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Entry

What does social engagement look like in small towns in Poland and Italy? Who is most frequently involved? Whose initiative are the projects implemented under? In which areas? We sought answers to these and other questions by conducting a study as part of the Co-Decision, Co-Makers, Common Europe project funded by European funds. The project partners were two cities: Sianów in Poland and Asolo in Italy.

The aim of the conducted research was to identify "good practices" in the field of social engagement and civic participation in Polish and Italian cities belonging to the International Cittaslow Towns Network. Within the study, we examined both more formal examples of activities (participatory budgets, citizen consultations, Youth Councils, Senior Clubs, NGOs, regular local events, volunteering, etc.) as well as less formal ones (neighborly assistance, picnics, etc.). We looked for initiatives initiated by local authorities, as well as those that arose from the ideas of the city or municipality residents. Local leaders, who completed a survey prepared by the project team (experts from various backgrounds), were involved in the study.

The first part of the research was quantitative in nature and focused on social engagement in Cittaslow towns in Poland and Italy. The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire. The second part involved describing selected civic initiatives that illustrate the results of the quantitative study.

According to the assumptions, the survey was to be conducted in 60 cities (30 in Poland and 30 in Italy) and was targeted at residents, local leaders, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of local government authorities. It was anticipated that approximately 150-200 people would complete the survey.

Despite many attempts to reach respondents from different cities, 223 responses were collected from 35 Polish cities (164 surveys, with the highest number from Sianów, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, and Olecko) and 19 Italian cities (59 surveys, with the highest number from Asolo, Pineto, and Santarcangelo di Romagna). It should be emphasized that the presented research results are exploratory in nature, and we cannot generalize them to other cities. They







contribute to further research on social activity in small towns in Poland and Italy. Below are the main conclusions from this study.

Survey results

Traditional, clean, artistic - what do the respondents think about their cities?

Both respondents from Polish and Italian cities believe that the adjective that best describes their city is "small" (79% and 75% respectively). The characteristics of the cities can be divided into three segments - since respondents could indicate up to five traits, their collective responses can be grouped by combining the ones that were most frequently selected. In the case of Italian cities, those who chose the answer "small" also usually selected the traits: clean, sustainable, and artistic (*Figure 1*). In the case of Polish cities, "small" was associated with: traditional, quiet, and clean (*Figure 2*). Both in Polish and Italian cities, positive responses dominate and fall into the first and second groups, while negative responses are less common and also form a separate group. The biggest differences between Italian and Polish cities are related to their perception as artistic - 54% (IT) and 25% (PL), sustainable - 51% (IT) and 26% (PL), and quiet - 25% (IT) and 49% (PL).







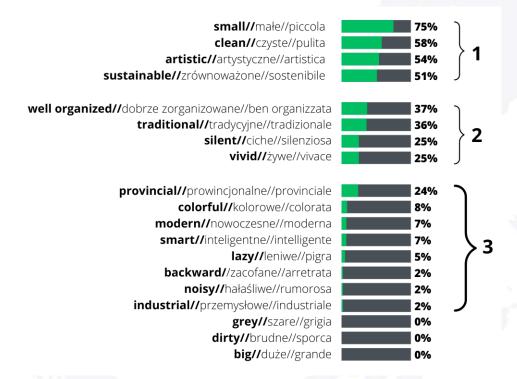


Figure 1. Characteristics of Italian cities. Groups of most frequently combined responses.

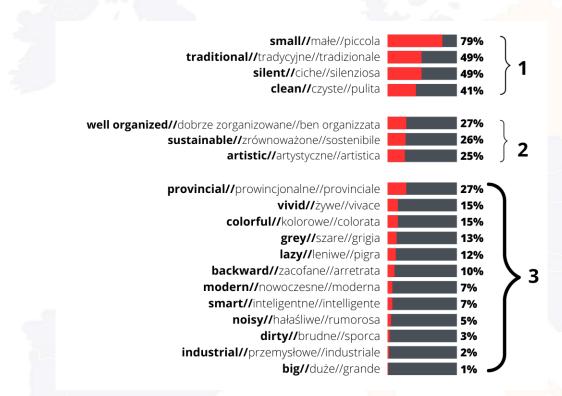


Figure 2. Characteristics of Polish cities. Groups of most frequently combined responses.

European

Commission





Seniors, youth, or local authorities? - The most active groups according to the respondents opinions

There are significant differences in perceiving the most active groups in the city. In Italian cities, the most common indications are mayors and councilors (60%), youth groups (37%), religious groups (33%), and women (30%). In Polish cities, the most frequently mentioned groups were seniors (76%), mayors and councilors (54%), women (38%), and youth (30%) *(Figure 3)*. Important differences in the percentage of indications primarily concern seniors - 19% in Italy and 76% in Poland, religious groups - 33% and 9% respectively, men - 23% and 4%, and women - 30% and 38%. Therefore, in Italian cities, youth is perceived as more active than seniors, while in Poland, it is the opposite. Seniors are seen as the most active group. The low percentages of indications for religious groups and men in Poland compared to Italian cities are also noteworthy.

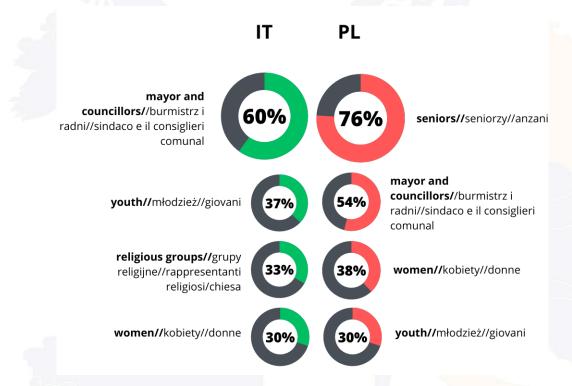


Figure 3. The most active groups in Italian and Polish cities.





5



What and for whom - areas of community actions

The most commonly indicated areas of social activities in both Poland and Italy were actions directed towards seniors (63% in Poland and 46% in Italy). However, the responses that appear in lower positions indicate a different emphasis. In Polish cities, the focus is primarily on areas related to culture and art (50% of responses), sports and recreation (47%), and children (42%). In Italian cities, there is greater emphasis on tourism (42%), but also on culture and art (39%), as well as cultural heritage and regional history (37%) (Figure 4).

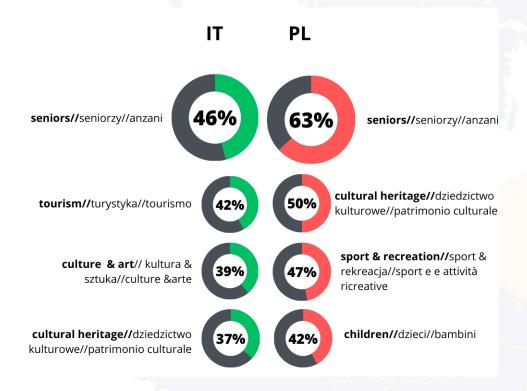


Figure 4. The most frequently indicated areas of activities in Italian and Polish cities.

The biggest differences concern tourism, cultural heritage, and culinary matters, which seem to be more important for Italian cities and are aligned with their tourist profile. On the other hand, for Polish cities, a more significant area is focused on children and youth. It appears that Italian cities are more oriented towards "external" needs (attracting tourists with narratives about cultural heritage and food), while Polish cities prioritize "internal" needs (e.g., seniors, children), and the actions taken complement or even substitute public initiatives in these areas.







Initiation of actions

The most frequently indicated groups initiating social activities in both Polish and Italian cities were mayors and councilors (53% in Italy and 48% in Poland) and formal groups (53% and 45%) (Figure 5). In Poland, informal groups were also mentioned (45%). Entities considered least likely to initiate actions were broadly defined external entities, such as supra-local institutions (49% in Italy and 45% in Poland) (Figure 6).

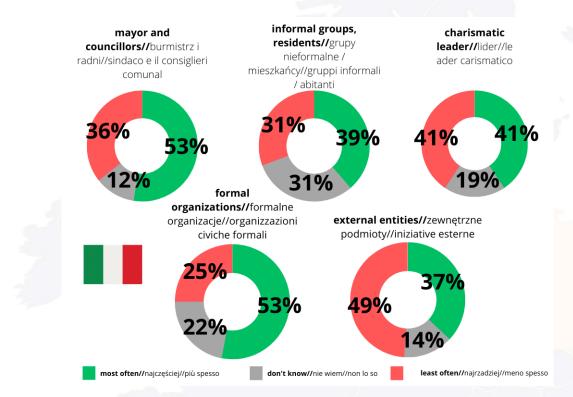


Figure 5. Entities indicated as most and least frequently initiating actions in Italian cities.





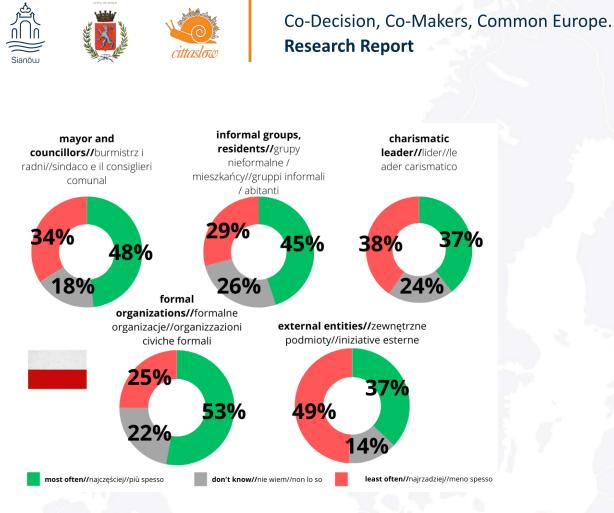


Figure 6. Entities indicated as most and least frequently initiating actions in Polish cities.

The biggest differences concern the role of formal organizations, which had 53% of indications in Italian cities stating that they most frequently initiate local initiatives, while in Polish cities it was 45%. The greatest similarity (smallest differences in indications) was related to local leaders, whose involvement was relatively highly rated.

What sets us apart and what unites us? - Polish and Italian opinions on social activity

A significant majority of respondents from Poland and Italy believe that in their city, municipal authorities collaborate with residents in conducting local initiatives (80% in Italy and 77% in Poland). Most respondents also believe that local authorities are open to residents' initiatives (90% and 74%) (Figure 7). In both Polish and Italian cities, respondents found it difficult to determine whether the development of the city is more influenced by initiatives from local







authorities or by the residents themselves. Most chose the safe answer "hard to say" (Figure 8).

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Figure 7. Agreement with statements regarding the actions of local authorities.





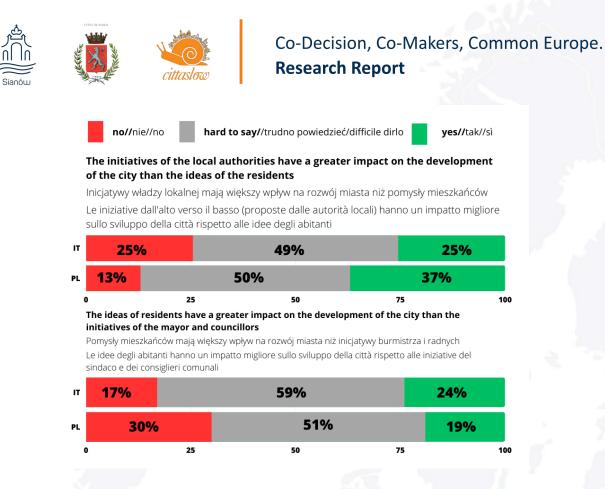


Figure 8. Agreement with statements regarding top-down and bottom-up influence on city development.

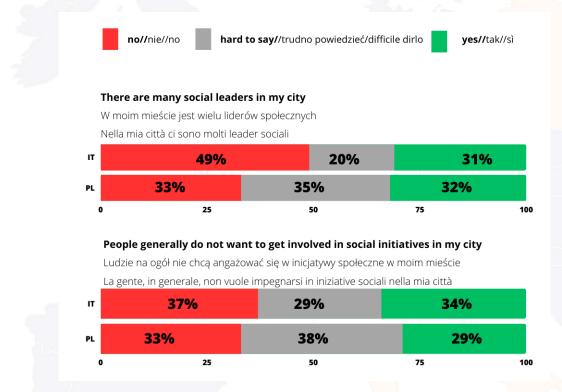
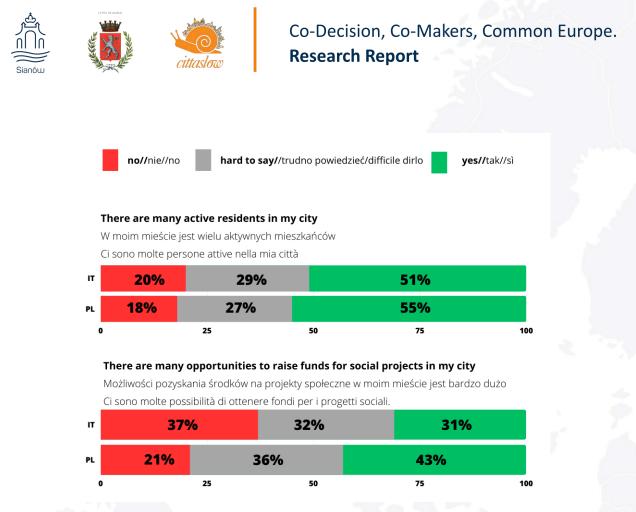


Figure 9. Agreement with statements regarding citizen engagement.









The majority of respondents from Italian cities disagree with the statement that there are many social leaders in their city (49%), while in Poland there is no clear consensus - opinions are evenly divided. The respondents mostly disagree with the statement that people generally do not want to get involved in local initiatives in their city (although in Poland, the majority found it difficult to answer this question) (Figure 9). The majority of Italian and Polish respondents believe that there are many active residents in their city (51% in Italy and 55% in Poland). More respondents from Poland (43%) than from Italy (31%) agreed with the statement that there are many funding opportunities for social projects (Figure 10).

Tools Supporting Civic Engagement

The question about the most popular tools supporting civic engagement revealed differences between Polish and Italian cities, especially in terms of the most frequently chosen answers





11



(respondents could choose a maximum of three). In Polish cities, the most popular instruments were indicated as actions and projects initiated by local authorities (64%),

financial support for local NGOs (59%), and cost-free local initiatives (38%). In Italian cities, the most frequently indicated tools were volunteering (76%), cost-free local initiatives (61%), and projects initiated by local authorities (51%) (Figure 11). Thus, in Italian cities, tools based on volunteer work and cost-free actions by residents are considered popular, while in Polish cities, the focus is on the activities of formal entities: local authorities and non-governmental organizations.

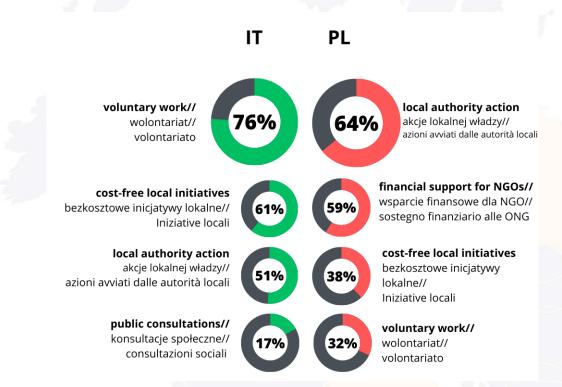


Figure 11. The most popular tools supporting civic engagement in Italian and Polish cities.





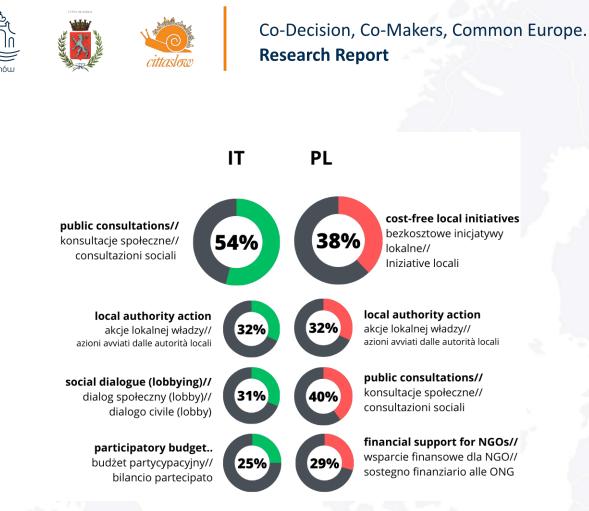


Figure 12. Tools supporting civic engagement identified as most desired.

In the study, we also compared opinions on the most popular tools with those expected to be used in cities. Respondents from Italian cities would primarily expect: social consultations (54%), local government projects (32%), social dialogue (31%), and participatory budgeting (25%). On the other hand, respondents from Polish cities expect: cost-free local initiatives (38%), actions initiated by local authorities (32%), social consultations (31%), and financial support for local NGOs (29%) (Figure 12).

What does Cittaslow give us? Benefits of belonging to the Cittaslow network

Questions regarding the benefits of belonging to the Cittaslow network can be divided into several groups concerning: city identity (e.g., exchanging experiences with representatives of other cities, city prestige, shaping city identity), city promotion (e.g., attracting tourists, promoting local food), city development (e.g., opportunities for financial support, attracting investors), city residents (e.g., improving residents' quality of life, attracting new residents), and city spaces (e.g., infrastructure modernization, environmental protection). The most







selected answers in Italian cities are: attracting tourists (53%), shaping city identity (45%), city prestige (41%), and exchanging experiences with representatives of other cities (40%) (Figure 13). In Polish cities, the most selected answers are: opportunities for receiving financial support (46%), exchanging experiences with representatives of other cities (43%), city prestige (33%), and shaping city identity (32%) (Figure 14).

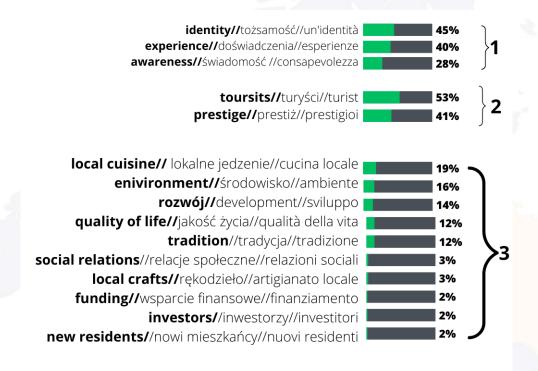


Figure 13. Benefits of belonging to the Cittaslow city network. Responses from Italian cities' respondents.







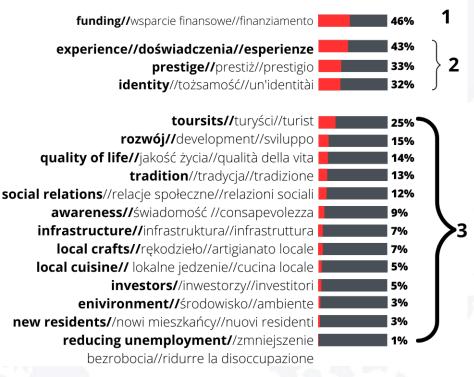


Figure 14. Benefits of belonging to the Cittaslow city network. Responses from Polish cities' respondents.

Since respondents could choose up to three answers, it is possible to identify how the chosen responses correlate with each other, forming groups of correlated choices. In Italian cities, we can distinguish (1) a group of responses related to building city identity (creating city identity, raising awareness among residents and the region, and exchanging experiences with residents from other cities), (2) a group related to attracting tourists (attracting tourists and city prestige), and (3) a group combining the remaining responses, which may also form smaller subgroups (such as preserving traditions, environmental protection, better conditions for city development) (Figure 13). For Polish respondents, three groups can also be identified, but with a different arrangement. These are: (1) the possibility of obtaining financial support, (2) a group related to identity creation (creating city identity, exchanging experiences with representatives from other cities, city prestige), and (3) a group with the remaining responses, among which certain subgroups can also be identified, such as city development being linked to improving residents' quality of life and raising awareness of the city and region being associated with building social relationships (Figure 14).







The biggest differences between respondents from Polish and Italian cities are related to: the possibility of obtaining financial support (2% in Italian cities and 46% in Polish cities), attracting tourists (53% and 25% respectively), increasing awareness of the city and region (28% and 9%), and promoting local food (19% and 5% respectively).

Respondents from Poland and Italy perceive similar benefits in terms of building city identity and promotion. Italian cities place greater emphasis on the benefits of attracting tourists, while Polish cities focus more on obtaining financial support.

A Few Words About the Respondents

The online survey was addressed to local leaders from Polish and Italian cities belonging to the Cittaslow network. A total of 223 individuals responded: 59 from Italy and 164 from Poland. The majority of respondents from Italian cities represented non-governmental organizations (63%). A significant percentage declared no affiliation with any organization (22%). The remaining individuals indicated: cultural center, educational institution, being a local entrepreneur (3% each), with individual respondents representing a youth organization, religious organization, and environmental organization. In the case of Polish cities, the most frequently mentioned affiliations were: holding positions in local authorities (26%), no affiliation with any organization (21%), membership in a non-governmental organization (19%). The remaining individuals represented a local cultural center (9%), educational institution (7%), youth organization (5%), being a local entrepreneur (2%), or belonging to a religious organization (1%). 10% stated that none of the suggested answers described their status.





Good practices

POLAND - Sianów - Participatory Budgeting / The Citizen's Budget

Participatory Budgeting is an initiative of local authorities that is becoming increasingly common in various cities and municipalities in Poland, including some Cittaslow towns (e.g., Ryn, Reszel, Barczewo). The aim of the initiative is to encourage residents to get involved in their local community by proposing and selecting projects funded by the municipality from a dedicated budget.

In Sianów, participatory budgeting has been organized since 2020. Every year, a few percent of the municipality's budget is allocated for this purpose. Residents are encouraged to submit projects for the benefit of their city/municipality. Subsequently, an electronic voting process is conducted, in which all residents above the age of 16 can participate. As a result of the voting, projects to be financed from the participatory budget are selected. Over four full editions, over 670,000 Polish zlotys have been allocated to projects related to public space, environmental protection, culture, and more. This innovative tool is gaining popularity among the residents of Sianów, with over 5,000 votes cast for 44 different projects in the four editions. It serves as an inspiration for other municipalities to introduce changes in their budget policies.









POLAND - Sianów - Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations

In Sianów, particular attention is given to tools for cooperation between local authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at promoting the idea of participation and involving residents in the process of creating public policies. As part of this cooperation, representatives of NGOs can benefit from educational workshops and advisory services, including topics such as external fundraising, team building, volunteer cooperation, as well as legal, accounting, promotional aspects, and cross-sector partnerships. Additionally, NGO representatives are invited to participate in activities related to the analysis and development of documents regulating the scope of cooperation between local authorities, residents, and social organizations.

The Sianów NGO Incubator has also been established, which collaborates with the District Center for Non-Governmental Organizations. Funding for cooperation is obtained from various sources, including European funds, the municipal budget, and the county budget. The







collaboration between local authorities and NGOs in Sianów has been recognized by the Marshal of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, receiving the title of "Local Leader in NGO Cooperation" three times.











Project CO-DECISSION CO-MAKERS COMMON EUROPE is co-funded from the European Commisision funds under the EU programme Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)

19



POLAND - Sianów - Civic Dialogue

In Sianów, residents are encouraged to actively co-create public policies. Two important bodies of social dialogue serve this purpose: the Council for Public Benefit Activities and the Sports Council.

The Council for Public Benefit Activities functions as an advisory body on matters related to the third sector in the Sianów municipality. Its tasks include providing opinions on strategic documents, identifying the needs of non-governmental organizations, fostering and maintaining cooperation between local NGOs, and coordinating social initiatives undertaken by the local government. The Council consists of 8 members, including representatives of local authorities and NGOs. The presence of representatives from different sectors allows for the recognition of various perspectives and listening to the voice of residents.

The Sports Council focuses on promoting physical activity in the municipality. Its responsibilities include developing the municipality's strategy for physical activity, creating policies and implementing programs related to physical activity, and organizing sports events. The Council also consists of 8 members, including representatives of sports organizations, clubs, and the local government. The Council collaborates with schools, clubs, and other institutions that support a healthy lifestyle.









POLAND - Olsztynek / Działdowo / Lubawa - Youth City Councils

The involvement of young people in local politics, including the establishment of Youth City Councils, plays a significant role in community building. Such organizations have been created in Olsztynek, Działdowo, and Lubawa.

A prime example of an actively operating council is the Youth City Council established in Olsztynek in 2004. The council comprises 15 councilors who are representatives of schools in Olsztynek. The council's aim is to promote the idea of self-government among young people and support their activities in the city and municipality of Olsztynek. As part of their work, young councilors undertake various tasks related to environmental protection, spreading the idea of self-governance among young people, and actively engaging in the preparation of investment projects targeted at the youth. The active work of the Youth City Council in Olsztynek has been recognized and awarded multiple times, including at the International Cittaslow Assembly in the Netherlands, and has received the "Laur Najlepszy z Najlepszych" award from the Marshal of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.









Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrmolsztynek/photos?locale=pl_PL

Lubawa (currently in its fifth term since 2014) and Działdowo (in its fourth term, with a current membership of 19 students representing a total of 7 primary and secondary schools) can also boast actively functioning Youth Councils.







POLAND - Active Seniors: Prudnik - "Rajd Staruchów" / Biskupiec "Piknik na powitanie lata"

Seniors are one of the most socially active groups in Poland. Many cities and towns have senior organizations and so-called Universities of the Third Age (UTAs).

An example of seniors' significant involvement in local life is the operation of the Prudnik University of the Golden Age "Pokolenia," which collaborates with the local government, cultural center, Dinosaur Club at the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK), and the Prudnik Council of Seniors. The group of seniors in Prudnik promotes a healthy lifestyle among older individuals, encourages physical and mental activity, and fosters social connections to prevent isolation. One of the initiatives they undertake is the annual "Rajd Staruchów" (Seniors' Hike), which involves a walk, contests with prizes, and a communal meal. The event has been led for years by a local leader who has been organizing the entire event. The seniors in Prudnik are an active group, and thanks to their initiative, Prudnik became the first city in the Opole Voivodeship to join the International Network of Cittaslow Cities.



Source: https://glosseniora.pl/2019/10/28/rajd-starucha/







The seniors from Biskupiec are also an actively engaged group. Every year since 2002, as part of the "Piknik na powitanie lata" (Picnic to Welcome the Summer), a gathering of seniors from Biskupiec and other friendly towns such as Szczytno, Jeziorany, Bartoszyce, and Barczewo is organized. The main organizers of the event are the Day Care Center "Senior-WIGOR" in Biskupiec and the Municipal Social Center in Biskupiec. The event traditionally has a theme, such as Rome (in ancient, Olympic, and more contemporary versions with hits from San Remo). Various performances are organized during the picnic, which are then evaluated by a jury consisting of representatives from local authorities and senior organizations.



Source:<u>https://cittaslowpolska.pl/index.php/pl/aktualnosci/95-biskupiec/680-rzymskie-</u> wakacje-seniorow

Poland - Barczewo - Academy of Active Women

The Academy of Active Women is an initiative carried out by an informal group consisting of employees of the Stacja Warmia Foundation, with the support of the Cultural and Library Center. It was a series of diverse meetings for women aged 30-50 who are overloaded with







work, family, and household responsibilities on a daily basis. The project, initiated in 2022, included free meetings on topics such as healthy nutrition, theater, medicine, and culminated in a fashion show in which the project participants acted as models. The project continues in 2023, and so far, the participants have had the opportunity to participate in training sessions on first aid, workshops on self-presentation and public speaking, among other activities.



Source: https://www.facebook.com/stacjawarmia?locale=ms_MY

ITALY - Trevi - "Campaign against urban degradation"

The aim of the project was to encourage residents to reflect on everyday practices related to caring for the common space. Following the principle that "small individual actions leave a trace. You do the difference," small actions were promoted, such as cleaning up after dogs, not painting on walls, saving every drop of water, disposing of garbage in trash bins rather







than on the streets. As part of the project, attention-grabbing graphics illustrating various aspects of caring for the space were prepared. Information was also distributed to every resident of Trevi.



Source: https://www.comune.trevi.pg.it/notizie/tu-fai-la-differenza-parte-la-campagna-disensibil-000

ITALY - Asolo - "FOR A COMMUNITY WELFARE" – long term programme

One of the goals of the local government in Asolo is to increase social engagement among the town's residents by shifting from service provision to supporting local projects initiated by the residents themselves. The process of changing this approach is divided into two main levels. The internal level involves evaluating the municipality's previous actions aimed at engaging residents and collaborating with non-governmental organizations. Two friendly cities, Fonte and Maser, have also been invited to collaborate, and together they are developing a long-term strategy for implementing social policies. After a year of joint efforts, three Units (Services) were established to coordinate new cross-local projects: the Work Project (related







to unemployment), Social Housing (related to affordable housing), and Family Networks (related to family support). Another project in the plans is Home Care for Minors and the Elderly (assistance for minorities and elderly individuals).

The second level of the program focuses on building relationships between the social policy of the Asolo local government and the broader local community. This level involves institutional cooperation between various organizations (preschools, schools, cultural centers, libraries) to identify potential areas for joint actions that address previously identified local needs. This part of the program also initiates collaboration between non-governmental organizations and resident engagement (including the establishment of an Active Residents Committee) supported by a Local Educator (Community Educator).

The program was initiated over a year ago and is currently in the process of implementing subsequent stages..



Source: materials provided by the organizers.

ITALY - Asolo - "STREET EDUCATION"

The genesis of this grassroots initiative was the concern of Asolo residents for young people who were difficult to engage in any social activities. Through discussions with social workers





27



and other local leaders, it was decided to implement a plan for joint actions involving both youth and adult residents of the local community. The first stage involved identifying the needs of young people in order to better tailor the actions to their interests. As a result, a youth center was established, open to all young people.

The second stage of the project involved the collaborative work of youth and adults in revitalizing the urban space to make it more attractive and, above all, safer for young people. The plan included organizing training and social consultations with various groups in the local community. The goal was to create a friendly and secure space for all residents. The project is still ongoing and is linked to the good practice described below.



Source: materials provided by the organizers.

ITALY - Asolo - "SPACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE"

In the summer of 2019, the local authorities of Asolo sent letters to all young people between the ages of 14 and 20, inviting them to participate in the "Space for Youth" project. A group of 16-17-year-olds from four nearby rural areas responded to the invitation. This group met once a week with an educator from the Kirikù cooperative to brainstorm ideas for the project, reflect on the spaces where young people gather, and consider the necessary changes in those







spaces. Everyone was encouraged to contribute their ideas and suggestions regarding the redesign of urban spaces for youth.

During their final meeting, the young people presented proposals for changes to two specific areas to the local authorities, incorporating innovative and environmentally responsible solutions. As a result, it was decided to renovate the basketball court and build a volleyball court that would be freely accessible to all residents. The implementation of this plan involved the active participation of young people, council members responsible for social and youth policies in Asolo, educators from the cooperative, volunteers from the senior association, and local government employees. The initiative was also appreciated by the parents of the engaged youth. Furthermore, monthly social consultations with the youth and the Kirikù cooperative were permanently integrated into the activities of the local government.



Source: materials provided by the organizers.





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29





Source: materials provided by the organizers.

ITALY - Castelnovo / Felina - MASTERPLAN DI CASTELNOVO MONTI E FELINA

As a result of long-term efforts by the local public administration of Castelnovo and Felina towards participatory spatial planning and urban revitalization since 2016, two strategic documents called Masterplans have been created. The residents of both towns were involved in the preparation of these documents. Local Community Maps were developed, a Citizens' Forum was organized, and a series of other initiatives were undertaken, all aimed at creating a panoramic image of Castelnovo's city center and redeveloping the spaces of the former agricultural consortium and the former cinema-theater in Felina. These two documents serve as the basis for further actions related to the regeneration of urban spaces carried out by the public administration. They are also a direct response to the social needs identified by the residents and representatives of local non-governmental organizations.







Source: https://www.redacon.it/2019/03/27/castelnovo-e-felina-presentazione-dei-pianiprincipali-di-rigenerazione-urbana/

ITALY - Pineto - "White night of Sports"

The White Night of Sport and Paraolympic Sport is an example of good practice in promoting sports and integrating people with disabilities. The event, organized through the collaboration of various sports associations, takes place annually in Pineto's squares, allowing participants to discover and experience various sports disciplines. The organization involves athletes, sports associations, and citizens of the town.

The first edition of the White Night dates back to 2014, and since then, it has become a unique opportunity for direct and profound understanding of the world of sports, discovering the passion and perseverance of Olympians and Paralympians. During the event, which lasts throughout the night, participants can take part in various sports activities and visit food stalls and more. The White Night also provides a space dedicated to music and entertainment, with







performances by different groups representing various artistic genres to further enhance the event's atmosphere and cater to all tastes.



Source: https://www.facebook.com/pinetonottebiancadellosport







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