emerged as a space for reconnection. While participants admired their towns' architecture and unique spa atmosphere, they often felt excluded from these spaces. Creative heritage education, affordable access to spa services, and connecting spa traditions with themes like mental health were proposed to make heritage more relevant to their lives.

Executive Summary

Key Evaluation Takeaways

The evaluation process gathered feedback from all involved: youth, teachers, GSTE staff, facilitators, and the core Socionaut team. It revealed strong foundations alongside areas for improvement:

- **A Strong Start:** The project created space for meaningful cross-border exchange. Youth reported building friendships, practicing communication skills, and growing more confident in sharing their ideas.
- **Skills Gained, but Heritage Underexplored:** While soft collaborative skills like teamwork, dialogue, and public speaking were strengthened, learning around spa heritage was more limited. Future iterations should put more focus on accessible, youth-led heritage exploration.
- **Youth Voice Needs a Response:** Though participants shared ideas with decision-makers, their presentations were met with only limited feedback. Structured feedback and ideally regular follow-ups are essential next steps to continue building mutual trust.
- **Programme Demands Were High:** Despite improvements between workshops, the schedule remained dense, with limited time for rest or informal bonding. Future designs should integrate more icebreakers and team-building activities for building confidence, and space for energy recovery.
- **Uneven Preparation Across Towns:** Differences in recruitment and support led to varied levels of engagement. Establishing local youth groups or school forums could build interest and readiness over time.
- **Coordination Gaps Affected Safety:** Inconsistent communication, delayed schedules, and unclear expectations created uncertainty, particularly at the start of workshops. Future interactions would benefit from a dedicated project coordinator.
- **Scaling Requires Resources:** The project's ambition outpaced its budget and staffing. To sustain and expand the Youth Forum meaningfully, future phases require either increased funding and structural support or a scaled-down approach.

Youth Forum Outcomes

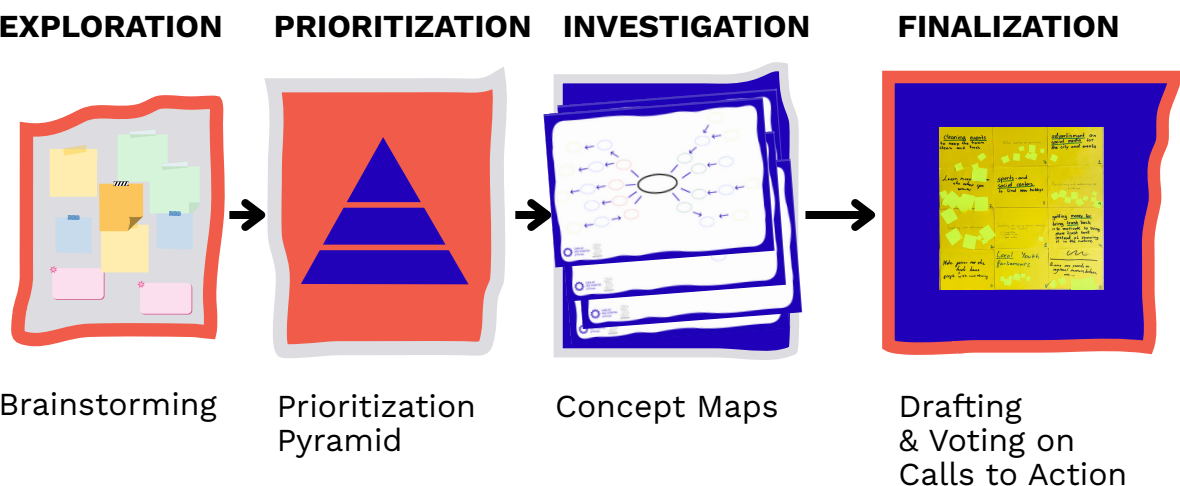
Understanding the Process

It's impossible to fully capture the breadth and energy of the discussions, ideas, and moments shared during the workshops. Nothing can replace the experience of being there in person. Still, in the following pages, we present some of the key outcomes of the Youth Forum's work. To understand them, it helps to briefly outline the process that unfolded during the spring workshops in Mariánské Lázně.

On **Tuesday**, participants worked in the ten groups established during the autumn phase. They began by **brainstorming** topics related to their towns—what worked well, what was missing or difficult, what mattered most to them, and what they'd like to see changed. They then used a **pyramid prioritization exercise** to collectively rank their ideas. In several rounds, participants moved individual post-its from a shared pool toward the top of a pyramid, helping surface those ideas that resonated most strongly within each group.

From these top-priority ideas, each group selected **one question or topic** to investigate further. In the final session of the day, the groups created **concept maps** to explore their chosen topics in more depth. They examined good practices, challenges and barriers, open questions or uncertainties, and possible solutions.

On **Wednesday**, selected youth representatives picked up where the groups had left off. They reviewed all ten concept maps and identified recurring themes, challenges, and suggestions. Based on these, they drafted a series of **calls to action**—concrete proposals aimed at making spa towns more youth-friendly. These were then voted on and **six final calls to action** were selected. The representatives worked in pairs to refine the chosen proposals and prepare for their formal presentation at the GSTE General Assembly the following day.



Youth Forum Outcomes

What are the Outcomes?

In the following section, you will find:

- **The six final calls to action**

deliberated and voted on by selected youth representatives. These were presented at the General Assembly.

- **All twelve calls to action**

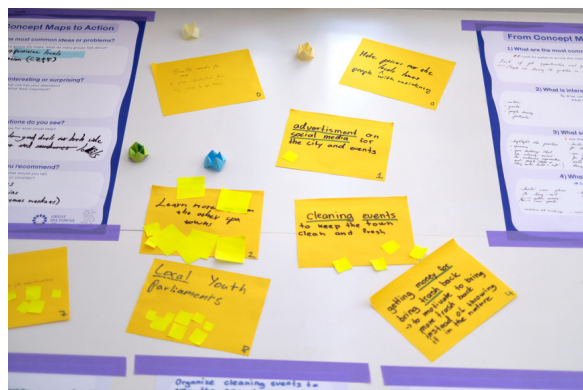
created by the selected youth representatives in their attempt to create an actionable outcome based on the work of all ten groups.

- **The interpretative conceptual map**

synthesizing the key themes explored across all ten groups in their individual conceptual maps (enclosed in the annex).

- **A prioritization pyramid**

offering a visual summary of the broader set of ideas considered during the workshops—some of which did not make it to the final stage.



Youth Forum Outcomes

Six Final Calls to Action

The following six Calls to Action were selected and developed by the youth representatives during the final day of the Youth Forum in Mariánské Lázně. They reflect a thoughtful **synthesis of the ideas discussed** across all ten working groups and represent the youth's most strongly supported proposals for improving life in their spa towns. While not every suggestion made it to the final round, these six proposals capture a cross-section of recurring themes: from **revitalizing underused buildings** and **supporting job creation**, to **youth engagement**, **environmental action**, **education**, and **international cooperation**.

Together, they demonstrate the participants' ability to balance **vision with practicality**, and show how young people can meaningfully contribute to the development and sustainability of their towns—if given the space to be heard.

- 1 From Abandoned to Alive
- 2 Develop Local Youth Parliaments
- 3 Better Jobs & More Opportunities
- 4 Organize Cleaning Events
to Make Spa Towns Cleaner
- 5 Invest in Universities
- 6 Spa Towns Should Continue
Learning from Each Other

Youth Forum Outcomes

Six Final Calls to Action

1 From Abandoned to Alive

What should happen?

Lend unused or abandoned buildings to private companies or entrepreneurs for free—on the condition that they renovate the spaces and ensure public benefit

Goal:

Revive empty buildings, support local entrepreneurship, and create new opportunities for citizens without large investments

These places could host:

- Public courses (art, yoga...)
- Startups
- Conferences
- Book launches
- Concerts
- Cafés
- Sport halls
- Restaurants
- Offices
- Public workspaces
- Art exhibitions

Who should be involved?

The town
Local community
Private companies
Entrepreneurs



Youth Forum Outcomes

Six Final Calls to Action

2 Develop Local Youth Parliaments

What should happen?

Spa towns should cooperate with local schools and organize meetings for students who study in the town. These Youth Parliaments should also connect online with Youth Parliaments from other spa towns. Everyone should have the right to speak and be heard.

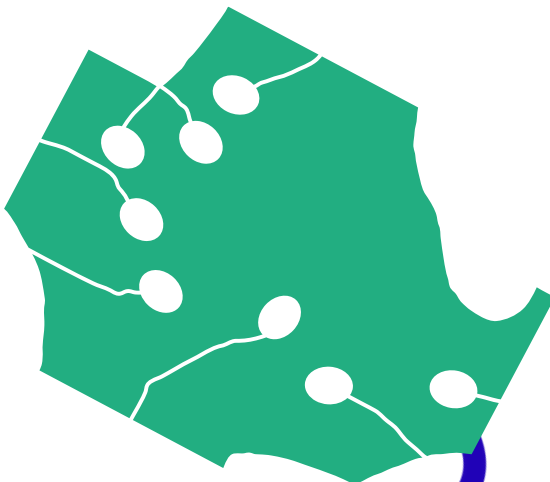
Why Is This Important?

It helps young people get involved in their communities.

Young people know what they want from their town.

Who should be involved?

- People based in or representing spa towns
- Young people interested in practical English 8 learning how local decisions are made
- People interested in presenting policies & improving communities
- Local schools and teachers
- Social workers
- UNESCO staff
- Young citizens



Youth Forum Outcomes

Six Final Calls to Action

3 Better Jobs & More Opportunities

What should happen?

Spa towns should focus on creating new job opportunities.

Old buildings could be transformed into new job spaces, creating opportunities for employment & entrepreneurship in spa towns.

Why is this important?

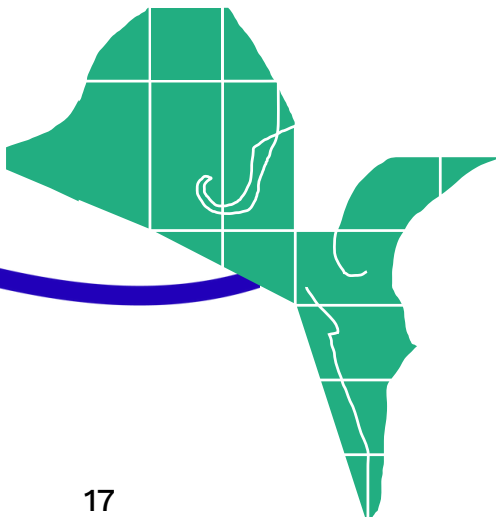
People are leaving spa towns due to lack of opportunities.

Without jobs, neither locals nor visitors can thrive in the town.

People willing to expand their businesses.

Who should be involved?

- A social organization to manage and coordinate job creation
- People who can survey and understand the needs of locals



Youth Forum Outcomes

Six Final Calls to Action

4 Organize Cleaning Events to Make Spa Towns Cleaner

What should happen?

Cities should set up trash collection points where participants earn money based on the amount of trash they collect (measured in kilograms).

Twice a year, towns could host competitive cleanup events, with prizes awarded to those who collect the most trash.

Open Questions

What happens to the collected trash afterward?

What if people bring trash from home just to earn money—how can this be prevented?

Why Is This Important?

A cleaner city improves the environment and public health—especially important in spa towns.

Young people feel empowered by contributing to their community and protecting nature.

Who should be involved?

- City authorities to organize events and manage collection points
- Residents who would participate in the cleanups

Youth Forum Outcomes

Six Final Calls to Action

5 Invest in Universities

What should happen?

Spa towns should build universities to support the full development of the city.

This would increase the local population, as students would be able to stay in the town for their studies.

Why Is This Important?

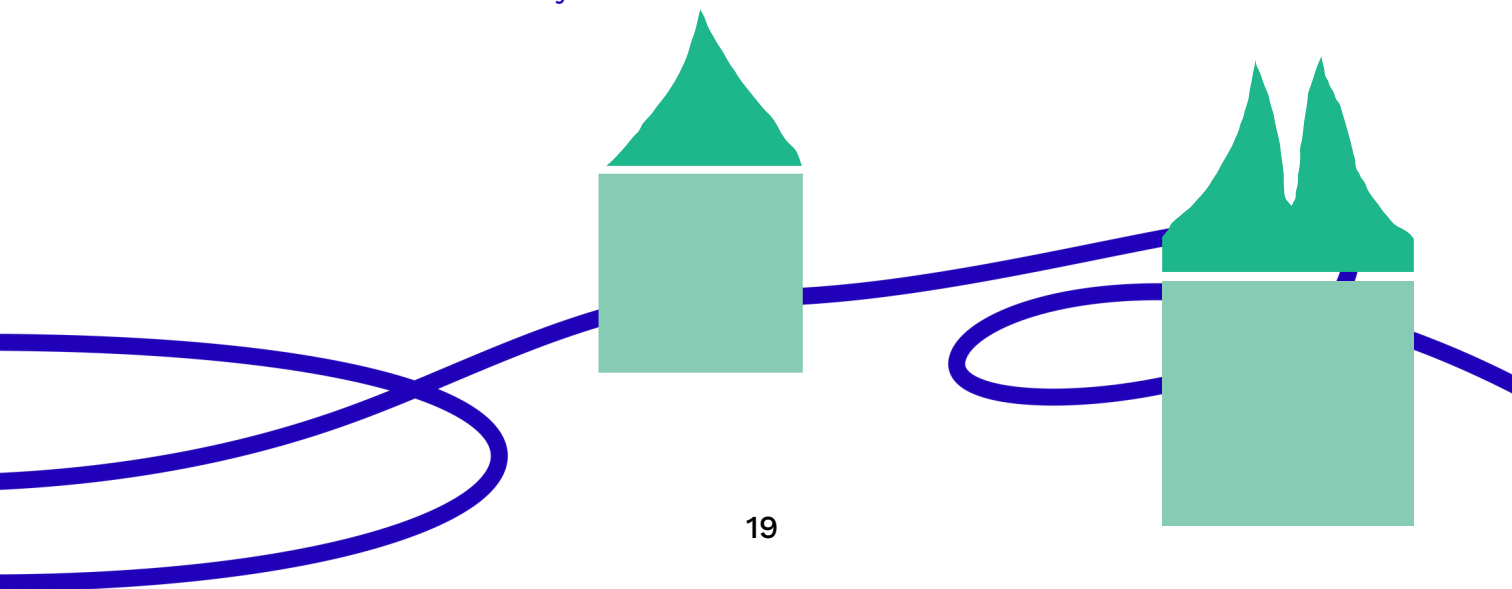
Most spa towns don't have universities.

This would increase access to education and attract more educated people.

Students could stay in the town after high school and continue their education locally.

Who should be involved?

- Government (should fund and oversee the project)
- Local residents (should be engaged and supportive)
- Businesses (can contribute jobs after and benefit from university presence)



Youth Forum Outcomes

Six Final Calls to Action

6 Spa Towns Should Continue Learning from Each Other

What should happen?

Young people should be asked about the problems they see in their towns.

Then, spa towns can discuss together which towns face similar challenges and share what has helped them solve those issues.

Also includes: Talking about the root causes of these problems.

Open Questions:

What will the Youth Forum look like in the future?

Why is this important?

Spa towns can learn from each other and solve problems more effectively.

Young people benefit from shared experiences and proven solutions.

Who should be involved?

- The Youth Forum
- A guide or facilitator



Youth Forum Outcomes

All Calls to Action

While the six final Calls to Action reflect the most widely supported proposals, they emerged from a broader set of creative and thoughtful suggestions developed during the workshop process. The full range of ideas captures the full diversity of proposals of the selected representatives.



Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map

The conceptual map below, composed as a synthesis of all the 10 original maps created by the working groups, offers a rich insight into how young people perceive life in their spa towns—and how these towns could become **more welcoming, relevant, and engaging for younger generations**.

In the center is the main design question. Around it in black are key topics that surfaced during the discussion. Surrounding them are summaries of four types of ideas.

- **Green (Good Practices)** = Things that already work well
- **Red (Challenges)** = Problems or barriers
- **Yellow (Questions)** = Uncertainties
- **Blue (Solutions)** = Suggestions and proposals for action



Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map

The themes present in the conceptual map fall into several interconnected clusters that reflect **both the everyday lived experience of young people and their aspirations for the future**. Several youth participants—and some teachers and staff—shared concerns that not all voices or ideas were adequately reflected in the final General Assembly presentation. This section attempts to offer and preserve a **broader view of that richness of thought, emotion, and vision that surfaced during the workshops**.

1. The Central Tension: Spa Towns as “For the Old” vs. “Fun for Us”

One of the strongest and most consistent themes across all groups was a feeling of **mismatch between spa towns and youth life**. Participants repeatedly described their towns as “boring,” “old,” or “not made for young people,” contrasting this with a **strong desire for fun, creativity, and shared inter-generational experience**.

Activities like festivals, concerts, and youth-designed spaces emerged as key symbols of what was missing. Importantly, this was not just about entertainment—it was about **having places to belong, connect, and express themselves**.

At the same time, several groups expressed **respect for the unique atmosphere** of spa towns. This suggests a **desire not to erase tradition, but to find a space within it**—a call for evolution, not replacement.

RECOMMENDATION: Engage young people in co-creating events and spaces that reflect the shared heritage as well as their interests. Let them help design, organize, and promote activities—with support, but also agency.

Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map

2. Public Space and Infrastructure: Access, Use, and Conflict

Public space was a recurring concern—not only in terms of availability but how it is used, who it is for, and what messages it sends. Sport featured heavily: from the **need for free and accessible sports facilities**, to the **value of parks, pools, and nature**. Some youth connected sport to both **mental health** and **social life**—as a way to relax, connect, and feel good. However, concerns were raised about **costs** (e.g. spa admissions or private sport facilities).

There were several mentions of **empty or decaying buildings**, raising broader questions about urban planning, architectural heritage, and maintenance. Youth were aware of the practical challenges here —“where will the money come from?”—but still felt these issues should be addressed.

RECOMMENDATION: Involve youth in mapping and reimagining underused spaces. Connect urban regeneration projects with their ideas, and consider participatory budgeting where possible.

3. Heritage as Barrier or Bridge?

Heritage surfaced as both a **point of pride and a source of frustration**. Some youth viewed protected buildings and regulations as obstacles to development: “we can’t build a youth center here because it’s protected.” This suggests a lack of clear communication around **why heritage matters and how it can coexist with innovation**.

Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map

A key insight is that young people often **do not feel that spa heritage is relevant to them personally**—it’s something for tourists, for older people, or of the past. And yet, when invited to imagine new ways of storytelling, some groups proposed **guided tours, influencer visits, or reinterpretations** that suggest real potential for reconnection.

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce participatory heritage learning. Let young people explore and retell the history of their towns in their own voices—through digital media, art, or storytelling.

4. Feeling Unseen: Lack of Recognition and Voice

A major undercurrent in the maps—and throughout the workshops more broadly—was a sense that **youth needs are not always actively considered in local decision-making**. Several students noted that towns make little effort to understand what young people want, and pointed to **gaps in communication from schools, municipalities, and local leaders**. What young people are asking for is not just a seat at the table, but a sense that their perspectives are respected and taken seriously.

One group worried they might disturb older spa visitors by proposing building constructions or renovations to create new spaces for youth. Another mentioned that they had never been taught about the significance of their own town. These are **signs of a civic disconnect**—one that can be bridged with intentional and ongoing dialogue.

RECOMMENDATION: Create structured feedback loops between youth and local authorities. Normalize two-way exchange and commit to visible, responsive dialogue.

Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map

5. Broader Social Context: Housing, Schooling, Job Market and Belonging

Finally, young people placed their concerns within a wider lens. They spoke of **job opportunities, the cost of services, the lack of schools, homelessness, and affordability**. These are not abstract worries—they reflect what youth are seeing and hearing at home, in their families, and in their communities.

Rather than limit themselves to “youth issues,” participants expressed a desire to **understand and improve life for everyone** in their towns. This is an important reminder that youth participation is not just about youth spaces, but about being part of shaping whole communities.

RECOMMENDATION: Create structured feedback loops between youth and local authorities. Normalize two-way exchange and commit to visible, responsive dialogue.



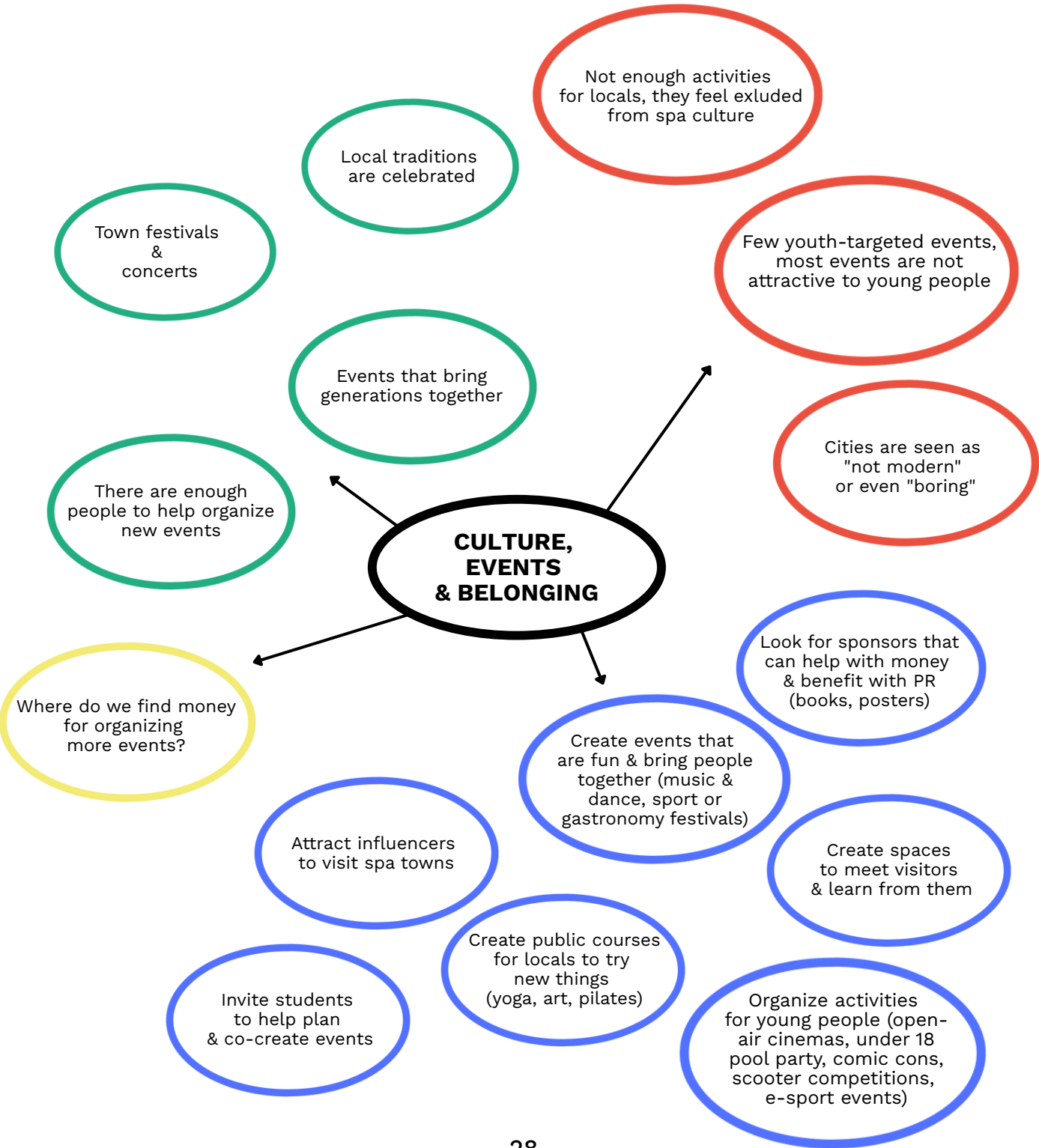
Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map



Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map



Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map



Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map



Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map



Youth Forum Outcomes

Interpretative Conceptual Map



The Youth Forum Outcomes

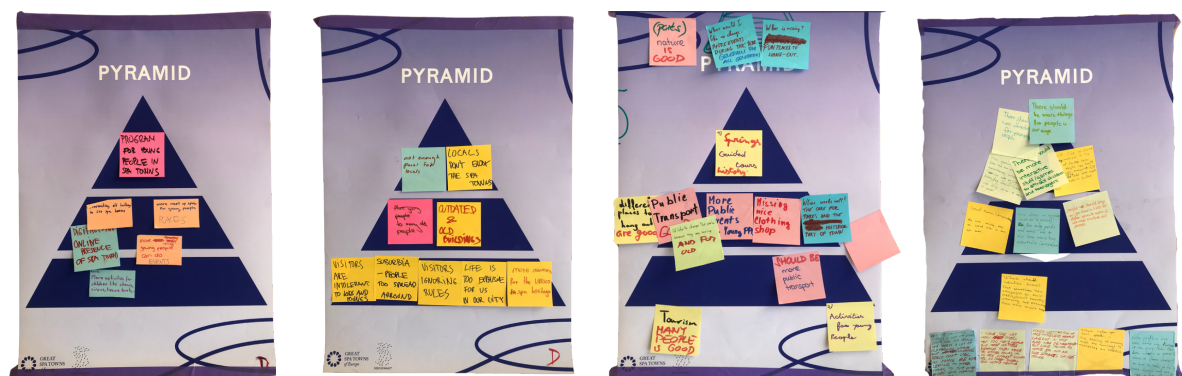
Prioritization Pyramid

Before creating their investigative conceptual maps, all ten working groups engaged in a **structured prioritization exercise**. Each group began with a broad pool of ideas collected during their initial brainstorming. They then collaboratively moved ideas into a pyramid structure—starting from the base and working upwards—to highlight what they felt were the most important, relevant, and actionable topics. This stage played a key role in **grounding the co-design work that followed** and ensured that each group entered the conceptual mapping phase with a **shared sense of direction and consensus** on what mattered most.

Many of the themes surfaced through this step—such as places to hang out, more activities and events for young people, and the sense that spa town services are mostly designed for older people—are explored in greater depth in the conceptual maps summarized above. However, this stage also helped surface additional nuances that are worth engaging with.

Several new points emerged here:

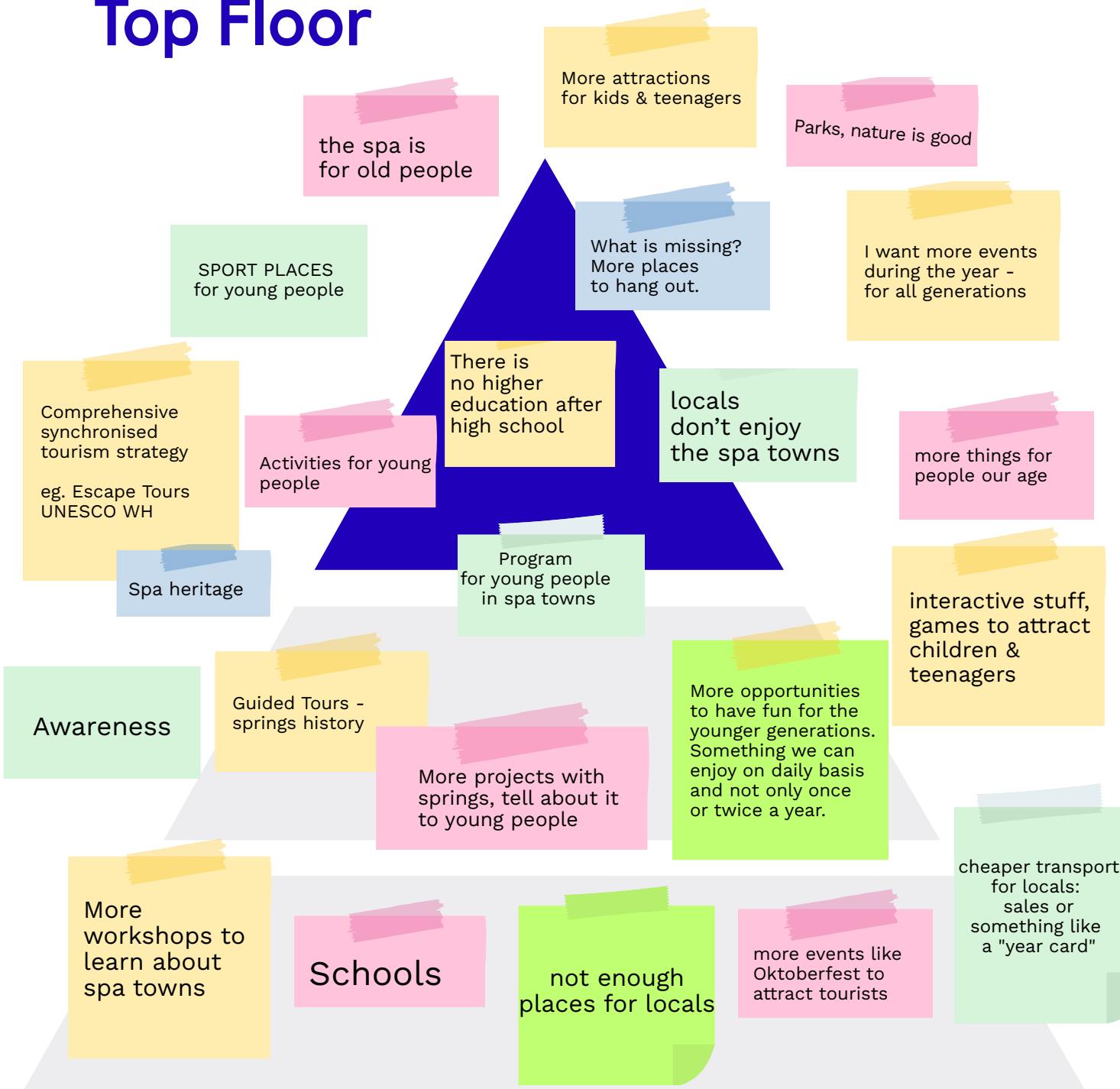
- The **importance of mental health**, particularly as a **modern spa concern for youth**.
- A recurring focus on **financial accessibility** - from sports and transport to leisure and spa services.
- Calls for **improving the digital presence** of spa towns to better resonate with younger audiences.
- A **distinction between locals’ needs and tourist-focused spaces**, including the experience of those living on the **physical and social margins** of spa towns.
- A desire to **integrate both formal (schools) and informal education** into town life and cultural understanding.



The Youth Forum Outcomes

Prioritization Pyramid

Top Floor



The Youth Forum Outcomes

Prioritization Pyramid Middle Floor



The Youth Forum Outcomes

Prioritization Pyramid Bottom Floor

Adults should know that we also care about spa towns

Visitors are intolerant of kids and young people

Life is too expensive for us in our city

Make people know more about the heritage of the city - what is so special about it- Create more chances to learn it, make it more known, and not just a knowledge for those who are interested.

Making the spa town more accessible for people with disabilities

more nature in the towns

Visitors ignoring rules

Mental health as part of modern spa towns

there should be more public transport

More activities for children like shows, circus, treasure hunts,...

What should adults know? That their campaign on social media sometimes are not exactly working and promoting them more won't help.

More adverts

More means of transport

Keeping the unique traditions and heritage of the spa towns

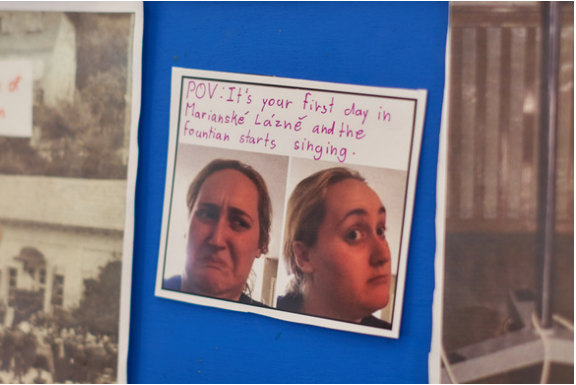
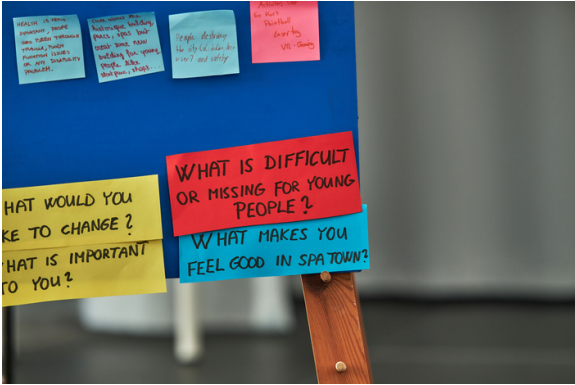
When young people go to the park they do not really have activities that are interesting for them. There should be more modern elements.

Spraying wall

Concentrate more on vandalism (usually low to no penalty)

Lot of small shops for old people. Old fashion stores, nothing really cool, so people are leaving to other towns to buy new good looking clothes

activities for young people



Photos from various workshops about spa heritage



Photos from various workshops about spa heritage

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Comprehensive Summary & Recommendations

In this section, we offer a comprehensive evaluation of the project, drawing on reflections from all key participant groups—not only the youth, but also teachers, GSTE site managers and staff, facilitators, and the core Socionaut team.

We present a summary of key insights, followed by practical recommendations for the future continuation or expansion of the Youth Forum. We then provide a breakdown of feedback organized by participant groups to give a more nuanced picture of the experience from multiple perspectives. These accounts focus on the project as a whole with a keen focus on the spring iteration of the project. A detailed overview of the fall section of the project can be found in the interim presentation. This is then followed by a brief overview of our evaluation methodology.

The INTERSPACE Youth Forum project marked an **ambitious and hopeful step** toward embedding youth voices into the shared cultural governance of Europe's spa towns. The evaluation – based on surveys, reflections, and extensive facilitator feedback – reveals both **strong foundations and important areas for future growth**. Below, we summarize key themes and offer recommendations for next steps.

1. A Strong Start: Exchange, Growth, & Participation

Participants, teachers, and staff alike highlighted the project's success in creating an inclusive, creative, and inspiring space for **intercultural exchange and cooperation**. The vast majority of students reported **meeting peers from other countries**, trying out new methods, and improving their **English and communication skills**. Many youth grew more confident over the course of the project, with several pushing past initial shyness and sharing their perspectives publicly for the first time. Teachers observed **meaningful personal growth and increasing engagement**, especially during the spring phase.

RECOMMENDATION: Maintain the focus on intercultural, peer learning and meaningful participation. Continue cross-national collaboration through thematic group projects (such as those outlined in the calls to action), and work on fulfilling shared goals that go beyond symbolic exchange.

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Comprehensive Summary & Recommendations

2. Skill Gains Over Heritage Knowledge

While youth **learned a great deal about teamwork, dialogue, and public speaking**, fewer seem to have walked away with a strong **sense of spa heritage or understanding of other towns' history** – despite this being one of the project's central objectives.

RECOMMENDATION: Ensure that the collective history of all participating spa towns, as well as their unique characteristics are better integrated and framed as central learning elements – ideally with youth-led exploration and storytelling formats or site-visits that feel accessible and engaging.

3. Youth Voice Was Heard – but Not Met with a Response

The project created space for youth to express their ideas, develop calls to action, and present them to mayors at the General Assembly. However, some of the most engaged participants left feeling frustrated or disheartened by the **lack of feedback**. Several stated explicitly that they received no information on what would happen with their proposals. At the Assembly, youth were made to present in a formal, adult-coded environment, with limited meaningful interaction or follow-up from local leaders.

RECOMMENDATION: Build structures for two-way communication.

- **Provide structured feedback** to each call to action (e.g. “we are already working on this / we will work on it / we will not be able to, and here's why”).
- **Introduce regular follow-ups** (e.g. every 6–12 months), allowing youth to see the results of their participation and remain involved.
- Ensure that in future iterations mayors receive youth outputs in advance and are encouraged to visit or even actively participate in the workshops themselves.

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Comprehensive Summary & Recommendations

- RECOMMENDATION:**
- Shift from performance-style presentations to **carefully designed and facilitated, safe and youth-centered discussions**, ideally in informal settings (e.g. smaller rooms, roundtables, or circles) where there is space for nuanced conversations, uncertainty or collective brainstorming.

4. Structure & Pacing Improved – but Still Too Demanding

Compared to the autumn phase, the spring meeting saw **improvements in pacing and structure**. Project-related activities were spread over multiple days, and **more playful and creative methods** were used. Still, some students, teachers and facilitators found the **programme too dense**, with **not enough unstructured time for rest**, bonding, or personal reflection. Several sessions **required a high level of cognitive and social effort**, particularly because of working in a **foreign language**.

- RECOMMENDATION:**
- Start each workshop cycle with more icebreakers, confidence and team-building activities.
 - Respect energy cycles and design with young people's needs in mind, including space for downtime, movement, and informal play
 - Add morning briefings for all participants (staff, teachers, facilitators) to increase clarity of programme and reduce confusion.

5. Preparation & Recruitment Were Uneven

Preparation and recruitment varied significantly across towns. Some schools and site managers provided clear context, support or even learning, while others not as much. Some towns had many motivated youth applying to participate; others struggled to find volunteers. This led to **uneven engagement from various participating towns**, and some frustration by the lack of commitment from peers. This gap was felt not only during the workshops but also in the election and representation process.

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Comprehensive Summary & Recommendations

- RECOMMENDATION:**
- Establish local youth engagement structures (e.g. school forums, town youth councils) that work in participants' native languages and build interest and willingness to participate.
 - Let these groups nominate motivated youth representatives for international gatherings and ask them to report back.
 - Clarify criteria for participation in advance and ensure recruitment, onboarding, and expectations are standardized across towns or transparent.

6. Coordination, Communication & Safe Space Design

The project struggled with several **coordination and communication issues**, especially in the lead-up to and during the in-person workshops. Teachers did not always receive **clear schedules or materials in time**, and students were sometimes unsure where they needed to be or what was expected. The press conference was **cancelled without clear communication**. These lapses affected the sense of **clarity and emotional safety**, particularly at the beginning of each day.

- RECOMMENDATION:**
- Appoint a dedicated project manager at GSTE level, with no other role, to coordinate all moving parts.
 - Organize a meeting in advance with all facilitators, teachers, and site managers – clarifying roles, schedule, expectations.
 - Hold a daily check-in or “camp-style briefing” each morning.
 - Prepare maps, workshop information packages, meal plans, and clearly assign and inform about group division and their responsible teachers.
 - Prioritize psychological safety: young people need to know what's happening, where they are, and who is there to support them.

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Comprehensive Summary & Recommendations

7. Sustainability & Scaling

The current project was implemented with **limited funding and capacity**. Despite great efforts from all partners, the budget was **insufficient to support the project at its intended scale**. Much of the coordination work fell to partners not originally tasked with it, and in Mariánské Lázně, an extra staff member had to be hired from local resources to help manage logistics. There is also only a **limited amount of funding to continue the project forward**.

- RECOMMENDATION:**
- Secure a larger, dedicated budget for future phases.
 - For future projects of a similar scale, consider creating a full-time coordinator position within the GSTE organization.
 - Alternatively, aim for projects of a smaller scale with a smaller number of participating youth to decrease the demands on coordination.
 - Ensure that any expansion of the Youth Forum comes with the structural support necessary to maintain quality, and meaningful engagement.



The young participants described the Youth Forum workshops as a mix of **engaging, challenging**, yet **meaningful** experiences. While many highlighted **new friendships, creative activities**, and were **grateful for the opportunity to express their ideas**, others pointed to the **long days** and **moments of fatigue**. Survey responses showed strong **appreciation for the intercultural exchange** and **modest gains in confidence**, particularly in **using English** and **meeting new people**. However, **enthusiasm for core project components**—such as the Youth Forum itself or heritage learning—**was more subdued**. Reflections revealed that while students gained valuable skills in communication and teamwork, deeper knowledge of spa heritage and other towns remained an area with room for growth. One recurring theme in informal conversations was the **lack of feedback**: several of the selected youth representatives expressed disappointment at not receiving any response to their ideas, which left some feeling unheard. **Addressing this gap in future stages of the Youth Forum will be important to sustain trust and motivation.**



Responses to the open-ended question
“How would you describe the workshops?”

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Youth Perspectives

What did they say about the experience?

(Numbers in **green** and **orange** indicate the average response on a scale from 1 – 5 where 1 is complete disagreement, 3 a neutral response and 5 a complete agreement; one number refers to the response from the Final survey, where there are multiple numbers separated by →, the numbers show the movement between the Baseline, Follow-up and Final survey).

Quantitative responses suggest a **generally positive but mixed experience**:

- “The workshops were fun”: **3.2**
- “I learned new things and had interesting experiences”: **3.5**
- “I met new friends from other countries”: **3.5**
- “I felt comfortable sharing my ideas and opinions”: **3.2**

The most consistent positive shift was seen in **confidence-related indicators**:

- Using English: **3.8 → 3.9 → 3.9**
- Meeting people from other countries: **3.6 → 3.8 → 3.8**

Excitement remained high and stable around the **exchange aspects of the project**:

- Visiting other spa towns: **4.5 → 4.5 → 4.4**
- Meeting people from other countries: **3.9 → 4.1 → 4.0**

Other indicators remained relatively flat or dipped slightly by the final round. For example:

- Feeling connected to town history: **3.5 → 3.5 → 3.3**
- Interest in learning about spa heritage: **3.7 → 3.8 → 3.4**
- Wanting to help protect heritage places: **4.1 → 4.1 → 3.8**

Engagement with core project outcomes like **youth forum creation** and **social media outputs** was more muted:

- Social media projects: **3.3**
- Creating and participating in the Youth Forum: **3.3**

What did they learn?

Comparing answers to “What would you like to learn?” in the Baseline survey with “What have you learned?” in the Final Survey reveals a notable shift. While **many students initially expressed interest in learning about other spa towns and their history, these topics were less frequently mentioned in final reflections.**

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Youth Perspectives

Instead, **students increasingly reported acquiring soft skills and collaborative abilities**, including:

- Communication and idea exchange
- Improved English and occasional vocabulary from other languages
- Teamwork and cooperation
- Understanding and interacting with peers from different backgrounds

This suggests that while the intercultural and skill-building objectives were largely met, the learning goals around spa heritage and town-specific knowledge may have been underemphasized.



Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers consistently described the Youth Forum workshops as **educational, varied, and intense – but ultimately rewarding**. Many noted the project's power to inspire growth in their students, highlighting the mix of structured activities and informal moments that encouraged creativity, collaboration, and reflection. Phrases like “interesting”, “rich in variety”, and “beneficial” appeared frequently, alongside words like “challenging” and “inspirational”, reflecting the dual nature of the experience.



Responses to the open-ended question
“How would you describe the Youth Forum workshops?”

What worked well?

The **organisation and delivery of the programme** received strong praise. Teachers appreciated the well-planned structure, the presence of **professional facilitators**, which were missed in the fall, and the **diverse and creative methods** used—including visual tools, memes, and interactive group tasks. Many noted that the spring meeting felt better paced and more enjoyable than the one in the fall, with **more free time**, and a better balance of focus and fun. Several appreciated the **growth in students' confidence and engagement**. Some also welcomed the chance to connect with colleagues from other towns.

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation Teachers' Perspectives

What were the main challenges?

Nonetheless, the teachers also faced challenges, particularly around **logistics, communication, and student support**. The most frequently mentioned difficulty was **coordinating travel and managing their student groups**, especially when practical information was unclear or delayed. Unfortunately, this was a persistent issue both in fall and spring. Food was also criticized for a lack of variety, especially for those with dietary restrictions. Some teachers also expressed concern for **quieter or less confident students**, suggesting that more attention be paid to integrating them fully and creating space for all voices. The **language barrier and shyness** was another recurring theme, especially for those with lower English proficiency. A few noted that group composition, size, and timing pressures occasionally affected group dynamics and participation. Despite these challenges, nearly all teachers reported feeling supported and prepared, with specific praise for the Socionaut team's coordination and the overall structure of the experience.

What would they do differently?

Suggestions for improvement included inviting **slightly older participants**, introducing **more icebreakers or fun team-building activities early on**, and **increasing break times between sessions**. Some suggested role-play or scenario-based activities to build engagement. Others recommended a **clearer information package for teachers in advance**, allowing them to better understand and support the process. A few also commented that **not all youth ideas were reflected in the final presentation**.



Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

GSTE Staff's Perspectives

For the site managers and other GSTE staff involved, the Youth Forum workshops were widely seen as a **successful and inspiring international collaboration**. Overall, the staff expressed enthusiasm, respect, and optimism for the Youth Forum process and its potential as a long-term platform within GSTE. Words like well-organized, creative, stimulating, and fun were frequently used to describe the experience, alongside a strong appreciation for the project's emphasis on shared heritage and intercultural exchange.



Responses to the open-ended question
“How would you describe the Youth Forum workshops?”

What worked well?

Several staff members praised the **variety and balance of the programme**, which was seen as an improvement from the fall—highlighting the mix of focused co-design sessions with informal activities and excursions—as well as the **professionalism of the facilitation team**, which contributed to the smooth delivery and engagement of participants. The youth’s ability to collaborate across language and cultural barriers, and the **quality of their final presentations** to the General Assembly, were especially noted as highlights.

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

GSTE Staff's Perspectives

What were the main challenges?

The most common difficulty was **communicating the purpose and structure** of the Youth Forum process to all participants in a clear and accessible way. **Language barriers**—especially for some French-speaking students—along with initial **shyness**, were also noted as hurdles to full participation. Others mentioned that **not all ideas made it into the final presentations**, and that the **youth reporters struggled to be heard by external media**. Logistical issues such as long days, limited free time, and minor discomforts (e.g. cold weather or food quality) were also mentioned.

What would they do differently?

Suggestions for improvement included providing **more time for breaks**, **smaller working groups** to ensure deeper engagement, and exploring ways to continue the collaboration beyond the workshops, perhaps through a shared youth-led project.



Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Facilitators' Perspectives

Facilitators generally felt **confident in their roles** and **appreciated the structure of the programme**. They saw the project as a **success though not without its challenges**.



Responses to the open-ended question
“How would you describe the Youth Forum workshops?”

What worked well?

Facilitators highlighted the **broad range of participatory methods** used throughout the workshops, noting the strength of **visual tools** and the **clarity of outputs** such as maps, pyramids, and posters. The diversity of methods was seen as effective in helping participants engage with complex topics. The workshop design followed a **clear structure and appropriate pacing**. The **Heritage Forum panel discussion** following immediately after the project’s conclusion, involving young participants, teachers, and local stakeholders, was mentioned as a particularly well-executed add-on.

What were the main challenges?

Key challenges included **helping students overcome initial shyness and discomfort**, especially when speaking in English or working in unfamiliar groups. Facilitators observed that participants often reverted to their national groups, and many needed more structured support for team-building at the beginning. The differences in preparation among students from **different towns** were also mentioned – some arrived well-informed, while others had little understanding of the project’s goals.

Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

Facilitators' Perspectives

The **programme's intensity** was frequently raised: longer sessions with limited breaks led to visible waves of fatigue. Facilitators also noted occasional tensions created by the need for reporting. In particular this manifested in relation to the **presence of professional photographers**—who were seen as disruptive for some of the youth and facilitators in the co-design process. Additionally, the chosen form of public presentations increased performance pressure for some students.

What would they do differently?

Suggestions for future improvements included:

- Starting with more time for icebreakers and group bonding, leaving conceptual work for later;
- Designing more activities that require interdependence between group members to encourage collaboration;
- Allowing more flexibility for young people to shape the format of final presentations and media outputs;
- Reducing overall group size and improving national-level preparation in advance;
- Providing clearer communication and guidance for teachers about their role and expectations;
- Scheduling time for the full facilitation team, GSTE staff and teachers to meet and align before the workshop begins.



Lessons Learned: Project Evaluation

A note on Evaluation Methodology

To evaluate the impact of the Youth Forum, we used a **combination of formal tools and informal conversations**. These included **surveys, reflective activities, feedback forms, facilitated discussions, and spontaneous exchanges**. The goal was not only to capture measurable outcomes, but also to understand the lived experience of participants across all roles. Below is a breakdown of the main evaluation approaches used for each participant group.

Youth Participants:

Feedback from the young people was gathered through a **three-part survey**: a baseline at the start of the Baden exchange (with 90 respondents), a follow-up at its conclusion (with 65 respondents), and a final round on the last day in Mariánské Lázně (with 66 respondents). In addition, a variety of **interactive reflection activities**—including visual and movement scales, group discussions, and writing—were used during workshops to capture evolving thoughts and impressions.

Teachers:

Teachers received a **feedback form** after both the autumn and spring in-person gatherings. The form included open-ended questions asking them to reflect on what worked well, what challenges emerged, what may have been missing, whether they felt adequately prepared, and space for any additional comments.

GSTE Staff and Site Managers:

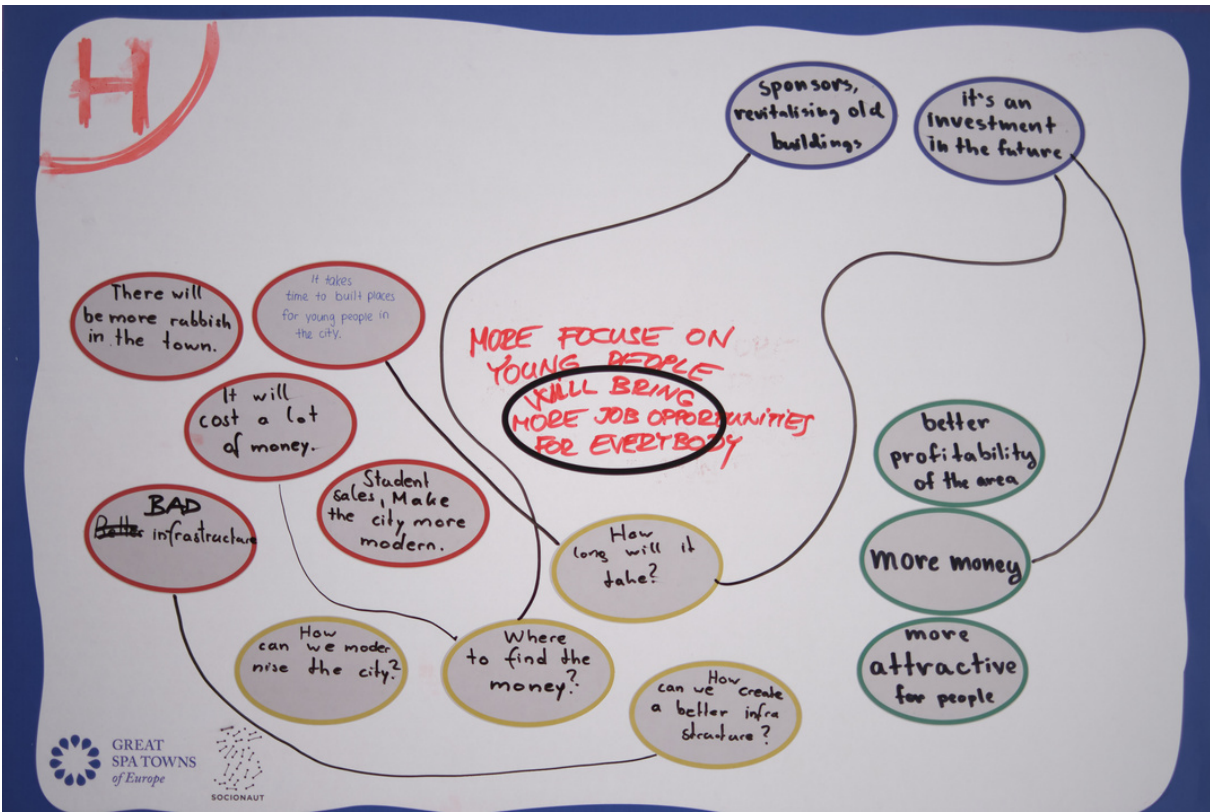
The evaluation process **mirrored that used with teachers**. In autumn, feedback was collected through a facilitated online reflection rather than a written form. The spring round used a structured survey.

Facilitators:

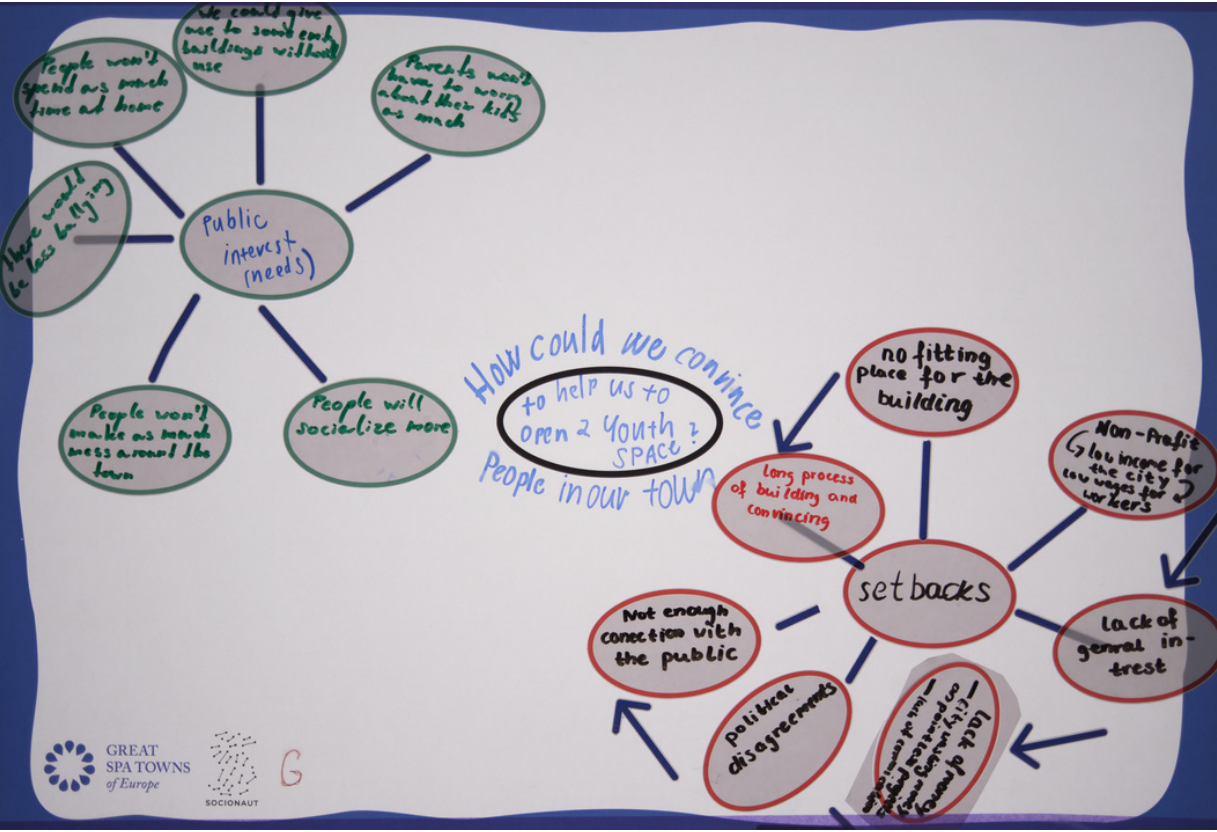
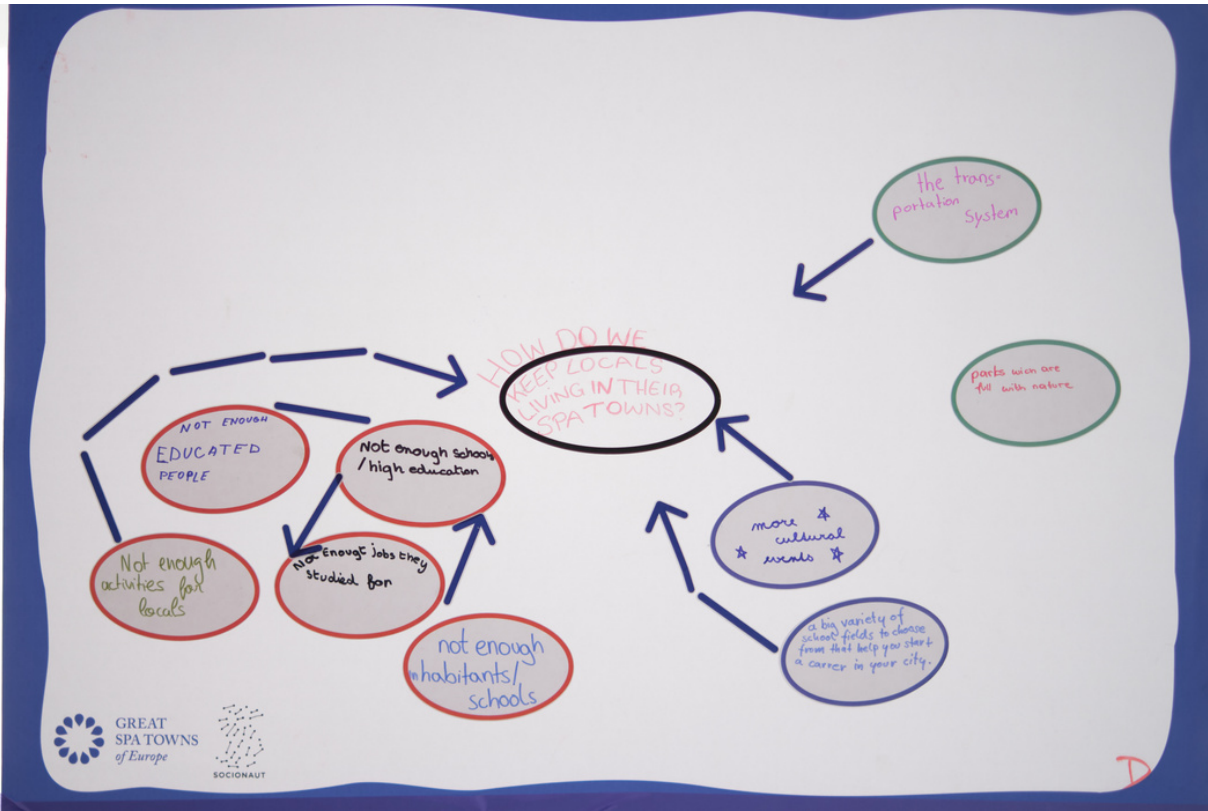
Reflections from the facilitation team were gathered through a mix of **daily debriefs** after each workshop and a **structured post-event online session**, allowing for both immediate and more reflective insights.

Annex

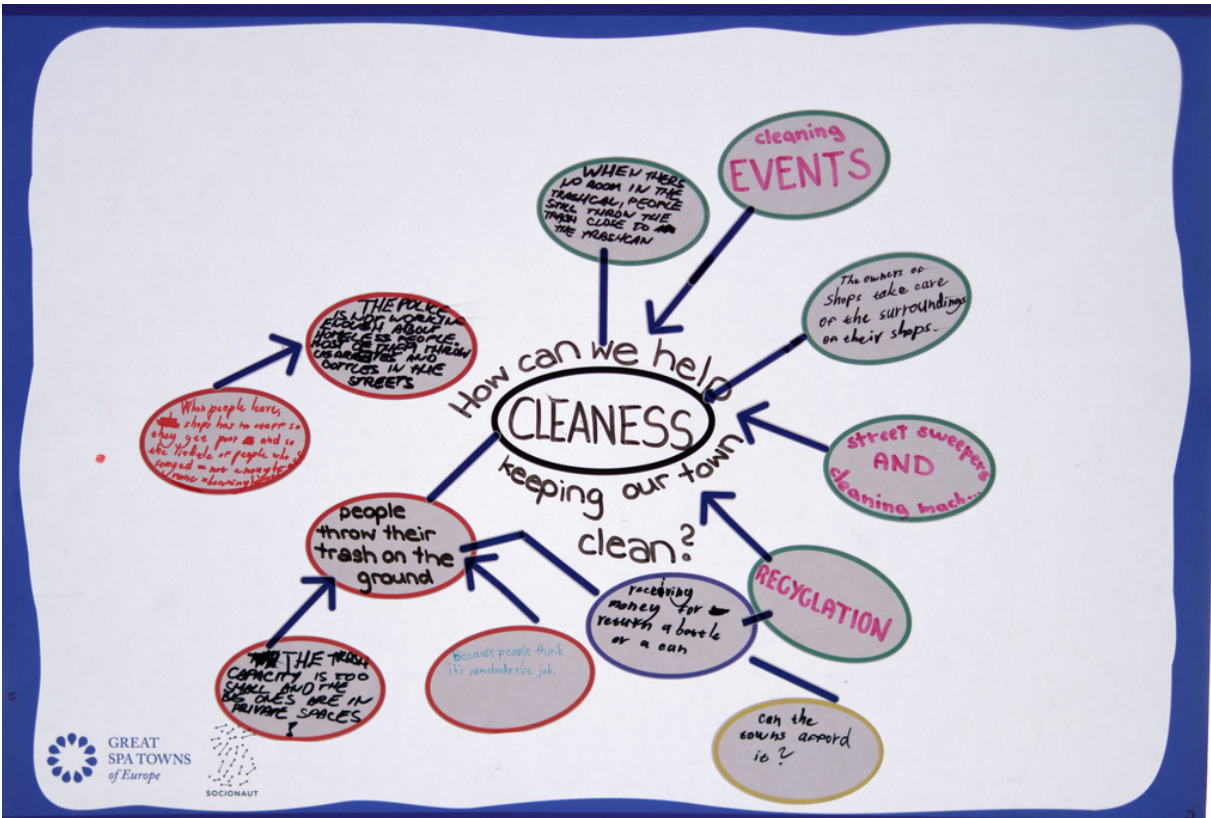
Concept Maps



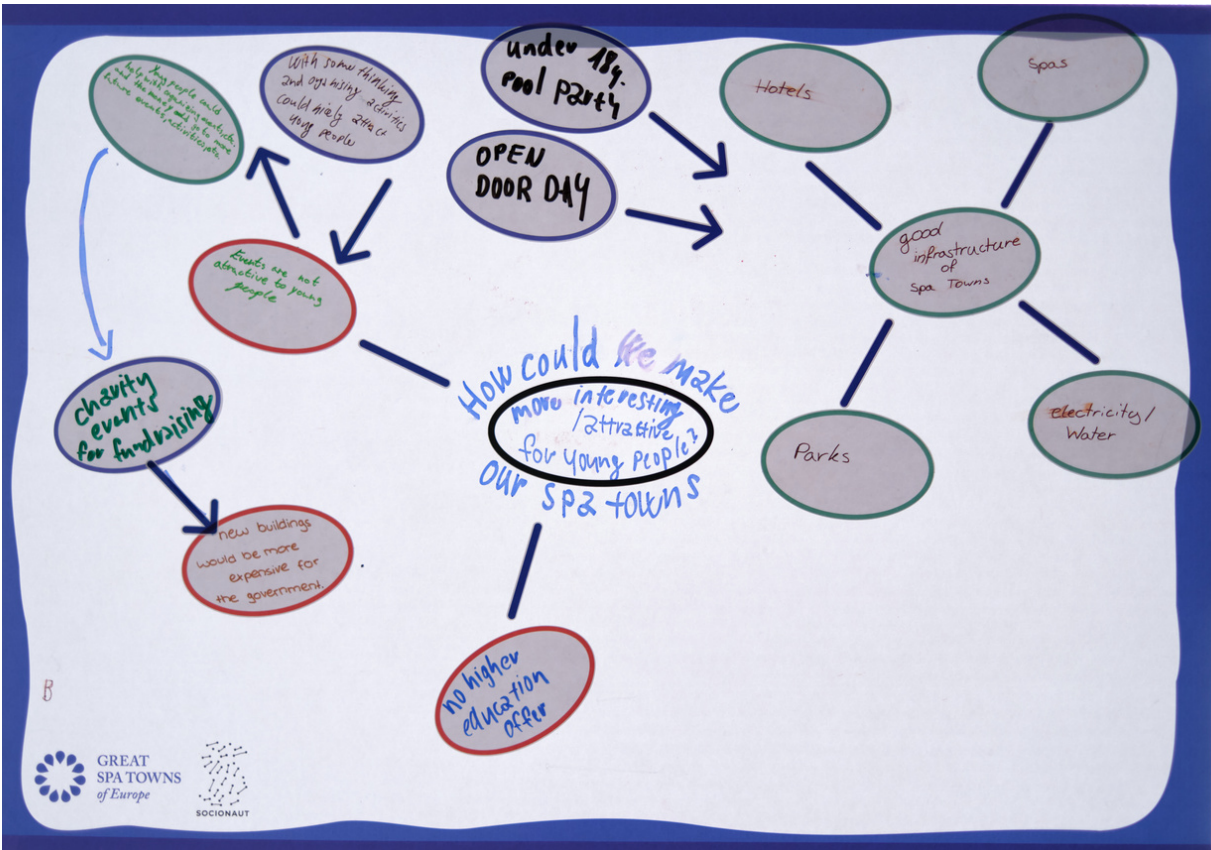
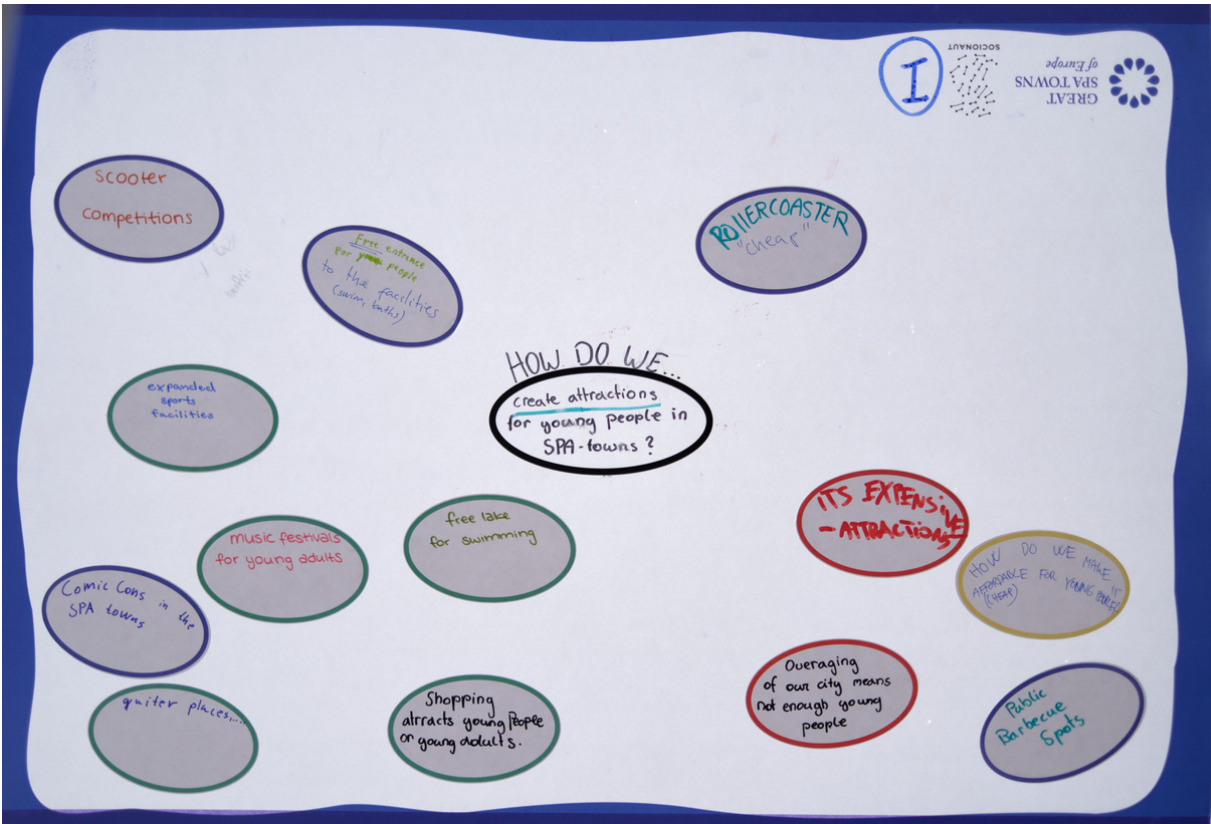
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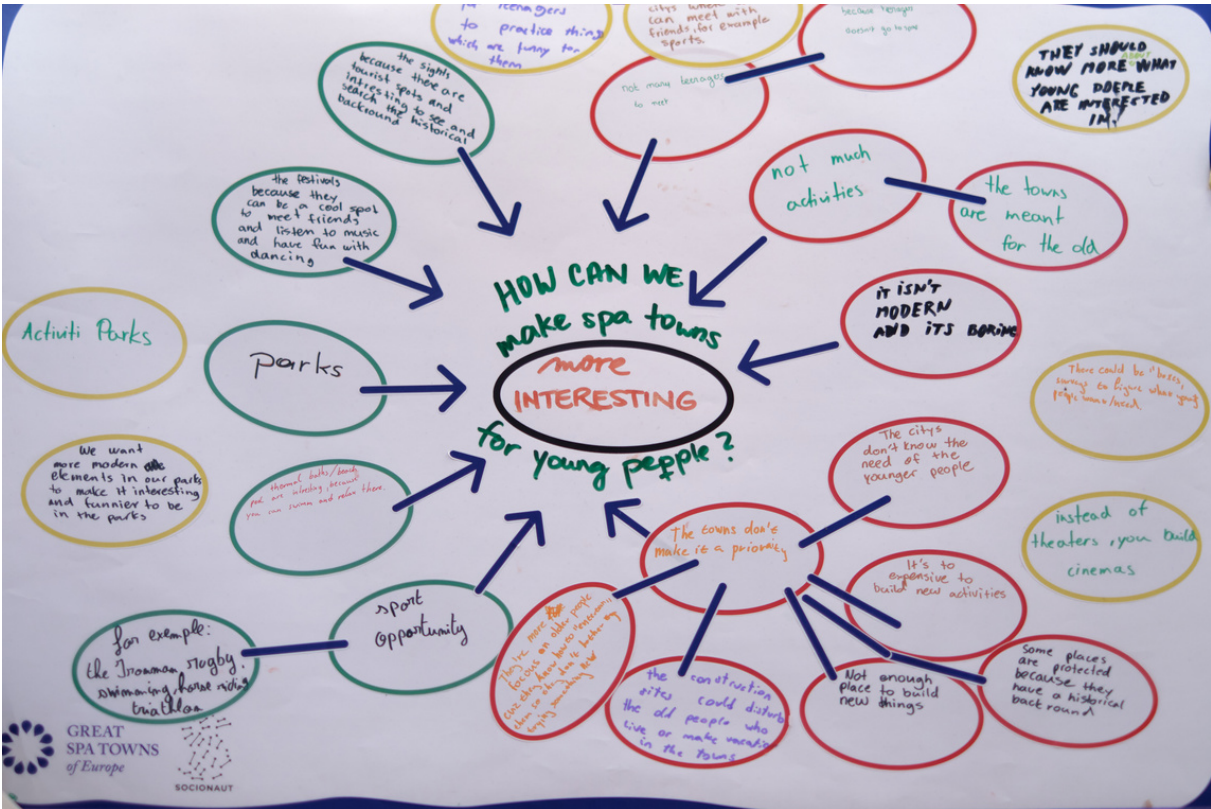
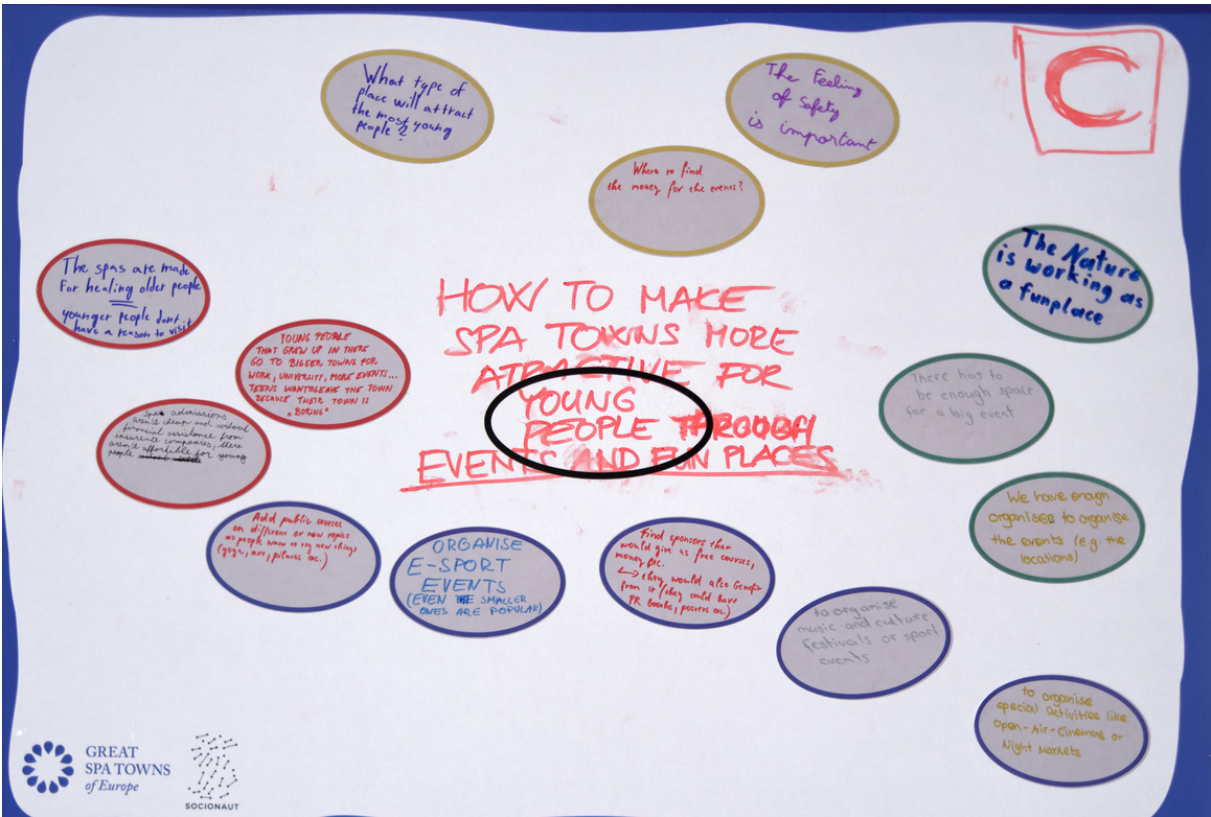
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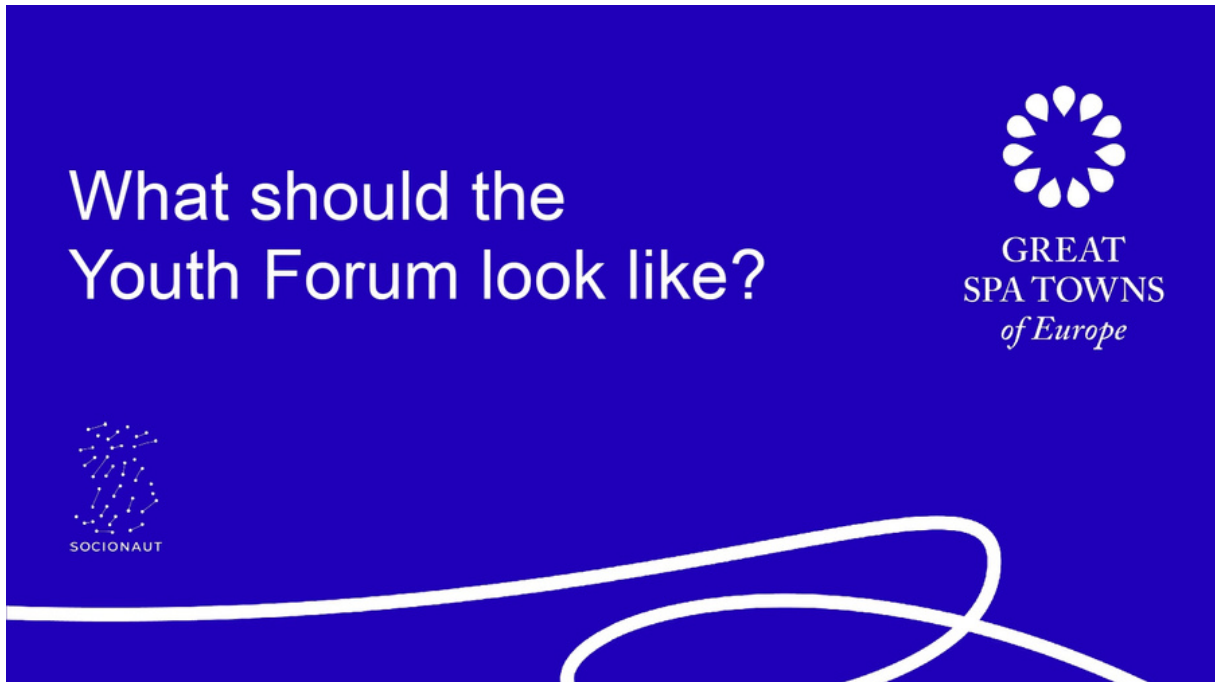
Concept Maps



Concept Maps



Presentation for General Assembly - Fall 2024



BADEN GENERAL ASSEMBLY YOUTH FORUM PRESENTATION



The Process

Together = all 100 students

- We answered guiding questions in 10 mixed groups
- We voted for our best ideas
- Each group chose a person to join a new group = Youth Forum Committee

Youth Forum Committee

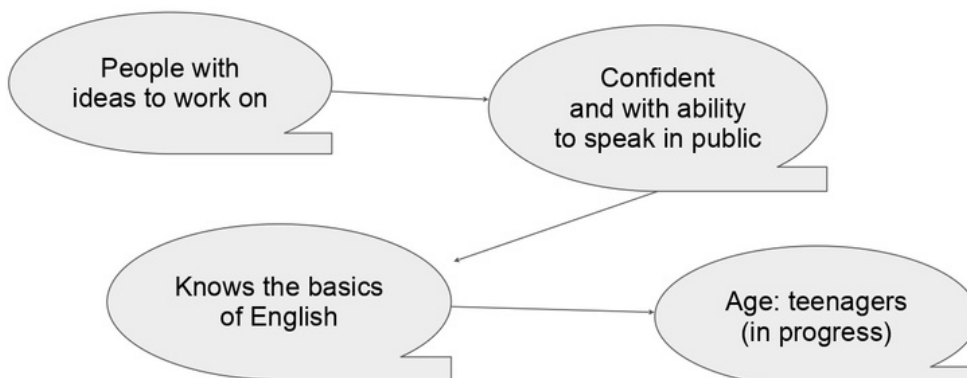
- We shared the best ideas from our groups
- We thought about ideas and discussed them
- We chose the ideas we found most important

Presentation for General Assembly – Fall 2024

1) What is the goal of the Youth Forum?

- We want to work on a **BETTER FUTURE**
- We want to learn from older generations how to protect our heritage
- We can learn from older people and they can also learn from us
- We bring a new perspective
- We help make spa towns attractive to all generations, not only seniors

2) Who should join the Youth Forum?

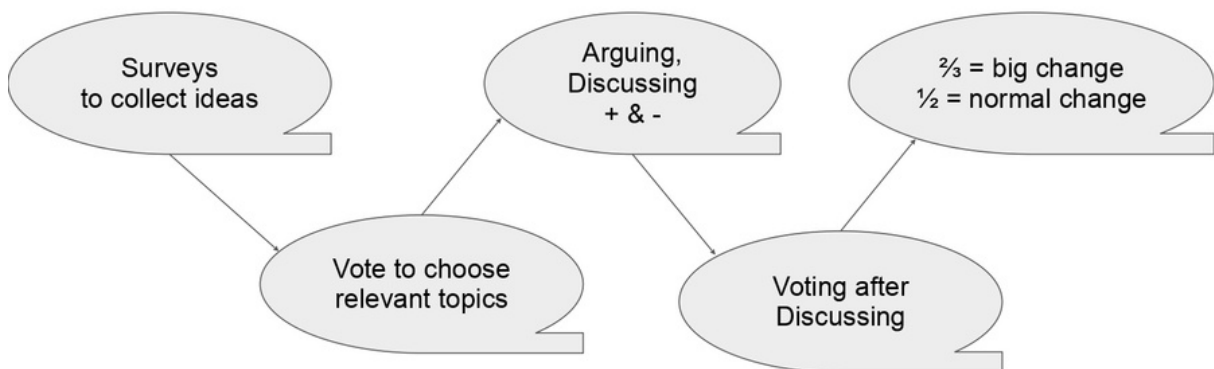


Presentation for General Assembly - Fall 2024

3) How often and where should we meet?

- Always in a different spa town
- Meetings frequency:
 - **at least 1x - 2x a year in person** – to solve problems, discuss ideas
 - **more often online** – to inform
- During a busy season and during a calm season

4) How should we make decisions?



Presentation for General Assembly – Fall 2024

BADEN GENERAL ASSEMBLY YOUTH FORUM PRESENTATION



5) How do we make sure everyone can participate?

- Write down ideas first & discuss together after
- Help with translation
- Everyone has a right to participate
- Participation methods for less communicative people

BADEN GENERAL ASSEMBLY YOUTH FORUM PRESENTATION

Thank you for listening

