

Young Citizen Relationship Management (yCRM)

Tackling demographic challenges in rural areas by establishing effective communication between municipalities, regions and young people who are living away from their place of origin.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Scheibbs, Austria

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 - Social inclusion & local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19 - LEADER/CLLD

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Timeframe: 2018 to 2021

Project promoter: Eisenstraße Niederösterreich

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Summary

The Eisenstraße Niederösterreich LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) believes that municipalities and regions need to communicate with young citizens through the same systematic communication approaches that companies use with their customers. Hence, they established a youngCitizen Relationship Management (yCRM) approach that is similar to the Customer Relationship Management approach commonly used by companies. This would allow the region to tackle its demographic challenge of youth emigration by entering into a new relationship with its young people, even if they temporarily leave the area.

Project results

The project activities have reached 1 500 young people via physical events and another 100 000 people through social media communications. The video portraits and the website were visited by around 13 000 different people during the project period.

Lessons & Recommendations

Professionally prepared communication materials (videos, photos, magazine, etc.), involvement of young people in the project's development, and a hybrid approach have been instrumental to the 'Get the Most' association's success.

Context

In 2013/2014, the University of Vienna conducted an in-depth demographic survey on behalf of the Eisenstraße Niederösterreich Local Action Group (LAG). One finding was particularly alarming: the migration balance in the 15-40 age group was clearly negative. Hundreds of people between 15 and 25 were moving away from the LAG's region (to pursue educational opportunities), and in the older age groups, immigration or «return migration» did not take place to an extent that could compensate for the emigration rate. Within the region, there is also a clear north/south divide; with the tendency to emigrate being particularly pronounced in the southern part of the region.

Despite a prospering regional economy, which includes numerous leading companies that are successful on the world market, employers have long been unable to find enough local workers as the population continues to dwindle. This difficult situation led the LAG to target demography as a separate field of action. The yCRM system was launched by a group of young people in 2017, and by 2019 it had formed its own association called 'Netzwerk Mostviertel - Get the Most'. The initiative aimed to be much more than a mere campaign from the business community looking for skilled workers and had far more ambition than to act as a welcome initiative by municipalities looking to attract residents.

Objectives

The aim of this project was to radically change the relationship that young people have with their region. Until then, when young people left for jobs or for further study, they were no longer visible from the point of view of local policy making. The yCRM-approach provided a means through which the youth of the region could stay connected by maintaining active, positive communication between those who grew up in the region, especially if they were leaving the area due to temporary life circumstances. Through this approach, the region itself became a platform that supported both communities (in maintaining and strengthening the social fabric) and the local economy (by highlighting work and development opportunities).

Activities

- ▶ A kick-off event - The LAG organised a conference at Neubruck Castle in Scheibbs in June 2018, which explored the topic «How can we (re)gain young people for our region». Alongside the large number



of young people that attended, the LAG invited representatives of municipalities, associations and business enterprises to come and contribute to the development of the project.

- A mobilisation campaign - A nationally recognised communications agency (Campaigning Bureau) was engaged to develop the concept and visual identity of 'Get the Most.'
- Mostviertel ('Regulars' Table') in Vienna - In September 2018, the first event took place with more than 100 participants from the region who study or work in Vienna. The 'Regulars' Table' has taken place five times since then; always in Vienna and always including music, drinks and exciting content to strengthen the participants' connection to their region.
- 'Get the Most' outreach - Different media promote the association, including a newsletter sent to over 500 addresses; the 'Get the Most' magazine which is attached to a Viennese daily newspaper; a video portrait series with newcomers and returnees; and social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- Demography dashboard - In order to monitor the region's demographic statistics, the project developed the interactive 'demography dashboard'. The dashboard can draw on a large amount of data to compare population trends and developments in communities within the region, in Lower Austria and nationally (<https://lep.eisenstrasse.deckweiss.at/>).
- Ambassador workshops ('Get the Most Academy') - Multipliers are crucial for the success of a project like this, so in order to inspire young people to become multipliers, the project organised workshops offering them knowledge about personal and team development. This core group of young participants founded the association 'Netzwerk Mostviertel - Get the Most'.
- Networking event outside the region (Club to Most) - The organisation of a night club event in March 2019 in Vienna attracted more than 1 000 participants, who celebrated the 'Get the most' initiative together. It became apparent that such physical meetings are immensely important for bonding.
- Project management - While the LAG tried to launch the project idea alongside the rest of their LEADER work from 2015 onwards, yCRM only started to gain momentum when they hired a dedicated project manager.

Main results

'Get the Most' has developed into a comprehensive talent and onboarding initiative for the region. yCRM collected over 500 datasets for young people from the region, including contact data such as former and current place of residence. This forms the basis of the newsletter mailing list, through which regular news from the region is communicated along with job and housing opportunities.

The project activities have reached 1 500 young people from Mostviertel, in and outside the region (especially in Vienna), via physical events.

In addition, the project achieved a social media reach of over 100 000 people, with the video portraits and the website being visited by around 13 000 different people during the project period.

It is not possible to quantify how many young people have returned to the region as a result of the project. Nevertheless, it is exciting that the people who founded the «Netzwerk Mostviertel» association while they were working or studying in Vienna have now all returned to live and work in the region.

The LAG succeeded in giving the region a new image. This is evident from the positive reaction of the region's companies and professionals. Also, as part of a research project conducted by the German University of Erlangen, 'Get the Most' was examined as an example of best practice for combatting rural depopulation.

Key lessons

Initially, the project was focused on the digitally driven yCRM system. Once underway, however, the project demonstrated that networking among young people requires physical formats which are much more effective at building emotional connections. In particular, it became apparent that professionally prepared communications (videos, photos, magazine, etc.), involvement of young people in the project's development, and a hybrid approach have been instrumental to the 'Get the Most' association's success.

The Eisenstraße Niederösterreich LEADER LAG ensured the involvement of other relevant stakeholders from municipalities and businesses - and it guaranteed stability in the implementation and financing of the group's activities. This organisational support was also important to the success of the project.

The project was implemented under the LEADER measure, but exchanges with other regions showed that other EU funds can be used (e.g. ERDF, ESF), especially regarding the development of professional skills and the labour market.

"Smaller communities in particular do not have the time or resources to actively and systematically pursue talent management. The region's 'Get the Most' initiative helps us to ensure that we become attractive to young people - also, and above all, by involving young people."

Manuela Zebenholzer, Mayor of Hollenstein an der Ybbs and 'Eisenstraße' board member

Additional information:

www.eisenstrasse.info



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