
How to Create a High-Impact Organisation

The Europiamo Journey through Connect4Impact



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The Question That Started It All

Every organisation begins with a question.

For Europiamo, that question was simple but radical: **“How do we make a decentralised and mostly remote community work, and have a real impact in Italy?”**

When we started out in January 2020, Europiamo wasn't a project yet. It was an idea born out of dozens of conversations with young people, youth workers, and organisations active in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.

We met in cafés, Zoom calls, and late-night chats at training courses, all circling around the same feeling, that something was missing in how youth participation worked in our country. There were many good initiatives, but too often isolated, short-lived, and disconnected from each other.

We wanted to do something different: to build a community, not a campaign; a network where learning, collaboration, and growth would happen continuously, not only when a project was approved.

That meant thinking differently from day one: not as an “association that implements projects,” but as a **learning organisation**, one that designs, tests, and refines ways for young people and organisations to work together, learn from each other, and take action in their communities.

Since then, it's been a long road, full of experiments, detours, and a few beautiful surprises. Between 2020 and 2024, Europiamo grew from a small team of volunteers to a national reference point for youth work and participation. We've welcomed more than 50 member organisations, activated four regional sub-communities, and created dozens of opportunities for young people to learn, connect, and lead.

Each step of this journey was guided by the same principle: impact doesn't happen by chance, it's built through strategy, relationships, and a culture of learning.

And this is precisely what the project Connect4Impact gave us the space to explore: a safe framework to test how theory meets practice, how structure meets community, and how passion meets systems.

A High-Impact Nonprofit by Design

From its first steps, Europiamo was consciously inspired by some of the most respected frameworks in nonprofit management and social impact. Among them, **Engine of Impact: Essentials of Strategic Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector** by William F. Meehan III and Kim Starkey Jonker (Stanford University Press, 2017) provided a powerful compass.

The book argues that successful nonprofits are not driven by passion alone, but by the disciplined alignment of strategy, learning, and leadership, like a well-tuned engine where every component must work together. The authors identify seven interdependent elements that define high-impact organisations:

- **Mission:** A clear and enduring purpose addressing a concrete social need.
- **Strategy:** A coherent, evidence-based plan linking activities to long-term outcomes.

- **Impact Evaluation:** The capacity to learn from evidence and adapt accordingly.
- **Insight and Courageous Leadership:** A balance between analytical clarity and moral conviction.
- **Funding Model:** Sustainability mechanisms aligned with mission and scale.
- **Board Governance:** A strategic, learning-oriented governance culture.
- **Talent and Organisation:** A values-based culture that attracts and empowers committed people.

These elements became reference points for Europiamo's internal development. They informed the organisation's strategic planning cycles, the adoption of OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) for execution, and the establishment of learning loops after each major activity.

Learning from Forces for Good

Another major influence has been **Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits** by Leslie Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant (2008).

This book shifted our understanding of impact from what an organisation does to what it enables.

They identify six practices common to the most impactful nonprofit organisations:

- **Advocate and Serve:** combining grassroots action with systemic influence;
- **Make Markets Work:** engaging constructively with private actors to advance public good;
- **Inspire Evangelists:** turning supporters into champions who spread the mission;
- **Nurture Nonprofit Networks:** collaborating instead of competing to maximise collective impact;
- **Master the Art of Adaptation:** learning, experimenting, and evolving with context;
- **Share Leadership:** distributing power to strengthen ownership and resilience.

This approach mirrors Europiamo's DNA. We do not see ourselves as "the" change-maker, but as one node in a much wider ecosystem. If Engine of Impact taught us discipline, Forces for Good reminded us that our strength lies in connection. And that was just some of the resources that helped us shape our path.

It was for sure a bumpy road. But 5 years, many many changes, crises, successes, tears, and smiles Europiamo is a recognised actor in Italy. A point of reference for the people that are working with Erasmus+ and ESC in Italy.

And this was also because we kept experimenting, trying different approaches, different activities to get where we wanted. And try to learn from both failures and successes. One step at the time.

The Connect4Impact project became the perfect opportunity to test how these ideas could live within a real, dynamic network. It gave us the means to invest in new structures like the Community Manager, to support our sub-communities, and to prototype new forms of collective learning and participation.

The Role of the Community Manager

One of the most significant developments enabled by Connect4Impact was the creation of a Community Manager position, a role designed to address a long-standing organisational challenge: maintaining meaningful and regular engagement within a dual membership structure that included both youth organisations and individual members.

The Community Manager acted as the connective tissue of Europiamo's network, ensuring continuous communication, coordination, and learning across the community's diverse actors.

Mandate and Approach

The role was guided by a clear set of accountabilities:

- 3 monthly outreach meetings with potential new organisations to expand the network;
- monthly check-ins with collective members (youth organisations and nonprofit) to map their needs, opportunities, and proposals;
- regular calls with our Young Ambassadors (GAE) to maintain alignment and motivation;
- support in organising local and national events, including the Toolfair and Bootcamp;

Beyond these operational duties, the Community Manager developed a living communication system that allowed Europiamo to monitor trends, needs, and expectations across its 50+ member organisations. Through short monthly reports, the organisation could track what was working, where new partnerships might emerge, and how to adapt its strategy.

Impact and Learning

The position proved transformative. It enabled Europiamo to:

- Increase the number of active member organisations from 25 to nearly 50, with a more balanced representation across Italy;
- Strengthen regional sub-communities (particularly in Lazio, Piemonte & Campania), ensuring that national strategies translated into local action;
- Enhance member satisfaction and retention, thanks to personalised contact and responsive support;
- and turn participation into co-creation, by identifying member proposals that later became joint initiatives under the Project Labs.

The experience also revealed challenges: the scope of the role was ambitious for a part-time contract, and sustaining systematic outreach required strong digital tools and continuous internal coordination. Nevertheless, the introduction of this position laid the groundwork for a professionalised community management model that Europiamo intends to maintain beyond the project.

- [1. Youth Participation Toolfair - Cascina Govean \(Turin\), 28-30 June 2024](#)
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1. Youth Participation Toolfair - Cascina Govean (Turin), 28-30 June 2024

Hosted at **Cascina Govean in Alpignano (Turin)**, the *Youth Participation Toolfair 2024* brought together **over 20 youth organisations and networks** from Italy and Malta for three days of shared learning and practical exchange on meaningful youth participation.

The event involved organisations such as **Projekta (Malta)**, **YEPP Italia**, **In(t)essere**, **Madiba**, **Oasi Giovani**, **Circo Wow**, **Comune di Alpignano**, and several youth councils from Northern Italy. In total, **approximately 30 participants** (youth workers, volunteers, and local administrators) took part in workshops, discussions, and experiential sessions.

The Toolfair was designed as a **peer-led practice exchange**, enabling participants to showcase methods they already use in their daily youth work. Among the featured sessions were:

- a hands-on introduction to the **YEPP methodology** for community participation;
- **circus and theatre-based techniques** for inclusion and trust-building;
- the use of **Open Badges** to validate non-formal learning outcomes;
- small group discussions on youth policy and the recognition of youth work.

Each session combined demonstration, active experimentation, and structured reflection, allowing participants to both learn and contribute. Informal evening moments further encouraged connection and knowledge sharing across organisations.

The transnational dimension added depth to the exchange. Maltese and Italian practitioners compared how participation is organised and supported in their respective contexts - identifying shared challenges such as the sustainability of youth involvement and the need for stronger collaboration between NGOs and municipalities. Several organisations began exploring possible partnerships for future Erasmus+ initiatives.

The event concluded with a **collective reflection on “co-decision”** - how to move from youth consultation to shared governance. Participants co-wrote a short summary of insights and tools, later circulated within both national networks to support further practice exchange.

2. Euforia Fest 2024 - Bari, 19 October 2024

Euforia Fest 2024 took place on **19 October 2024 in Bari** and represented one of the year's most visible moments for Europiamo's community in southern Italy. Conceived as a vibrant

celebration of youth participation and European citizenship, the festival brought together youth organisations, volunteers, and young people from across the region to explore European opportunities and share experiences of civic engagement. The event was co-organised by **Europiamo ETS** in partnership with **ESN Bari**, **InCo Molfetta**, **Link APS**, **Arcigay Taranto**, **Tou Play**, and **Mama Happy**, among others.

The event gathered **over 150 participants**, mainly young people aged between 18 and 30, alongside **25 youth organisations and networks** active in Puglia and neighbouring regions. Youth workers, volunteers, and local associations participated in the fair and workshops, with the city of Bari providing institutional support and visibility for the initiative.

The festival unfolded throughout the day in a dynamic and inclusive format combining learning, storytelling, and culture.

Key activities included:

- a **Youth Organisations Fair**, where associations presented projects, volunteering paths, and Erasmus+/ESC opportunities;
- Europiamo's interactive workshop "**Next Stop: Youth Goals**", guiding participants to connect their own experiences with the **European Youth Goals** through creative reflection;
- a **Living Library of Mobility**, where returnees from European experiences shared personal stories and insights;
- and an **evening concert and social moment**, turning the festival into a space of celebration and connection.

The event's design allowed for both structured participation and informal networking, encouraging spontaneous encounters and new collaborations among participants.

Euforia Fest achieved its central purpose: to make European youth opportunities visible and relatable to a wider public. Many young attendees encountered Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps for the first time, discovering pathways for involvement and exchange. Several organisations initiated follow-up discussions on potential joint projects and local partnerships. The combination of learning and festivity created a sense of belonging and optimism, reinforcing the idea that youth participation is not only a civic duty but also a source of joy and community connection.

3. Europiamo Bootcamp 2024 - San Vincenzo (LI), 9-15 September 2024

The *Europiamo Bootcamp 2024* took place from **9 to 15 September 2024** in **San Vincenzo (Livorno)**. Designed as an immersive residential training, it represented the **culmination of Europiamo's long-term learning pathway "Simple Project Writing"** - a free course created to guide youth workers and young people step by step through the process of designing Erasmus+ Youth projects.

This final stage brought together the most engaged participants of the online programme for a week of applied practice, turning knowledge into real project ideas and building collaboration within Europiamo's growing network of youth organisations.

The Bootcamp gathered **14 participants** from across Europiamo's community, representing both individual youth leaders and member organisations. All shared a strong motivation to deepen their understanding of Erasmus+ Youth project design and to contribute actively to European youth work. The small group size ensured close interaction, personalised feedback, and the development of a cohesive learning community.

Over seven days, participants moved through a carefully structured learning process combining non-formal education, teamwork, and simulation.

- **Day 1 - Arrivals:** Participants settled in, received logistical guidance, and were introduced to the week's goals.
- **Day 2 - Teambuilding & Relevance:** Group activities fostered trust and collective rules. Participants began working on project concept notes, focusing on needs analysis and objectives.
- **Days 3 - 4 - Project Design & Impact:** Sessions explored target groups, learning outcomes, partnerships, inclusion, digitalisation, sustainability, and impact. Teams developed activity plans and budgets.
- **Day 5 - Deadline Simulation:** A practical exercise where each group completed a full Erasmus+ application under real-time constraints, replicating the pressures of an actual submission.
- **Day 6 - Open Space & Evaluation:** Participants refined their proposals, received one-to-one feedback, and engaged in a collective evaluation and planning of next steps.
- **Day 7 - Departures:** Closing reflection and farewells.

Throughout the week, the learning environment balanced structure and flexibility - alternating between guided input, collaborative drafting, and peer learning moments.

The Bootcamp had a strong **educational and community-building impact**. Participants left with increased confidence in project writing and a clearer understanding of each phase of the Erasmus+ Youth application process. The *deadline simulation* was particularly valued, as it reproduced the collaborative pressures and decision-making typical of real project development. The Bootcamp also consolidated relationships within the Europiamo network, transforming online learners into an active community ready to co-develop and submit real proposals.

4. Let's Go Local - Rome, 17-18 May 2025

Let's Go Local was held on **17-18 May 2025 in Rome**, organised by the **Lazio local community of Europiamo ETS**. Conceived as a teambuilding and goal-setting retreat, the event focused on strengthening relationships among members, welcoming new participants, and defining shared priorities for the coming months.

The initiative reflected Europiamo's broader mission of cultivating cohesive, self-organised local communities - where young people and youth organisations collaborate to generate social impact at the grassroots level.

The event brought together **15 participants**, including young members and representatives of local youth organisations. Among these were **Jules Verne APS** and **Ostia Clean Up**,

alongside **13 Europiamo Ambassadors** and community volunteers. The group mixed experienced members with new entrants to the network, creating a fertile environment for exchange and collective learning.

The two-day programme was designed around participatory and non-formal activities fostering connection, trust, and strategic alignment:

- **Icebreakers and Team-building Games:** Dynamic activities opened the event, enabling participants to connect personally and build a relaxed, inclusive atmosphere. These games helped overcome initial barriers and fostered a sense of belonging, particularly for new members.
- **Open Discussion Circles:** Facilitators guided small-group discussions on motivations, expectations, and the collective vision for Europiamo's work in Lazio. Each participant was encouraged to share their perspective, nurturing mutual understanding and a shared sense of purpose.
- **Goal-Setting and Planning:** A collaborative brainstorming session produced a set of common goals for the next semester, including raising Europiamo's visibility in the region and promoting more youth-led local engagement initiatives.
- **Reflection and Feedback:** The event concluded with a collective reflection on the learning process. Participants identified personal takeaways and offered feedback for future activities, highlighting the day's positive energy and clarity of direction.

Let's Go Local succeeded in strengthening both the interpersonal and operational dimensions of Europiamo's Lazio sub-community. It **renewed members' motivation**, **expanded the local network**, and **laid the foundation for a more structured regional action plan**. The process also reinforced Europiamo's approach to decentralised participation - empowering local groups to self-organise while remaining aligned with the organisation's shared vision and values. Participants left with a clearer sense of purpose and stronger interpersonal ties, essential conditions for sustained community impact.

5. Skills 4 Impact - Savigliano (CN), 28 June 2025

Skills 4 Impact was held on **28 June 2025 in Savigliano (Cuneo)** as part of Europiamo's ongoing commitment to empowering young changemakers and promoting civic participation. Conceived as a hands-on learning event, it combined training, networking, and direct community engagement to help young people acquire the tools and confidence to act locally. The event created a dynamic bridge between Europiamo's national network and its local community in Piedmont, connecting youth organisations, youth councils, and public institutions in a single participatory learning space.

The event gathered **25 participants**, including young activists, members of local youth councils, representatives of municipal institutions, and youth workers from across the Europiamo network. Organisations and groups involved included **Oasi Giovani**, **Fondazione Comunità Solidale**, **In(t)essere APS**, **Fusandafe**, **Fondazione Lateral**, **Oratorio Patrocinio San Giuseppe**, **Libera Moncalieri**, **Fondazione Amleto Bertoni**

Saluzzo, Giovani di Turno ETS, Filarmonica Arrigo Boito di Fossano, and Associazione Joint, alongside youth councils from **Rivoli, Carmagnola, and Bra**, and representatives from the **Municipality of Saluzzo**.

This diverse composition fostered meaningful intergenerational and cross-sectoral dialogue between young citizens, civil society, and local government actors.

The full-day programme integrated civic education with applied practice in participatory governance and local action planning.

- **Morning - Participatory Budgeting Simulation:** Participants took part in a role-play exercise simulating a participatory budgeting process. By stepping into the roles of youth stakeholders and decision-makers, they experienced first-hand how collective deliberation, negotiation, and consensus work in allocating resources for youth-led initiatives.
- **Lunch at “Caffè Intervallo”:** The group shared lunch at *Caffè Intervallo*, a local social enterprise operating within the prison system, which offered participants a concrete example of how social innovation and inclusion can thrive at community level.
- **Afternoon - Local Solidarity Projects Design:** Building on their morning experience, participants designed project concepts addressing real local challenges. Facilitators guided them through identifying needs, formulating objectives, and sketching concrete youth-led actions with measurable community impact.

Skills 4 Impact created an engaging environment where learning and civic practice intertwined. Participants not only understood the mechanics of participatory democracy but also learned how to apply them in their local contexts. The event resulted in stronger local partnerships between youth councils and associations, renewed enthusiasm for bottom-up initiatives, and an increased sense of agency among young participants.

6. Take Over Campania - San Giorgio a Cremano (NA), 20 September 2025

Take Over Campania took place on **20 September 2025** in **San Giorgio a Cremano (Naples)**, organised by **Europiamo ETS** in collaboration with **TwoPlusTwo** and **Arciragazzi Portici**. The event was conceived as a regional forum for dialogue and co-creation, empowering young people and youth organisations to take a more active role in shaping local and regional youth policies. By combining civic education, policy analysis, and participatory advocacy, the event reflected Europiamo's broader mission to strengthen youth participation and cooperation between civil society and institutions in Southern Italy.

The event gathered **25 participants**, including young citizens, youth workers, and representatives of local organisations from across the Campania region.

Among the organisations represented were: *Forum dei Giovani Portici, Evolve - It's Your Turn, Croce Rossa Italiana, Drama Teatro Studio, WeWorld Onlus, Angeli in Volo APS, Blam APS, Still We Believe APS, JEF Napoli, The Nameless, and Agenzia Promozione Giovani APS*.

The one-day event combined a high-level panel, interactive learning, and practical working sessions.

- **Morning - Panel on Youth Policies and Empowerment:** Experts and practitioners provided insights on regional youth policy frameworks, youth work recognition, and participatory governance. Speakers discussed real examples of cooperation between institutions and young people, highlighting how civic lobbying can be used as a democratic tool for influencing public agendas.
- **Lunch - Networking at iPoint:** A shared lunch at *iPoint* offered an informal space for cross-sector networking and reflection among participants.
- **Afternoon - Co-creating Policy Recommendations:** Divided into three working groups, participants analysed the regional youth policy law, identifying gaps and proposing amendments. Each group developed concrete recommendations focused on inclusion, participation, and recognition of youth work. The process culminated in a set of written proposals to be shared with regional decision-makers.

Take Over Campania served as a catalyst for civic dialogue and regional cooperation. Participants enhanced their understanding of youth policy frameworks and developed advocacy skills applicable to future civic initiatives. The event resulted in **a collective set of policy recommendations** and inspired **two follow-up meetings** to monitor progress and ensure that the proposals translate into concrete actions.

The experience also strengthened the local *Europiamo* sub-community in Campania, reinforcing trust between young people, youth organisations, and local authorities. It demonstrated how inclusive policy dialogue can nurture long-term civic engagement and generate practical pathways toward more participatory youth governance.

7. Community 4 Impact - Saluzzo (CN), 27 September 2025

Community 4 Impact took place on **27 September 2025** in **Saluzzo (Cuneo)**, as a key event dedicated to strengthening local civic networks and fostering collaboration among organisations active in community development. The initiative was conceived to explore practical tools for building strong, resilient communities, with a specific focus on the **Community Weaving Framework** - an approach that combines personal connection, shared purpose, and structural collaboration to sustain local engagement over time.

The event, organised by **Europiamo ETS**, was part of the broader process of reinforcing local ecosystems of youth participation and social innovation in the Piedmont region, linking community work with European perspectives on participation and solidarity.

The event gathered **20 participants** from a wide range of organisations across Piedmont, including **Yggdra**, **Global Shapers**, **Municipality of Fossano**, **Metropolitan City of Turin**, **Intessere Association**, **Giosef APS**, **Atypica Social Cooperative**, **Youth Council of Carmagnola**, **Youth Connect Association**, **Giovani di Turno ETS**, **RUN (University of Turin)**, and **Centro Studi Sereno Regis**.

This diversity of backgrounds - spanning civil society, academia, social enterprises, and

youth networks - fostered an enriching exchange of ideas and perspectives on community work and local engagement.

The one-day event balanced experiential learning, exposure to good practices, and structured reflection:

- **Morning - Networking and Local Good Practices:** The day opened with networking activities and a collective discussion on the meaning of “community.” Participants then visited *Il Quartiere*, a once-abandoned police basement transformed into a thriving community hub offering cultural and social services. The visit illustrated how physical spaces can be reimagined to embody community values and social inclusion.
- **Lunch - Social Economy in Action:** Lunch was hosted at *Lo Spaccio*, a social bar managed by the cooperative *Voci Erranti*, which employs people from the prison system. This experience demonstrated how economic activity can integrate reintegration and solidarity, providing participants with a tangible example of community-based social innovation.
- **Afternoon - Training on the Community Weaving Framework:** The afternoon was dedicated to an interactive workshop introducing the **Community Weaving Framework**. Participants visualised their own communities through this tool, identifying key elements such as shared purpose, leadership, and networks of trust. A collective reflection followed, allowing for the comparison of different community realities and a deeper understanding of the conditions that enable participation and connection.

Community 4 Impact achieved its goal of combining learning, inspiration, and practice. Participants acquired a practical methodology for mapping and developing their communities and expressed motivation to apply the framework in their respective contexts. The event also reinforced regional cooperation, establishing new connections between civic organisations, municipalities, and youth networks.

The key takeaway from the day was that **strong communities are woven, not built** - emerging from a combination of shared values, supportive structures, and spaces that encourage collaboration. By offering both conceptual and experiential learning, *Community 4 Impact* exemplified Europiamo’s commitment to fostering networks that generate sustainable, long-term impact in local territories.

Other Events organised:

Alongside the seven major events described above, Connect4Impact supported a much broader process of organisational development and community animation within Europiamo. Several complementary actions were implemented throughout the two years of the project, consolidating the organisation’s role as a national hub for youth participation, training, and advocacy.

Online Agorà - The Online Agorà became one of the cornerstones of Europiamo’s community life. Held monthly and open to all members, these facilitated dialogues provided a space for reflection and exchange around themes inspired by the European Youth Goals

and the daily challenges of youth participation. Unlike traditional webinars, each Agorà was structured as a participatory conversation, encouraging organisations to share perspectives, identify common challenges, and co-create ideas for joint action. Over time, the format evolved into a shared ritual that strengthened the sense of belonging across the network, ensuring continuous engagement between physical events.

Online Project Lab - The Project Labs were temporary working groups created around concrete funding opportunities or thematic priorities. They offered a structured environment for youth organisations to co-design proposals under Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. Initially informal brainstorming spaces, the labs evolved into methodologically robust co-creation sessions, supported by templates, facilitation, and follow-up mentoring. Through this process, Europiamo not only enhanced the quality of project proposals emerging from its network but also fostered a culture of shared responsibility and innovation, lowering the barriers to entry for smaller or less experienced organisations.

Generazione E - Generazione E is Europiamo's ongoing programme to promote access to European mobility and participation opportunities. During the project period, it included both online events (such as information sessions on DiscoverEU, Blue Book Traineeships, and ESC opportunities) and school-based activities engaging hundreds of young people across Italy. These encounters brought Europe closer to students and local communities, transforming abstract opportunities into concrete, relatable stories of participation and growth.

Online Learning Path Educare all'Europa - Within the Educare all'Europa initiative, Europiamo delivered five workshops targeting high school students from the Lazio region. Through non-formal educational methods, simulations, storytelling, and interactive group work, students explored the functioning of the EU institutions, the history of European integration, and the meaning of active citizenship.

The activity, implemented in collaboration with Open Hub Lazio, reached more than 200 students per session from seven classes across four provinces, contributing to Europiamo's mission of making Europe accessible, tangible, and participatory for young people.

Europa Porta Europa Activities - Europiamo also plays an active role in Europa Porta Europa, an informal alliance of 16 national youth organisations advocating for more inclusive and participatory youth policies in Italy. Throughout 2024-2025, Europiamo co-organised and contributed to four key activities within the network, facilitating dialogue with policymakers and youth councils, and amplifying the collective voice of youth civil society. This engagement expanded Europiamo's advocacy capacity and provided valuable experience in coalition-building and political participation at the national level.

Together, all the online and local initiatives formed a coherent ecosystem of learning and participation. They responded to Europiamo's strategic priorities by strengthening capacity, promoting visibility and inclusion, supporting advocacy and policy dialogue, and deepening local engagement.

The Community Manager played a pivotal role in connecting these strands, ensuring that learning from each activity informed the next, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of experimentation, reflection, and growth.

Over the two years of *Connect4Impact*, Europiamo transformed experimentation into structure. The project provided the conditions to **test, document, and consolidate** a national model of community engagement grounded in evidence and participation.

Key Achievements

- A **replicable community management model**, balancing local autonomy and national coordination;
- A set of **tested educational formats** (Toolfair, Bootcamp, Agorà, Project Labs) adaptable for different contexts;
- Strengthened **capacity for advocacy**, through participation in networks such as *Europa Porta Europa* & Erasmus+ Coalition.
- A measurable **increase in membership and engagement**, supported by systematic communication and shared ownership.