MACU / E-book

Culture as a Tool for Engaging Seniors into Democratic Life – An Intergenerational Journey Towards Democracy Through History, Poetry and Theatre

Best practices of inclusive teaching methods for working with seniors and young people

Poland / Slovakia / Romania

Making Culture a Powerful Tool of Involving Seniors into Democratic Life

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Culture as a Tool for Engaging Seniors into Democratic Life – An Intergenerational Journey Towards Democracy Through History, Poetry and Theatre

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> *From cherished historic monuments and museums to living heritage practices and contemporary art forms, culture enriches our lives in countless ways and helps build inclusive, innovative and resilient communities.*

UNESCO, Culture in the 2030 Agenda



1. Introduction

The Erasmus+ MACU project "Making Culture a Powerful Tool of Involving Seniors into Democratic Life" (2025-1-PL01-KA210-ADU-000354847) was developed to demonstrate how culture can become an effective instrument for strengthening democratic participation among older adults while promoting meaningful dialogue with younger generations, thus being a catalyst for civic engagement, lifelong learning, and meaningful social change. The project recognizes that seniors possess valuable life experience, cultural memory, and knowledge that can contribute significantly to society. At the same time, it acknowledges the importance of empowering young people to engage actively in cultural and civic life. By bringing generations together through creative and participatory activities, the project seeks to build stronger, more connected communities.

The aim of the ebook is to share the inspiring journey of the participants of the Erasmus+ MACU project and to show how culture brings people together across generations, encourages dialogue and strengthens democratic values. Through personal stories, photographs, creative works, poems, a report on the preparations for and the staging of a performance “Driven by Democracy” and shared experiences, the publication celebrates the voices of seniors and young people who discovered that democracy is not only about institutions and policy, but also about careful listening, remembering, considering each other, creating and acting together.

We hope this book will encourage readers to become active members of their own communities, to value intergenerational relationships and to believe that every story, every idea and every person can make a difference. This difference can be made through the process of co-creating culture as it was the case of the MACU project – through poetry, history and theatre.

2. How can culture make democracy stronger? The story about the development and implementation of main ideas of the MACU project

Culture, intrinsically, is a force that shapes identities, strengthens communities, and creates opportunities for dialogue, participation, and social change. Through cultural activities, individuals develop a sense of belonging, learn to appreciate diversity, and become active contributors to community life. By this, in democratic societies, culture plays a fundamental role in promoting the values of freedom, equality, participation, and mutual respect. It provides safe and inclusive spaces where people can exchange ideas, express opinions, and engage in constructive dialogue regardless of age, social background, or education.

2.1. Why and how the MACU project was created?

Seniors are valuable contributors to democratic life. Their knowledge, memories, and life experiences gained during the time of socialism represent an important cultural resource that deserves recognition especially by younger generation. This was important in the MACU project as the experience of socialism is shared by seniors and older adults in the three countries participating in the MACU project: Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

The MACU project pursues the objectives of promoting culture as a tool for democratic participation, strengthening intergenerational dialogue, encouraging freedom of expression through history, creative writing and poetry and theatre combating social isolation and age-related stereotypes, developing innovative educational methodologies for intergenerational learning and fostering active citizenship, social inclusion, and community engagement. When culture becomes participatory rather than merely observational, it transforms individuals from audiences into active creators and engaged citizens.

The project was developed through cooperation between partner organisations from three post-communist European countries. This transnational dimension is important because the participating countries share historical experiences while also having different cultural and social contexts. Seniors bring memories of periods of political and social transformation, including experiences related to limited freedoms, shortages, creativity, solidarity, and the transition towards democracy. Young people bring contemporary perspectives, questions, aspirations, and new forms of cultural expression.

These different perspectives provide a valuable foundation for intergenerational learning. Through poetry, creative writing, storytelling, music, performance, discussions, trips, and other cultural activities, MACU creates spaces where personal experiences can be transformed into shared learning and dialogue.

The project was therefore designed not simply as a series of cultural activities, but as a process through which culture becomes a means of participation. Its activities encourage participants to listen to one another, express their opinions, explore shared values, and reflect on their role within their communities. The development of MACU is based on the principle that democracy is strengthened when people have opportunities to participate, to be heard, and to contribute to the life of their communities. Culture can provide such opportunities in an accessible and meaningful way.

MACU aims at building a digital platform where stories cross generations. Workshops that turn life experience into poetry, performance, and ecofriendly art. Excursions to historical places that mean something to both young and seniors. Seniors rediscover that they are heard and influential. Young people find a space to express thoughts and feelings through art. Together, they build communication skills across countries and generations while reflecting on about and European values as lived conversations. Educators discover new methods and good practices in the field.

2.2. Who participated?

The joining of the three organisations took place in Warsaw at the TCA training in October 2024 - Erasmus+ Contact Seminar Helping to Improve Key Competernces and Promote the Civic, Environmental and Social Engagement of Seniors. Based on our discussions together, we realized that our organizations were well suited to create a joint MACU project:

Toruń University of the Third Age (TUTW) as MACU project coordinator. TUTW is a non-profit organisation founded in 1989. It supports lifelong learning, active ageing and seniors' participation through educational, cultural, health, physical and community activities. More than 1,300 seniors take part in its courses and 28 interest sections each year.

CEREHIS as a MACU partner organization. CEREHIS is a non-profit organisation established in 2015 and based in Košice, Slovakia. Its activities focus on adult education, cultural heritage, history, religious studies, intercultural dialogue and democratic values. It connects academic research with accessible public education and develops participatory programmes for seniors and other learners.

Asociația „Liga Scriitorilor" Filiala Timișoara Banat (LSFTB)/ The Association „The Writers' League" Timisoara Banat Branch is a MACU partner organization. LSFTB is a non-profit cultural and professional organisation founded in 2010 in Timișoara, Romania. The organisation is committed to supporting artistic creation, freedom of expression, cultural participation, and the promotion of Romanian literature and culture, while encouraging dialogue and cooperation at European level. A particular focus of the organisation is the use of arts and literature to explore and understand the past and to promote democracy and human rights. The organisation has extensive experience in intergenerational and European adult-learning projects and holds Erasmus+ accreditation.



2.3. History, Poetry and Theatre in building democratic participation of seniors

Within the MACU project, we employed the following forms of cultural engagement:

1. History – acquires social significance when it is linked to specific places, personal memories, and dialogue between people. For this reason, the organization CEREHIS (Slovakia) focused its efforts on cultural heritage, historical memory, and intergenerational encounters (action “Journey for Knowledge”).

2. Poetry – can serve as a powerful instrument for democratic engagement, enabling individuals to voice their opinions. For this reason LSFTB used creative writing (poems and essays) to build bridges between the past and the future in multigenerational dialogue (action “Power of Poetry”).

3. Theatre – is a component of culture, but it also serves as a tool through which culture is created. TUTW prepared the performance “Driven by Democracy” and put it on stage as a manifesto crafted by both the young and the old (action “Driven by Democracy”).

3. History as a tool of democratic involvement

3.1. Cultural Heritage and Intergenerational Dialogue as Tools for Supporting Seniors' Engagement in Democratic Life

Historical memory is shaped not only by textbooks and official documents, but also by places people revisit, personal recollections and conversations with witnesses of political and social change. Such memories offer perspectives that complement formal historical knowledge and enable discussion of how freedom, democracy and civic responsibility are experienced in everyday life.

Within MACU, CEREHIS developed two complementary strands: discovering cultural heritage through two educational excursions and recording personal experiences through intergenerational dialogues. Both encouraged seniors to become active contributors rather than passive audiences. The first strand connected public history with local sites; the second gave young people an opportunity to listen to and critically reflect on lived experience. Together they created a coherent educational contribution.

3.2. Discovering History: Educational Excursions

3.2.1. Journey for Knowledge – Štós and Jasov (10 December 2025)

The first excursion took place during the international kick-off meeting in Košice (8–11 December 2025). The Journey for Knowledge brought together 14 seniors aged 65 and over and six representatives of the partner organisations, two from each participating country. The route linked the Košice region, Štós Spa and the Premonstratensian Monastery in Jasov, offering opportunities to discuss heritage, memory and the changes that had shaped local communities.

Trip Štós









Trip Jasov









At Štós Spa, historical and regional learning was combined with informal encounters. Following the introduction to the site, seniors had space to observe the surroundings, ask questions and exchange recollections. The excursion illustrated how an accessible visit can turn a familiar location into a shared learning environment.

In Jasov, the group visited the Premonstratensian monastery. A member of the religious community introduced its architectural, cultural and spiritual heritage and the interventions affecting religious institutions during the socialist period. The visit opened a discussion about freedom of religion, the relationship between public institutions and faith communities, and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Participants compared the historical account with memories of their own communities.

The principal outcome was not merely new knowledge about monuments. Participants were able to exchange personal experiences, formulate questions and connect local history to wider European experiences of political change. These encounters reinforced the understanding of cultural heritage as a starting point for dialogue about democratic values.

3.2.2. Barca’s Cultural Heritage and Photography Workshop (15 October 2026)

The second excursion took place on 15 October 2026 in the Košice district of Barca as part of Erasmus Days 2026. The programme began with a guided historical tour of the park led by historian Dana Kušnírová. Participants then visited the manor house and its library, where the historical account was extended by an encounter with the site’s cultural and institutional heritage.

Trip Barca









Trip Barca seniors photos









Trip Barca seniors photos (continued)





The local mayor addressed participants, followed by Matúš Maršalek from Europe Direct Jasov. CEREHIS presented opportunities offered by Erasmus+, focusing on adult education and seniors, and the programme concluded with a discussion. This connected historical learning with contemporary civic institutions and opportunities for participation.

The excursion also included a photography workshop. Participants selected subjects of personal interest and photographed the park, manor house and details of the local setting. Their images offered a participant-led perspective on heritage and formed the basis of a dedicated gallery. Photography enabled participants to express what they considered important, rather than simply reproduce a guide's interpretation.

Barca extended the first excursion's approach through creative participation and direct encounters with representatives of local government and a European information network. It yielded a photographic collection and further opportunities for discussion of local identity, heritage and civic engagement.

Post-event feedback also indicated a positive immediate reception: among seven questionnaire respondents, five rated the Barca excursion as excellent and two as good; all seven reported learning something new about local history and said they would attend a similar event again. The detailed evaluation and its limitations are presented in Section 6.3.

3.3. Rethinking History: Intergenerational Dialogues

A separate strand of the Slovak programme consisted of intergenerational dialogues prepared by CEREHIS in cooperation with the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. Students and older participants explored lived experience during socialism, political change after 1989 and the meanings of democracy in everyday life. The programme took place on 18, 21, 22 and 26 May 2026.

Intergenerational dialogues seminar





Intergenerational dialogues recording









Intergenerational dialogues recording (continued)



Intergenerational dialogues certification



A key part of the preparatory session on 18 May 2026 was a lecture by Associate Professor Adriana Jesenková, PhD., of the Department of Philosophy, entitled “Identity, Memory and Intergenerational Relationships”. It provided a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between individual identity, memory and intergenerational encounters. This helped students approach senior participants’ accounts as situated personal narratives, not merely as collections of dates or historical facts.

The lecture was followed by a seminar led by CEREHIS director Zdenka Bencúrová on the basics of editorial practice, qualitative interviewing and oral history. Students were introduced to interview preparation, question design and respectful communication with respondents. They subsequently drafted questions themselves and received individual written feedback explaining which formulations were appropriate and why others required revision.

Interviews addressed everyday life before 1989, political and social change after the end of the socialist regime, freedom of expression, civic participation and the meaning of democracy. Participants described experiences that could be compared with formal historical narratives, while retaining their personal and sometimes differing interpretations of events.

The interviews also reflected the interests of the students themselves. In preparing their questions, they selected the themes they wished to explore in greater depth, including political changes, everyday routines, family life, personal relationships and the experience of different generations. This flexibility helped them conduct conversations based on genuine curiosity while maintaining the shared educational focus of MACU.

For the seniors, it mattered that they could speak in their own voices and that their experiences were of interest to younger people. Students practised listening, asking follow-up questions and recognising differences between memory and historical interpretation. The encounters therefore created opportunities for reciprocal learning rather than one-way transmission of information.

The interviews were recorded audiovisually and edited into videos published on the MACU project’s YouTube channel. This gave personal testimony an educational life beyond the immediate meetings and made the experiences available to a wider audience.

3.4. Participants' Reflections

Eight seniors provided immediate feedback after the May interviews. Their responses suggest that recollections of the socialist period prompted a range of emotions and reflections. The quotations below come from participant feedback, not from unverified video transcripts.

"Emotion and sadness."

"I felt comfortable. Memories of childhood and my studies brought back some nostalgia and joy. Not sadness, but rather curiosity."

Seniors generally did not describe communication with students as difficult. Instead, they repeatedly valued the younger participants' interest in everyday experiences and personal memories that rarely feature in formal historical teaching.

"I really enjoy talking with young people. They asked me many questions about how we lived, what we had, and what we did or did not lack."

"Information for me personally, as well as a view of the priorities of today's young people."

"I was moved that someone is still interested in us seniors."

"I am glad young people are interested in life experiences. They can learn many interesting things and make comparisons."

Most numerical feedback ratings ranged from 8 to 10 points. Participants positively assessed the atmosphere, mutual understanding and opportunities to share experience. These findings describe immediate participant perceptions and should not be treated as evidence of measured long-term impact.

The experience also highlighted that opportunities for participation in cultural and civic life depend on practical circumstances, including mobility, health, transport and access to understandable information. These considerations informed the inclusive approaches described in the methodology.

3.5. Journey for Knowledge in Košice: Highlights and European Values

The Slovak MACU contribution brought two educational excursions and a series of intergenerational interviews into a coherent programme linking places, personal memory and democratic discussion. The visits to Štós and Jasov stimulated reflection on history and freedom of religion; the Barca excursion added active photography and contact with civic and European institutions; and the recorded conversations enabled seniors and students to examine changing experiences of society.

The cooperation with the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, UPJŠ, and Associate Professor Adriana Jesenková strengthened the academic basis of the intergenerational programme. Her lecture on identity, memory and intergenerational relationships was complemented by practical training in oral history and editorial interviewing, preparing students to engage critically and respectfully with personal testimonies.

These activities created concrete opportunities to explore European values in everyday settings: human dignity through attentive listening; freedom and pluralism through discussion of differing memories; equality through inclusive participation; and democracy and solidarity through intergenerational encounters. Rather than treating these principles as abstract concepts, the programme encouraged participants to relate them to places and lived experience.

Documented outputs include the educational excursions, participant photographs and edited audiovisual interviews. The immediate feedback indicates that participants appreciated being heard and interacting across generations. The project did not, however, establish a long-term causal measure of changes in civic participation.

3.6. Digital platform and online dissemination of MACU results

Alongside the face-to-face educational activities, the MACU partnership established an online communication and dissemination environment consisting of the project website, a dedicated YouTube channel and a project Facebook page. These channels served complementary purposes: the website brought the project’s aims, partners, activities and resources together in one accessible place; YouTube provided a home for edited audiovisual testimonies; and Facebook supported timely announcements, the sharing of photographs and updates, and contact with audiences beyond the immediate participant groups.

The project website, https://macuproject.com/, was developed as a shared digital platform for the partnership in Poland, Slovakia and Romania. Its multilingual information, activity sections, news and photographic galleries made the transnational programme easier to follow and supported access to project materials beyond individual events. The platform also provided a reference point for the educational methods and good practices documented in this e-book.

The MACU YouTube channel was created to publish and preserve audiovisual outputs, particularly the intergenerational interviews produced in Slovakia. Making edited conversations available online allowed the voices and lived experiences of older participants to reach younger audiences, educators and other interested viewers beyond the original workshops. Video materials could also be revisited as prompts for discussion about historical memory, democratic change and intergenerational understanding.

The project Facebook page complemented these resources through shorter, more frequent communication. It was used to publicise activities, share project news and visual documentation, and draw attention to materials available on the website and YouTube. Together, the three channels extended the dissemination of the project and provided different entry points for audiences with varying digital habits. Their educational purpose was to make cultural participation and seniors' contributions visible, rather than to treat online reach itself as proof of a long-term change in democratic engagement.

Project website: https://macuproject.com/ | MACU YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@MACUPROJECT | MACU Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/macuproject.



4. Poetry as a Tool for Democratic Engagement

4.1. Poetry

Poetry has long been recognized as a form of artistic expression, but its role extends far beyond aesthetics. In contemporary society, poetry can function as a powerful tool for democratic engagement, enabling individuals to express their voices, reflect on social realities, and participate actively in cultural and civic life.

At its core, democracy relies on the principles of freedom of expression, dialogue, and inclusion. Poetry supports these principles by offering an accessible and personal medium through which individuals can articulate thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Unlike formal discourse, poetry allows for ambiguity, creativity, and emotional depth, making it particularly effective in engaging diverse groups, including those who may feel excluded from traditional forms of participation.

The intergenerational workshops organized in Timișoara, Romania, within the Erasmus+ project “Making Culture a Powerful Tool for Engaging Seniors into Democratic Life” (MACU), illustrate how poetry can be effectively used to support democratic engagement. By bringing together young people and seniors, the workshops created a space for meaningful dialogue across generations.

Participants were invited to reflect on their personal experiences and transform them into poetic expression. The act of sharing these poems in a group setting encouraged active listening and mutual respect. Seniors contributed insights shaped by life experience and historical perspective, while young participants introduced contemporary viewpoints and aspirations for the future.

This exchange of ideas contributed to a deeper understanding of shared values and societal challenges. It also demonstrated that cultural participation could serve as a form of civic engagement, where individuals not only express themselves but also contribute to a collective dialogue.

Furthermore, the collaborative dimension of the workshops—through discussions, joint reflections, and collective poetry—reinforced the idea that democracy is built through interaction and shared responsibility. Participants experienced how their voices, when brought together, can create a stronger and more inclusive narrative.

In this context, poetry becomes a bridge between the personal and the collective, between emotion and reflection, and between generations. It enables individuals to engage with democratic values in a meaningful and accessible way, highlighting the importance of culture as a space for participation and dialogue.

The experience in Timișoara confirms that poetry is not only an artistic practice but also a valuable educational and civic tool. By integrating creative writing into intergenerational activities, projects can foster inclusion, strengthen social cohesion, and encourage active citizenship.

Poetry has always been one of the most profound ways through which human beings express their thoughts, emotions, and hopes. Across centuries and cultures, poems have carried memories of the past and dreams of the future.

During the poetry workshop, in 24th of March, the 6 students and 6 seniors created 13 original poems expressing their reflections on democracy, European identity, human rights, and freedom.

These poems was born from a meeting between generations. Seniors, who carry the wisdom of experience and the stories of time, and young people, who bring curiosity, creativity, and new perspectives, came together through the shared language of poetry.

Within the workshops organized in Timisoara, participants discovered that writing is not only an artistic activity but also a way of listening to one another. Every poem included in this collection represents a voice that seeks to be heard, a memory that deserves to be remembered, or a hope that looks toward the future.

Dialogue between generations is not merely possible—it is essential. Through poetry, seniors and young participants have built bridges between past and future, transforming individual experiences into shared cultural expression.

These poems stand as a testimony to the power of words to unite people, inspire reflection, and strengthen the values of respect, solidarity, and freedom of expression.

4.1.1. Seniors – the voice of experience in intergenerational dialogue

During the intergenerational poetry workshop, seniors brought not only their poems, but also a wealth of experience, emotion, and wisdom. Through their poetry, they shared memories, values, and life lessons, contributing to a genuine space of dialogue and understanding between generations. Their presence was essential – they inspired, moved, and showed that their voice matters and deserves to be heard. The workshop proved that through culture, generations can connect and build a better future together.

Poetry workshops and public reading

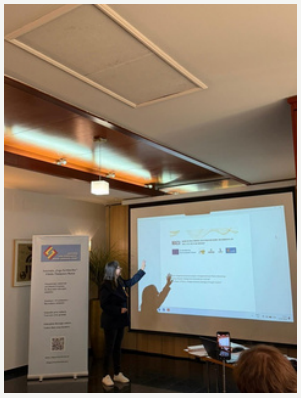


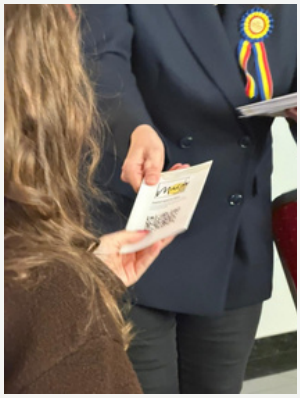














ASOCIATIA LIGA SCRIITORILOR FILIALA TIMISOARA BANAT LSFTB

New cultures on ancient soil

by Lucia Elena Popa

All poems were translated from Romanian into English by Ana Zlibut, First Vice-President of LSFTB.



Lucia Elena Popa

Hey, you young ones with high forehead,
free to meet life face to face,
how beautiful you are
with your flame-bright eyes!

Toward you I send a thought
of esteem and hope,
over the wall of my years
woven with the roots of time.
It is your season—
you whose minds are built in algorithms,
new people for new times!

Take from the weathered structure
of my wall
the ethics of the values
of our people.
Dig with devotion
until you reach the salt of the earth.
Give it shapes inspired
by your elevated minds,
mold it into daring ideas and plans,
defying time!

Raise with your young arms
a universe of light!

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

The Water of Time

by Ana Ghiaur

We drift upon the water of time.
At every turning
windows bloom into the future,
suspended before us,
seductive with light.
We ache to cross their thresholds,
yet first we must pass through
cascades of thought,
holograms where
doubt and fear entwine in dance,
winding corridors of imagination,
echoes cast from what has been.

With no helmsman, no oars,
the raft of being
yields to the current—
sometimes adrift,
sometimes swallowed by whirlpools,
until faith, hope, love
draw us back to breath.

The storm of passions
troubles the river’s skin,
tears the veins, shatters the mast,
until the oarsman
rediscovers the lost compass,
and divers rise from the depths
bearing hidden treasures
from the heart’s secret shell.



Ana Ghiaur

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

Seniors, Part of Europe

by Genoveva Tako

Seniors are people made of stories,
Years well lived, steps slowed by time.
They worked, they raised their children,
Leaving behind a road made straight.

Within the community, they have their place,
Rich in counsel, rich in patience.
Europe receives them with respect,
Gives them a voice that truly matters.

Integration means staying close—
Talking, listening, lending a hand.
Not leaving them alone at the margins,
But together, shaping a kinder land.

Seniors are not only the past;
They are present, and a future made bright.
When they are included and embraced,
Europe grows stronger, richer, united.



Genoveva Tako

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

Intergenerational transfer

by Janeta Dancea Achimescu

Culture — the guiding lighthouse,
Across generations it still shapes,
Forever molding human spirits,
People of every land and place.

Seconds beat with fluttering wings,
Time transforms them, swift and slight,
Yet culture will not be reduced
To a transfer measured by minutes alone or by sight.

It passes on with warmth and care
Roots that hold us, deep and strong,
With gentleness instead of hatred,
To generations yet to come along.

Seniors are dear to us,
With values sound and true;
Let us offer them respect
And moments bright and beautiful too.

Through dialogue, projects,
Unity and culture shared,
They raise the bar still higher—
Even when life feels hard, unfair.

God grants them strength and grace,
They never fear the dark or wrong;
If life should ever call on them,
They will step forward—brave and strong.



Janeta Dancea Achimescu

4.1.2. Youth voices through poetry

On March 24, during the poetry workshop, students from “Colegiul Național Bănățean” impressed with their sensitivity, creativity, and authenticity.

Young poets



Their poems reflected thoughts, emotions, and perspectives on today’s world, showing that young people have a strong and meaningful voice.

Through their verses, they built bridges between generations and contributed to a sincere and meaningful dialogue.

NATIONAL BANAT COLLEGE

A Vision

by Paraschiva Sonia Mihaela

All poems were translated from Romanian into English by Ana Zlibut, First Vice-President of LSFTB.

The world should glow in gentle grace,
With tender smiles on every face,
For from the roots where we belong,
We rise in pride, devoted, strong.

“Democracy” — the word we hear,
Be free to vote, be free from fear,
But is it truly as it seems
Within fair Europe’s honest dreams?

A continent of hope we see,
Bound by shared legacy,
We journey far from place to place
To change the course our lives may trace.



Paraschiva Sonia Mihaela

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

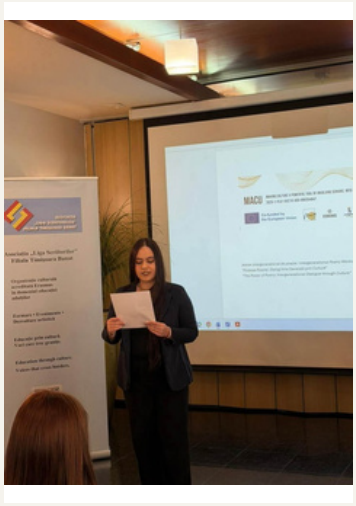
Our Europe

by Burlacu Andreea

In democracy, each voice is heard,
It guides our steps with every word,
Free thoughts are not a distant dream,
But promised rights — a steady beam.

Europe stands — a living mosaic bright,
Of tongues and faiths and values' light,
Of different peoples, far yet near,
With million hearts that beat sincere.

People are the soul of this way,
Through the living truth of today,
And tomorrow rests within our hands — united,
To guard justice's word, unshaken, undivided.



Andreea Burlacu

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

The Europe of Its People

by Ispas Serban-Rares

Europe is our shared embrace,
A home where many roads interlace,
Where voices rise — though rough they sound —
And joining thoughts grow strong and bound.

Democracy bestows the right
To choose, be heard, bring truth to light,
To speak out free, to stand and see
The future shaped by you and me.

And people, through the smallest deeds,
Can change the world through daily seeds,
United — not just age or role —
But one shared “us,” one common soul.



Ispas Serban-Rares

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

Free Stars

by Simionescu Marinela

A white star, blazing, seen from far away,
Descends to Earth with song each day,
It comes in light and leaves us stirred
By every shining, silent word.

We live, we think, we see, we're free —
We see it all, yet still ask quietly:
How can we prove we are worthy of this grace,
This gift of breath, this living place?

People smile, the small birds sing,
Freedom is the air we bring —
We are free, dear souls — set free!

O Europe — sacred, welcoming land,
With the brightest sun above your strand,
We thank you for your holy liberty,
Without it, life would cease to be
The truth we know and live each day:
The gift we simply call — Life's way.



Marinela Simionescu

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

The Voice of All

by Delia Holeiciuc

Democracy — the people’s voice,
A trust we guard, a conscious choice,
For many try to see it fall,
And steal the breath that serves us all.

In public squares the paths are weighed,
Though storms arise and doubts are laid,
From differing thoughts a balance grows,
Through open speech a nation flows.

Democracy lives through what we do each day —
We choose the course, we shape the way,
For only thus can wrong be overcome,
And clearer shall the world become.



Delia Holeiciuc

MACU / VOICES THROUGH POETRY

Under the Same Light

by Radu Maria Alexandra



Radu Maria Alexandra

Europe wakes each morning with a different story,
drunk on the scent of warm bread
from a small town at the edge of the map,
with hurried steps on rain-damp platforms,
with rows of shutters opening
toward the same light.

It is not merely a map or a lesson in a book,
but the sound of markets
where languages intertwine
like rivers that never quarrel when they meet.

It is a raised hand in a modest room
where someone says
“yes”
or “no”
and knows their voice has weight.

Democracy is not lifted onto marble pedestals —
it settles onto wooden park benches,
where people argue with fire,
then laugh and share the same coffee.

Europe breathes through ordinary people:
the teacher who shows children how to question,
the worker who claims his rights without shouting,
the young voter for the very first time,
heart tight, eyes wide open.

It is not an ideal hanging above the clouds,
but a structure built day by day from small gestures:
a door held open,
an opinion heard to the end,
a promise kept.

And perhaps in this quiet care
lives the strength to remain together
without losing one another.

Here are two special perspectives: one from a young participant and one from a senior, who share their thoughts and feelings after taking part in this experience.

„It was a very nice experience. I feel I have a much better understanding how the generations before us think and how we can better connect with them" Delia Holeiciuc, 18 years old.

„I was delighted to attend this meeting, because it was very successful. I have the nicest thoughts about the young people I was with, together. I see them as young people with great talent, of high value, and I take pride in them. I wish them a lot of luck" Lucia Elena Popa, 80 years old.

4.2. Creative writing

Creative writing encourages individuals to explore themes such as identity, belonging, justice, and community. Through this process, participants develop critical thinking skills and become more aware of their role within society. Writing and sharing poetry also fosters empathy, as individuals are exposed to different perspectives and life experiences.

Creative writing is a powerful form of expression that go beyond artistic creation; it serves as meaningful tool for civic engagement and social participation. By giving individuals the opportunity to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, this form of expression foster dialogue, reflection, and a deeper understanding of societal issues.

In the context of democratic societies, freedom of expression is a fundamental value. Creative writing provides an accessible and inclusive space where people of all ages and backgrounds can share their perspectives. It allows for emotional nuance and personal storytelling, making complex social topics more relatable and impactful.

In the essay workshops, in 6th of May, 5 seniors and 5 students explored the concept of democracy in greater depth, discussing its importance in everyday life, civic participation, and the role of citizens in building inclusive and resilient societies.

The workshops encouraged meaningful intergenerational dialogue, enabling young people and older participants to exchange experiences, perspectives, and ideas. Through discussions, brainstorming sessions, peer learning, and collaborative writing, participants strengthened their communication, critical thinking, and creative expression skills while gaining a deeper understanding of democratic values.

Democracy: From the Ancient Ideal to the Reality of Timișoara

by Paraschiva Sonia-Mihaela

Democracy is not just a system of government, but a living organism nourished by the involvement of every citizen. Although its roots lie in Ancient Greece, the homeland of our guests today, where demos (people) and kratos (power) first came together, the journey of this ideal has been long and often difficult.

In essence, democracy represents the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, political pluralism, and the rule of law. In an increasingly complex world, democratic values serve as a moral compass, ensuring that the voice of the minority is heard and that the power of the majority is exercised responsibly. It is a system based on dialogue, tolerance, and above all, civic education.

For Romania, the road to democracy was marked by immense sacrifice. After decades of totalitarianism, the rebirth of freedom began at a precise point on the map: Timișoara. In December 1989, the spirit of Timișoara proved that the desire for freedom is stronger than any oppressive regime.

Timișoara is not only the city where the first sparks of the Revolution appeared, but also a model of democratic and multicultural coexistence. The Timișoara Proclamation laid the foundations for a modern and European vision of Romanian society, emphasizing the importance of competence and integrity in public life. Today, Romania continues to strengthen its institutions, learning that democracy is a continuous process of growth, not a final destination.

The presence of the delegation from Greece honors us and reminds us of the historical connection between the philosophical foundations of democracy and our contemporary struggle to preserve it. Regardless of borders, the lesson remains the same: democracy works only when citizens choose not to be spectators, but active participants in writing their own history.

Democracy, freedom and responsibility

by Ispas Șerban-Rareș

Democracy is one of the most important principles of the modern world, being the political system in which power belongs to the people. In a democratic state, citizens have the right to vote, to express their opinions freely, and to participate in public life. Democracy does not only mean elections, but also respect for human rights, freedom of the press, and equality before the law.

Romania is an important example of the struggle for democracy. During the communist period, people had very few freedoms, and any criticism against the regime could be punished. The change came in December 1989, when Romanians went into the streets demanding freedom and justice. An essential role was played by Timișoara, considered the symbol of the beginning of the Romanian Revolution. The courage of the people there inspired the entire country and contributed to the fall of the communist dictatorship and the establishment of democracy.

After 1989, Romania made important steps toward strengthening democracy: organizing free elections, respecting freedom of speech, and adopting European democratic values. However, democracy cannot function properly without the involvement of citizens. People must be informed, participate in elections, and respect different opinions, even when they disagree with them.

Today, many democratic countries face problems such as misinformation, distrust in politicians, and social conflicts. Even so, democracy remains the most effective system for protecting freedom and citizens' rights. It gives every person the opportunity to make their voice heard and to contribute to the development of society.

In conclusion, democracy is not only a political system, but also a shared responsibility. The events of 1989 and the example of Timișoara show us that freedom and rights gained with difficulty must always be protected through involvement, respect, and solidarity.

My Voice in Democracy

by Radu Alexandra

Democracy is one of the most important forms of political organization because it places people and their rights at its very core. The word comes from the Greek terms *demos* (people) and *kratos* (power), meaning "the power of the people." As a 17-year-old, this idea means that every voice matters, even when it sometimes feels as though it does not.

Democracy is not just about voting once every few years. It means paying attention to what is happening around you, having the courage to express your opinions, and respecting others, even when they disagree with you. There are a few essential elements that make democracy work: free and fair elections, laws that apply equally to everyone, and the freedom to speak openly.

A close example is Romania. After 1989, people gradually regained their freedom and the right to choose their leaders. Although our democracy is still not perfect, the changes have been significant, and its future continues to depend on the involvement of every citizen.

Moreover, the act of publicly sharing the essays—through readings, workshops, or publications—empowers participants to take an active role in cultural and civic life. It validates their voices and reinforces the idea that everyone has something valuable to contribute to the community.

…every voice matters, even when it sometimes feels as though it does not.

— Radu Alexandra



5. Theatre as a form of expression and a space for creating meaning

The Toruń University of the Third Age (TUTW) has experience in engaging older people in theatre. Older people at TUTW write scripts, sing songs and perform on stage. The organisation has also successfully prepared and staged a performance at the Artus Court in Toruń, featuring students from Secondary School No. 3 in Toruń. The performance took place on 14 November 2024 to mark National Seniors' Day. It was this event that inspired the decision to incorporate theatre as a tool for empowering older people and fostering intergenerational dialogue.



The theatre is not merely a venue for staging performances but above all, it is a space for collective action, for sharing experiences and for constructing meaning. In the theatre, human experiences are conveyed through words, gestures, music, song, emotions, the relationships between actors on stage, and the relationship between actors and the audience.

The theatre is part of culture, but it is also a tool through which culture is created, passed on to future generations or transformed. For example, when a senior citizen tells a young person about their experience of life in socialistic Poland, and then the two of them create a theatrical scene based on this, something more than merely 'presenting history' takes place. Several processes are at work here. The first involves reconstructing a story from the past from memory, putting it into words, gestures and emotions. This story is interpreted by both the narrator and the listener. Both individuals become immersed in the story, converse with one another, ask questions and provide answers, express emotions, and the story told becomes the basis for creating a shared work and imbuing it with new meanings. In the next stage, the actors share these meanings – expressed through words, music, dance or gesture – with the audience. This creates a beautiful space not only for expressing experiences, but also for having a real impact on the surrounding world – a kind of manifesto by young and old alike.

It is precisely this theatrical reality that fosters a sense of agency and has the potential to strengthen the engagement of older and younger people in the democratic life of their region and country. That is precisely why, in the MACU project, we decided to adopt this form in order to strengthen intergenerational dialogue, as well as the agency of older people. We assumed that the play 'Driven by Democracy', prepared by older people and young people, would serve as a tool for conveying values and giving new meanings to the concept of 'democracy', and would also serve as the culmination of the project's activities, in which we would use poetry prepared by our Romanian partners and multimedia material (interviews with older people) prepared by our Slovak partners.

5.1. Exploring shared values through intergenerational theatre workshops

5.1.1. Intergenerational development workshops

We began building a space for intergenerational dialogue through theatre by reflecting on what is important to us and how this can be expressed. This was achieved through intergenerational development workshops and environmentally friendly art workshops.

The development workshops on values, motivation and intergenerational communication, based on coaching methods, were divided into four sessions (each lasting three teaching hours):

- Democracy through life stories (16 January 2026);
- Individual differences and communication (23 January 2026);
- Emotions in communication (20 February 2026);
- Values, motivation and engagement in democratic life (27 February 2026).

We devoted the first session to getting to know one another and integrating with each other, as well as to reflecting on how young people and older adults understand democracy. When asked about their reasons for attending the workshops, participants highlighted the following:

- curiosity,
- a suggestion from friends,
- a new experience,
- other countries,
- community initiatives,
- young people, intergenerational connections,
- belief in the power of culture,
- cooperation,
- challenges,
- activity,
- theatre.



The workshop participants worked in intergenerational teams of 5–6 people. Each of them told a story from their own life by answering one question chosen from a list:

- When did your voice count?
- When were you unable to make a decision even though it concerned you?
- When did you first feel that you had an influence?

• How were decisions made at your school or in your family?

Based on these stories, the participants drew a flower. In the petals of the flower, they wrote phrases typical of their personal stories, and in the centre of the flower, phrases that were common to all the stories.





On this basis, each team drew up its own definition of democracy. According to the workshop participants, democracy:

• means an equal say for everyone, striving to express a common voice, and the same rights and responsibilities;

• is access to material and non-material goods, freedom of speech and responsibility for it;

• is the self-evident right to express one's own views and the equality of those views;

• is freedom of choice, influence, the right to choose, freedom, community and joint decision-making;

• means mindful communication => drawing conclusions together => reaching a consensus => acting together;

• is freedom of choice, freedom of speech and equality, subject to legal and social constraints;

• cannot exist without ethics! This requires freedom, education and respect.

When asked what they took away from the workshops, participants highlighted, above all, their satisfaction with the collaboration during the sessions.

We devoted the second workshop session to explaining the differences in the ways people think and act, and the impact of these differences on communication. Participants learnt about the four cognitive perspectives according to the FRIS methodology: the perspective of facts, ideas, relationships and structures. In-depth reflection on these perspectives encouraged participants to engage in self-assessment and explore their strengths, as well as to identify the qualities that help them to express their opinions openly, listen attentively and bring about change in their environment.



Having examined their thinking styles, the participants drew suns in their groups. The sun's rays represented their individual traits, and in the centre of the sun, the participants wrote down what helps them communicate directly. The following responses emerged:

- mindfulness,
- respect,
- tolerance,
- imagination,
- patience,
- calmness,
- courage.



When asked at the end of the workshop what they'd learnt about themselves, the participants gave varied and insightful answers. Here are a few of them:

• I've learnt that I do actually like people,

• I know why I lose my patience,

• that I'm a person who sticks to the facts,

• that I'm sensitive.

We devoted the third session to emotions and their significance in communication. The workshop was based on the Non-Violent Communication approach, in which everyone takes responsibility for their own emotions. There are no 'good' or 'bad' emotions. We need all emotions to help us understand what we need. A positively felt emotion tells us that our need is being met, whilst a difficult emotion signals that our need requires fulfilment. Allowing space to experience emotions helps us understand ourselves, and when we take responsibility for our emotions, we create space for effective communication.

Participants worked in groups, sharing their stories and the emotions associated with them. They aimed to discover what needs underlie these emotions. They also learnt how to express requests so that they are clearly understood by the recipient.





The workshop concluded with the participants engaging in a deeply personal reflection on their needs. New ideas emerged, along with a discussion on ways to express and meet these needs.

The final workshop session was devoted to motivation and values. We began by reflecting on what assertiveness is and what rights we have. We then moved on to reflecting on what is important to us and how this motivates us to act. Finally, the participants answered the question of what value they are upholding by engaging in democratic life. The most common answers were:

• freedom,

• elections,

• security,

• tolerance,

• participation.



Participants evaluated the workshops by answering questions on an evaluation form. When asked what they had learnt about themselves and others during the workshops, they replied (selected answers):

• I learnt to better understand my own and others' emotions and to recognise how important good communication and mutual respect are in interpersonal relationships;

• I've deepened my self-awareness, experienced working in changing groups, and formed new relationships;

• listening to others;

• understanding my own behaviour and that of others.

When asked what would motivate them to become more involved in social/democratic life, participants replied:

• a tangible influence on the laws being made – referendums, changes to electoral law;

• the announcement that similar workshops will be held again;

• an even greater awareness that every individual has a real influence on social and democratic life, and that it is worthwhile to actively participate in activities for the benefit of others;

• not being judged by others;

• mutual cooperation, understanding and openness on the part of others.

The workshop concluded with a summary and the presentation of certificates of attendance.



From among the workshop participants, as well as other interested older people and young people with stage experience, a group of actors emerged who were keen to take part in the play ‘Driven by Democracy’.

5.1.2. Eco-friendly art and vocal workshops

The idea behind the eco-friendly art workshops was to create a space for sharing the skills and experience gained by older people during the socialist era, when saving materials, reusing them and repairing them were the norm. The aim was for the older people, as workshop leaders, to be able to show young people in an accessible way how to use, for example, seemingly useless scraps of paper to create decorations.

One example of such an activity was inviting young people and teachers from Italy, Portugal, Turkey and Poland to create, from scraps of paper, decorative motifs for a tree symbolising the four seasons – the tree of time and values.



Each team prepared decorations for a different season, and these were then all attached to a single large paper tree. Creating this shared tree inspired by the seasons was not only an art project but also an opportunity to discuss the cyclical nature of the natural world, diversity, coexistence and transience. Creativity mattered more than perfection. The tree also featured values explored during the joint workshops, such as curiosity, responsibility, freedom, innovation or inclusion.



The workshops took place on 5 March 2026 at the Copernicus Centre for Integration at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń as part of the joint Erasmus+ MACU projects and the Erasmus+ ‘Inclusive School: Empowering Students Like Trees in the Forest of Learning’, coordinated by the Henryk Dobrzański Hubal School Complex No. 2 in Aleksandrów Kujawski. The workshops were led by senior citizens from the Toruń University of the Third Age.

In addition to the eco-friendly art workshops, the senior citizens invited the young people to a short singing workshop. The aim of the workshop was to introduce the young people to the music of the band ‘Czerwone Gitary’, which, during the socialist era, was as significant to Polish audiences as The Beatles were in the West. One of the senior citizens invited the young people to play and sing the song ‘Płoną góry, płoną lasy’.



As well as practising singing in Polish, the young people also had the opportunity to understand the message and symbolism of the song, which tells of love and longing. Simple vocal patterns, rhythm and making music together helped to break down language barriers. Thanks to this, the participants quickly found a common language – even if they did not know each other's national languages, they could communicate through rhythm, melody and emotions.





When asked what they had enjoyed most during the workshops, the participants replied:

• closer contact with people of different ages, genders and backgrounds;

• the openness of the discussions;

• creating the 'tree of values' together;

• playing instruments and singing together;

• creativity, a friendly atmosphere, and engagement;

• interaction between young people and older people, and the understanding shown by the older generation;

• singing in Polish together.

The participants admitted that during the workshops they learnt from people of a different generation:

• patience :));

• courage;

• that it's never too late to take action and pursue your passions;

• the joy of simple things;

• openness despite language differences, the ability to work together, and kindness;

• that some feelings and values are shared despite the age difference;

• that travelling and learning about new cultures is a wonderful experience;

• the workshop demonstrated good practices in cooperation between older people and young people.

Seniors also led eco-friendly art workshops for students from a Salesian school in Toruń. Two sessions were held in Copernican Integration Centre. During the first one (11th March 2026) the young participants - under the supervision of the seniors, especially Hanna Osińska - created images using the iris folding technique.



Iris folding workshops

During the second meeting (18th March 2026) they also prepared cards and Easter decorations using the quilling technique. The young creators were very pleased with the results.



Quilling workshops

5.2. The performance “Driven by Democracy”

5.2.1. Audience analysis

In parallel with the start of work on the play ‘On the Road to Democracy’, we asked potential audiences (115 people took part in the survey), namely representatives of senior citizens’ organisations, university authorities, students, staff at cultural and educational institutions, as well as representatives of city and regional authorities, how and in what circumstances they experience culture. Respondents most frequently cited cultural institutions such as theatres, museums, art galleries and community centres, as well as literature, poetry, film and the media (television, radio, the internet and podcasts).

Figure 1. Venues and circumstances of cultural experiences

Source: own research

The respondents’ answers suggest that the theatre is a place where they frequently experience culture. This reinforces our choice of a theatre performance as a form of culture through which we strengthen older people’s engagement and agency.

When asked what engagement in democratic life means to them, respondents primarily cited participation in elections and referendums, as well as involvement in social and civic activities. The MACU project has the potential to strengthen engagement in social and civic activities through joint intergenerational cultural initiatives.

Figure 2. Engagement in democratic life

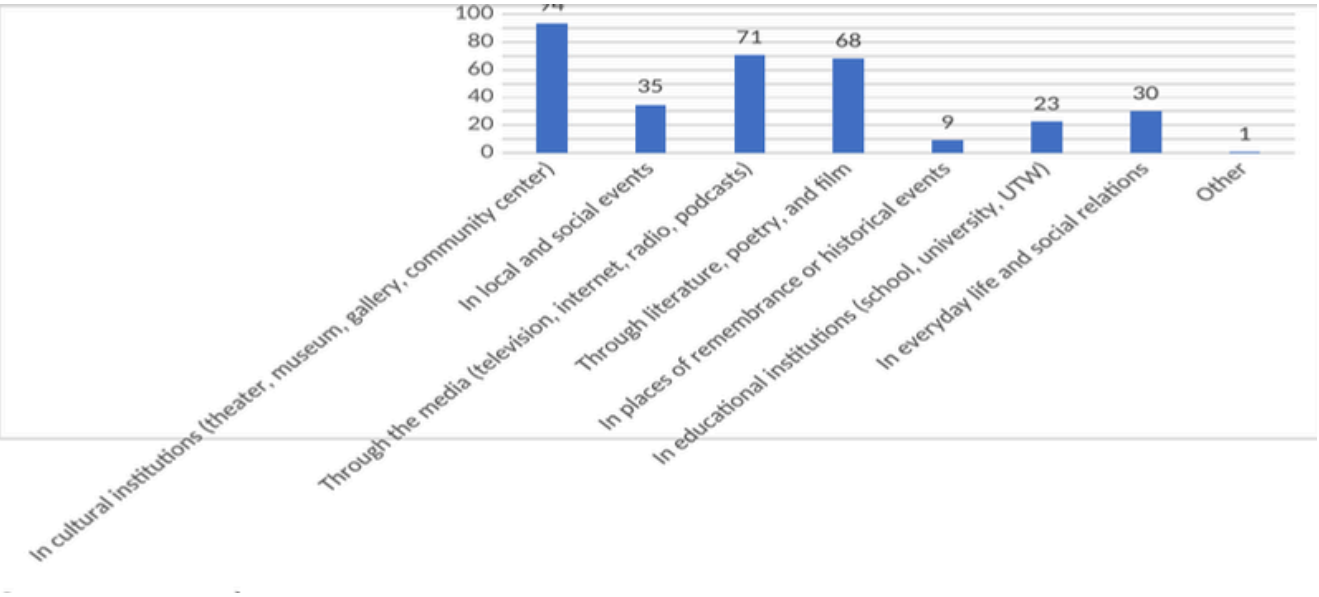
Source: own research.

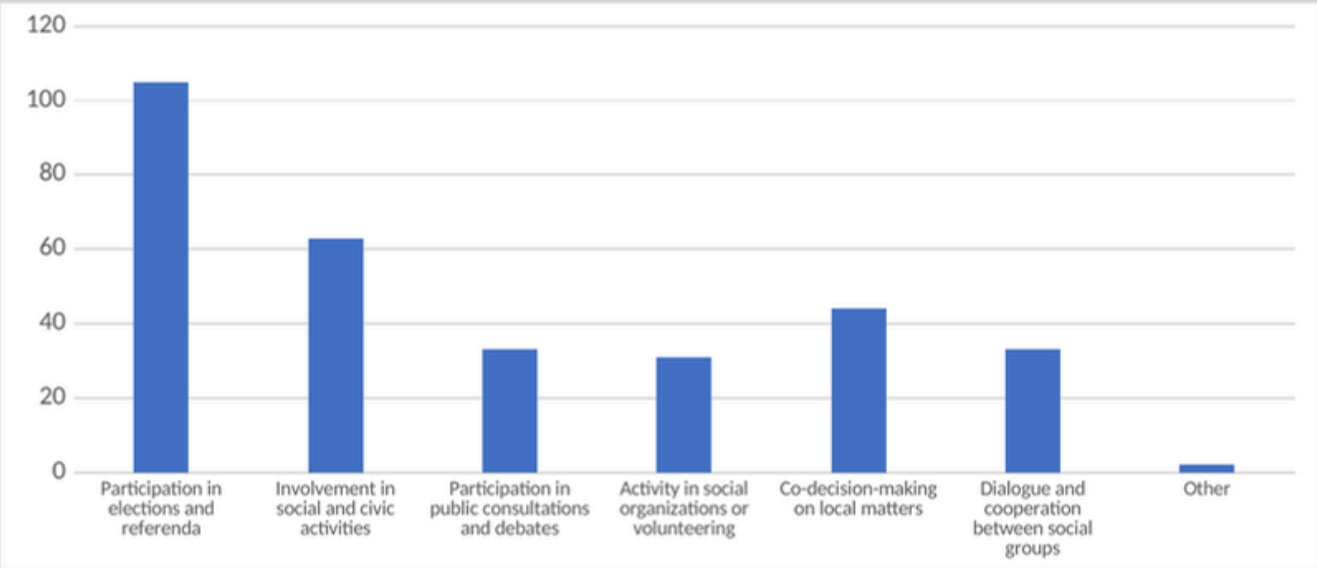
The vast majority of respondents (75 per cent) agree with the statement that culture can strengthen older people’s engagement in democratic life, which demonstrates the potential of the culture-based approach used in the MACU project – including theatre as a tool for building older people’s agency.

Figure 3. Culture can strengthen older people’s engagement in democratic life

Source: own research

When asked about their expectations regarding the play ‘Driven by Democracy’, respondents primarily highlighted the integration of young people and older people, as well as its educational value and the promotion of a better understanding of history and democracy, which is consistent with our activities, in which we first created a space for intergenerational dialogue and integration.


100
80
60
40
20
0
74
35
71
68
9
23
30
1
In cultural institutions (theater, museum, gallery, community center)
In local and social events
Through the media (television, internet, radio, podcasts)
Through literature, poetry, and film
In places of remembrance or historical events
In educational institutions (school, university, UTW)
In everyday life and social relations
Other


120
100
80
60
40
20
0
Participation in elections and referenda
Involvement in social and civic activities
Participation in public consultations and debates
Activity in social organizations or volunteering
Co-decision-making on local matters
Dialogue and cooperation between social groups
Other

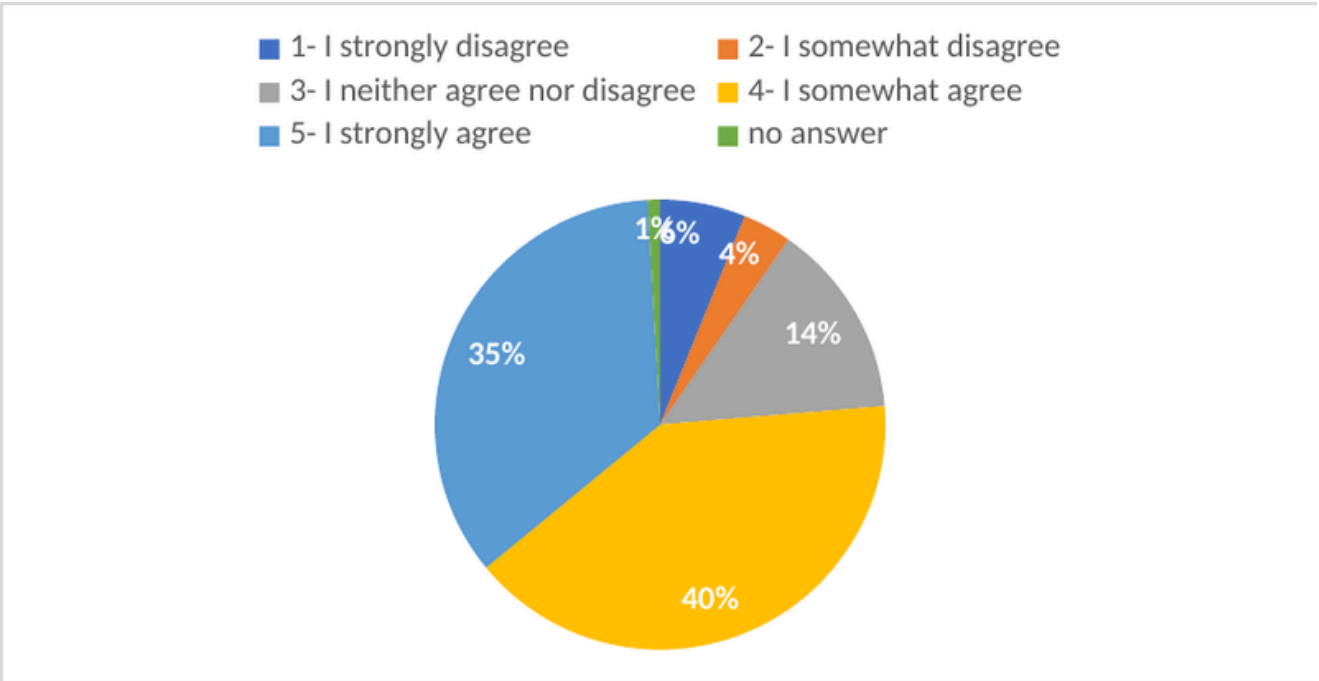

1- I strongly disagree
2- I somewhat disagree
3- I neither agree nor disagree
4- I somewhat agree
5- I strongly agree
no answer
1%
6%
4%
14%
35%
40%

Figure 4. Expectations regarding the play ‘Driven by Democracy’, prepared jointly by young people and older people

Source: own research.

As regards expectations concerning artistic forms, respondents primarily expect live music during the performance, and this was precisely the direction taken in developing the concept and script for the play, which is based on songs interspersed with short dialogues.

Figure 5. Artistic forms

Source: own research.

We also examined what might prevent respondents from taking part in the event.

Figure 6. Obstacles preventing participation in the performance

Source: own research.

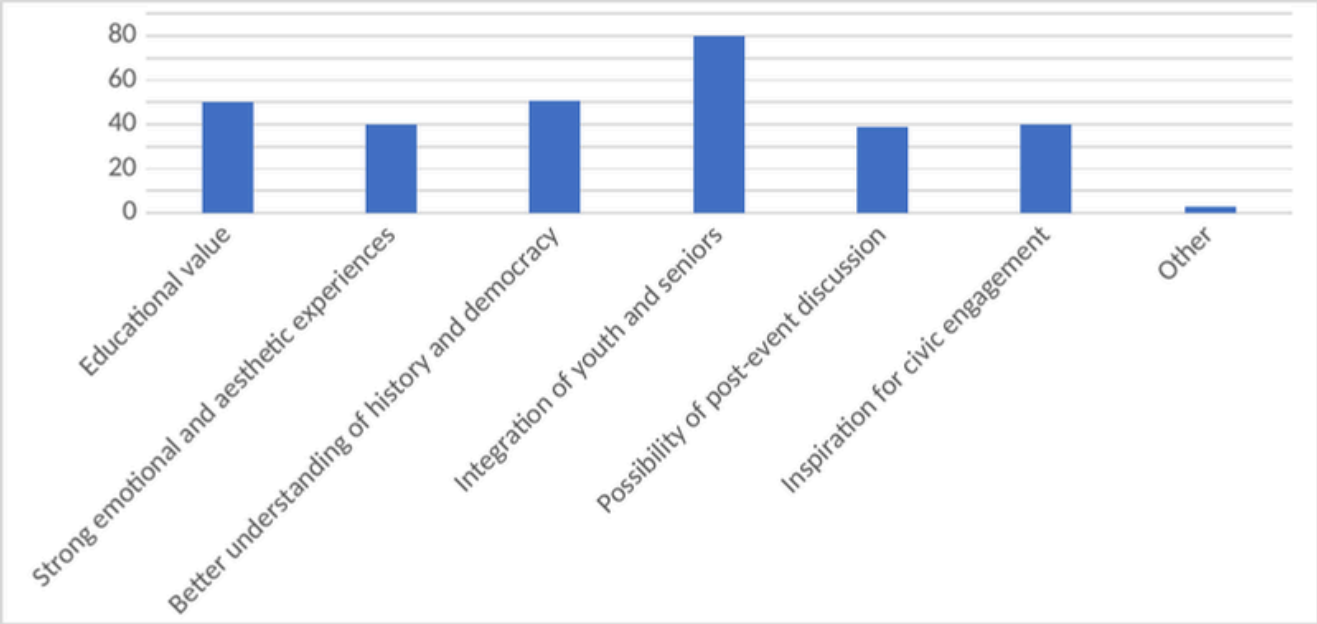
Respondents cited the inconvenient timing, a lack of information and promotion, and the cost of participation. Attendance at the play ‘Driven by Democracy’ is free of charge. We have taken steps to step up our information and promotional activities.

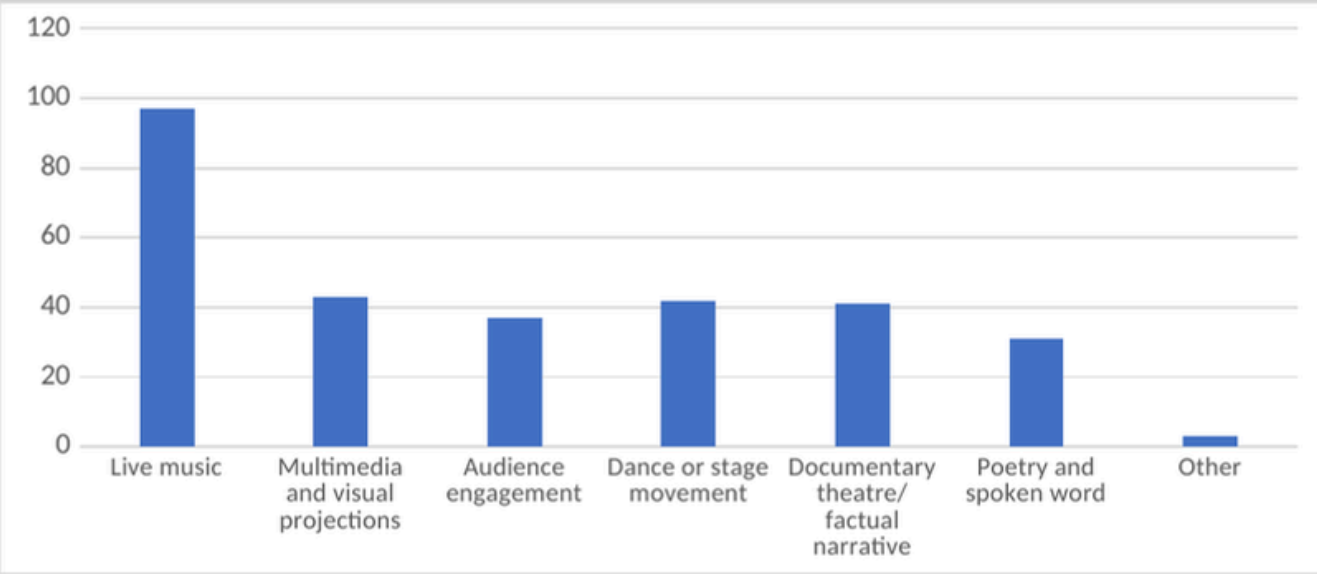
5.2.2. Preparing the script for the play ‘Driven by Democracy’ and forming the cast

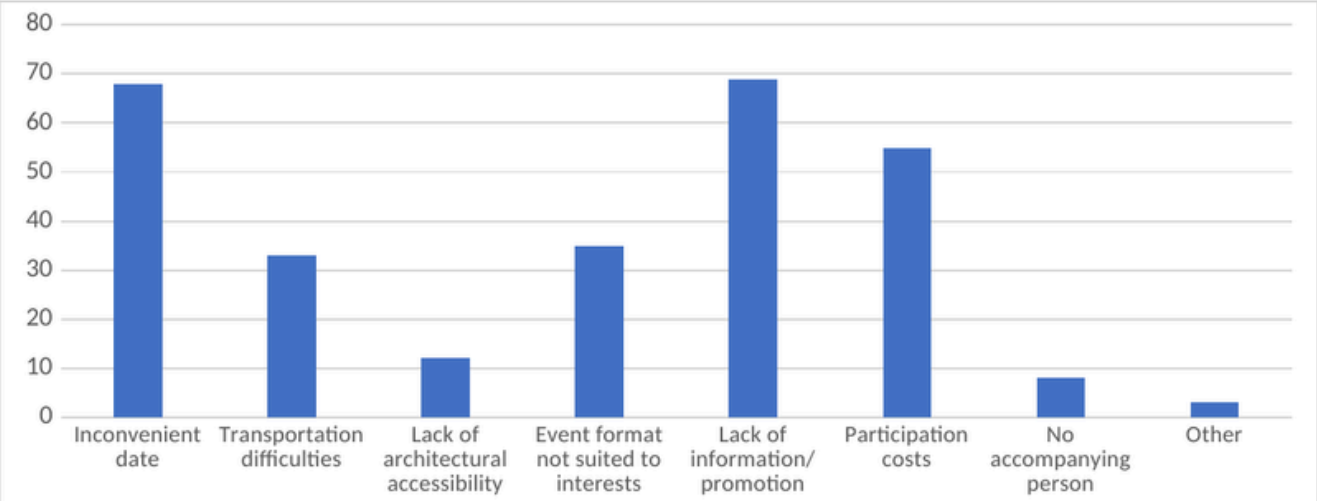
The script for the play "Driven by Democracy" was written by Krystyna Kuras, a senior member of the Third Age University (TUTW). She describes her work as follows:

"Well, I sat down and gave it some thought. The 1980s seemed the most fitting period to support this concept. I looked for texts and, in particular, songs—as I had decided from the outset that this would not be a somber, mournful, or martyrology-focused production. Of course, we need to show the younger generation what things were really like, but I selected pieces - ongs by the likes of Agnieszka Osiecka, Zbigniew Hołdys (such as 'Autobiografia'), Grzegorz Ciechowski ('Nie pytaj o Polskę'), and Wojciech Młynarski (including 'Róbmy swoje'), as well as works by Przybora and Wasowski ('Taka gmina') - though I won’t reveal everything just yet. In short, that is what I based my script on. Then, we recruited participants - though, unfortunately, we did have to be selective. By 'we,' I mean myself and the accompanist who joined the project; he not only provides musical accompaniment but also helps our performers refine their singing and decide on the best approach for each moment. And that is how we began our work. "

Subsequently, dialogues were added, and a selection of photographs was curated to be displayed in the background, illustrating the issues addressed in the performance.


80
60
40
20
0
Educational value
Strong emotional and aesthetic experiences
Better understanding of history and democracy
Integration of youth and seniors
Possibility of post-event discussion
Inspiration for civic engagement
Other


120
100
80
60
40
20
0
Live music
Multimedia and visual projections
Audience engagement
Dance or stage movement
Documentary theatre/ factual narrative
Poetry and spoken word
Other


80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Inconvenient date
Transportation difficulties
Lack of architectural accessibility
Event format not suited to interests
Lack of information/ promotion
Participation costs
No accompanying person
Other



Krystyna Kuras also took on the role of director for the production under the watchful eye of Damian Droszcz, an actor and theatre scholar with extensive experience in stage work and directing, both with older people and young people. The experience of the seniors from the TUTW theatre section, led by Maria Nowakowska – a senior herself and an experienced amateur actress – has been a great help. We have also invited the pianist Mateusz Skrzypnik to collaborate with us. He was responsible for developing the musical concept for the production, assessing the actors' vocal abilities, preparing musical arrangements tailored to the actors' vocal abilities and the aims of the production, and preparing materials for independent practice outside rehearsal times. Danuta Polarek, a senior member and coordinator of the TUTW art section, was responsible for the set design, whilst senior member Bogumiła Woźniak was in charge of the multimedia elements. Seventeen people were recruited for the production: five young actors and twelve senior actors.

5.2.3. Rehearsals for the production

Rehearsals for the play began in April 2026. From April to June, the cast met regularly once a week (Thursdays at 5.00 pm) in the conference room at the UCS UMK. Rehearsals lasted around 2 hours. Eight rehearsals took place before the summer holidays. July and August were set aside for the actors to work independently on the script and learn their lines, whilst September and October were a time of intensive rehearsals on stage.

The young actors speak enthusiastically about their roles in the play:

“We knew it was something to do with theatre, something to do with democracy, and something to do with older people, so we thought, ‘Theatre’s obviously for us, so let’s go…’. We’re split a bit between older people and young people, and we sing songs too. Unfortunately, there are fewer young people, so we’ve got quite a big role – it’s as if we’ve got quite a lot of work to do because of that. This production shows a bit of what life was like during the socialism, a bit of how everything changed along the way, and how people experienced it.” – says young actress Amelia Krawczyk. Meanwhile, young actor Konstanty Dziędziel admits: “(…) you do build relationships with the older members. It’s a cool, new experience and I’m able to learn a lot from it.

The older participants make no secret of their enjoyment of working with the young actors. Anna Jarońska from TUTW says: “This performance is actually brilliant – it shows what it was like as we moved towards democracy, how things are now, and it’s really great that the young people are singing with us – and not just singing, but reciting as well. I think it’ll be lovely once we’ve learnt everything. Bogdan Mazurkiewicz from TUTW also appreciates the young people’s involvement in the production: “At last we’re doing something not just on our own, because we’re always stuck in our own little world at our university theatre, just us older people, but here we’ve got brilliant support from the young people” .





5.2.4. The performance “Driven by Democracy” on stage

It began with rehearsing the lines, followed by practicing the songs, and finally, everything was brought together and rehearsed on stage. The goal was not just to deliver lines or sing songs correctly, but also to move effectively across the stage.



Danusia Polarek, who was in charge of the set design, describes what took place on stage: "The actors truly connected with the theme. They prepared their own costumes. I sourced items - water yokes, buckets, a firewood basket, a shovel, and a butter-making kit - from Hania’s allotment garden. Kaziu (an actor) brought buckets and wood for the basket; Dorota (an actress) brought vases; and Krystyna (the director) provided suitcases. As for the balloons, the idea was to release them from the audience's side. It came as a surprise to both the spectators and the actors - green balloons floating through the air during the final song 'Jeszcze w zielone gramy' ('Still Playing in Green').



My daughter," Danusia adds, "borrowed a balloon-inflating device from a kindergarten, and my children brought in dresses that had belonged to their grandmother, an old milk bottle and a doll. Every actor had to dress in period-appropriate attire; the quilted work jackets (‘kufajki’) were borrowed from a military reenactment group in Bydgoszcz."



“(…) The collaboration between the young people and the seniors was excellent. At times, it was necessary to temper the high energy and movement of the younger actors. They were incredibly talented, eager, and open to discussion. The older participants, too, were fully committed to giving their best performance. They contributed their own lyrics and stage movements for the song "Pan tu nie stał" ("You Weren't Standing Here"), drawing upon their personal memories. They also added their own ideas to the director’s vision. The musician - a young man - also put in a tremendous amount of work.” – Danusia recalls.



“The integration of the older and younger participants happened organically—whether during rehearsals or breaks, they would talk and share memories. What emerged during the workshops resonated throughout the rehearsals. (...) One young actor even received an excellent grade in his Polish language class for his performance; his teachers at school took notice. The young participants invited their families and friends. The grandmother of our musician attended the third performance; she was deeply moved” - Danusia recalls.

The director, Krystyna Kuras, ensured that rehearsals were held regularly - and even daily in the period leading up to the premiere. The process involved repeating lines and songs, followed by entire segments of the play. By the time the premiere arrived, the actors felt so at ease on stage that performing became a source of fun and pleasure for them. As Danuta remembers: "In the end, it was just pure fun for them. They moved on stage as naturally as they would in real life."



"For me," says Dorota, one of the actors, "taking part in the play ‘Driven by Democracy’ meant meeting a new group of people and forming meaningful friendships and collaborating with the younger generation. Not many of the young people stayed on, but those who did are truly remarkable individuals. We felt very well looked after by the Toruń University of the Third Age. We want more! Krysia (the director) was always open to our opinions and suggestions. The fact that we lack formal theatrical training does not mean that none of us have ever been involved in theater…”

In fact, when rehearsals for the production resumed after the summer break, three young people decided to withdraw - likely because they found it difficult to balance the intensive rehearsal schedule with their schoolwork or other commitments. Ultimately, the following individuals took part in the production:

2 young actors:

1. Alicja Szparaga (student at the 1st High School in Toruń)
2. Konstanty Dziendziel (student at the 6th High School in Toruń)

12 senior actors, all participants of the Toruń University of the Third Age (TUTW):

3. Alicja Usowicz
4. Anna Jarońska
5. Bogdan Mazurkiewicz
6. Cezary Więckowski
7. Dorota Roszak
8. Grażyna Ernest
9. Grzegorz Ernest
10. Janina Suska
11. Kazimierz Żurawski
12. Małgorzata Konieczna
13. Teresa Wiśniewska
14. Ewa Więch-Winiaszewska

Additionally, the following people contributed to the preparation of the production:

- Danuta Polarek – set design,
- Bogumiła Woźniak – multimedia,
- Mateusz Skrzypnik – music and accompaniment,
- Krystyna Kuras – script and direction,
- Damian Droszcz – directorial supervision.

When asked about the decline in the number of young actors, Damian Droszcz - an actor and theatre educator who provided professional directorial guidance for the production - remarked that it was actually for the best that those who remained were the ones truly able and willing to commit. Damian noted that the young participants "really made their mark" on the production, contributing their own ideas and initiatives. A young musician played a pivotal role, earning the respect of the senior cast members through his professionalism and consistent approach.

The director and screenwriter, Krystyna Kuras, frequently emphasized her vision and her persistence in bringing it to life through constant practice, rehearsals, and close engagement with the actors. Her determination did not preclude an openness to the actors' own suggestions. She was not afraid to address areas that needed adjustment; she was dynamic, consistent, and clear in her vision. She won the affection and respect of the actors, who are now eager to work under her direction on future productions.

The premiere of the performance took place on October 21, 2026, at the Complex of Music Schools in Toruń. It was very warmly received by an audience of nearly 200 people, including seniors, educators, young people, and the families and friends of the theatre troupe. Our partners from Slovakia and Romania were also in attendance. Ana Zlibut, representing LSFTB, recited a poem by a Romanian author concerning the subject of democracy.



Ana Zlibut reciting a poem by a Romanian writer

Following the performance, a debate was held on the use of theatrical art to foster democratic engagement, with a particular focus on intergenerational dialogue. The panel was moderated by Roman Tondel, MA, Director of the "Od Nowa" Academic Centre for Culture and Art at Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU). The panelists included:

1. Expert: Dr. Kinga Majchrzak-Ptak from the Institute of Pedagogical Sciences (Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, NCU), a researcher specializing in intergenerational learning and lifelong education.

2. Seniors:

Maria Nowakowska – experienced in leading the theatre, publishing, and tourism sections of the Third Age University (TUTW), and a member of the TUTW Board.

Anna Romanowska – a member of the TUTW Board, involved in the implementation of the MACU project, leader of the TUTW tourism section, a proofreader, and a specialist in Polish philology.

3. Students and doctoral candidates:

Weronika Krajewska, MA – a sociologist and doctoral candidate at NCU, familiar with the themes of the MACU project.

Martyna Kiczyńska, BA – a sociologist and socially active student, well-versed in the issues addressed by the MACU project, with a research interest in the subject of Third Age Universities.

The panel aimed to delve deeper into the themes explored in the performance: the dialogue between young people and seniors, the struggle for democracy, life during the era of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) compared to life today, and a reflection on how culture - such as theater, poetry, and history - can strengthen civic engagement and foster intergenerational dialogue.

Two additional performances of "Driven by Democracy" were staged at the "Od Nowa" club (associated with Nicolaus Copernicus University) on October 28, 2026, at 1:00 PM and 4:00 PM. The event was filled with intense emotion. The actors and the large audience in attendance were overcome with a sense of being deeply moved and filled with pride.



6. Best practices of inclusive teaching methods of working with seniors and youth

6.1. Principles

The inclusive teaching methodology developed and implemented within the MACU project is based on the following principles:

1. Inclusion and Equal Opportunities

All participants should have equal opportunities to express themselves, participate in activities, and contribute to the learning process, regardless of age, educational background, social status, or previous experience.

Activities should be adapted to participants' individual needs and abilities, ensuring that nobody feels excluded or left behind.

2. Intergenerational Learning

Young people and senior citizens are equally important contributors to the learning process.

Senior participants bring life experience, historical memory, knowledge, and cultural wisdom.

Young participants contribute creativity, innovation, contemporary perspectives, and new ideas.

Both generations have valuable knowledge to share and opportunities to learn from one another.

3. Active Participation

Learning should be based on dialogue, interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences rather than traditional teacher-centred approaches.

Participants should be encouraged to take an active role in discussions, creative activities, and decision-making.

4. Respect and Mutual Understanding

Different opinions, experiences, and perspectives should be welcomed and respected. Facilitators should create an atmosphere where participants feel safe to express themselves without fear of criticism or discrimination.

5. Learning through Creativity

Art, poetry, storytelling, and creative writing provide accessible ways of expressing emotions, personal experiences, and ideas. These methods can make complex topics, such as democracy and European citizenship, easier to understand and discuss.

6. Reflective Learning

Participants should have opportunities to reflect on their experiences, share their impressions, and identify what they have learned. Reflection helps transform creative activities into meaningful educational experiences.

7. Empowerment and Freedom of Expression

Every participant has a voice that deserves to be heard. Inclusive educational activities should encourage self-confidence, independent thinking, creativity, and active citizenship.

6.2. Creative writing (poems and essays)

6.2.1. Objective

The main objective of the creative writing activities was to encourage participants from different generations to express their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions through poetry and essay writing, focusing on democracy, European values, freedom, solidarity, human rights, active citizenship, and social inclusion.

The workshops aimed to:

Promote freedom of expression and encourage participants to develop their own perspectives on democracy and society.

Foster intergenerational dialogue by bringing together young people and senior citizens in a shared creative environment.

Develop participants' writing, communication, critical thinking, and reflection skills.

Raise awareness of European values and the importance of democratic participation.

Encourage creativity, self-confidence, empathy, and respect for different opinions.

Create a collection of original poems and essays that could be shared with a wider audience at local, national, and European levels.

An additional objective was to demonstrate that creative writing can be an effective non-formal education tool for discussing complex social and democratic issues in an accessible and engaging way.

6.2.2. Methods and Techniques

The workshops were organised using non-formal education methods, interactive exercises, individual and collaborative creative tasks, and guided discussions.

Creative writing was used not only as an artistic activity but also as a platform for civic reflection and intergenerational learning.

The main methods and techniques included:

1. Brainstorming and Group Discussions

Participants were invited to share their understanding of concepts such as democracy, freedom, equality, European identity, solidarity, and human rights.

These discussions helped participants identify personal experiences and ideas that could be transformed into literary works.

2. Creative Writing Exercises

Participants were encouraged to write poems and essays based on selected topics related to democracy and European values.

They were free to choose their own titles, writing styles, and ways of expressing their ideas.

Poetry provided an opportunity for emotional and symbolic expression, while essay writing encouraged structured thinking, argumentation, and critical reflection.

3. Guided Questions and Reflection

Facilitators used open-ended questions to stimulate critical thinking and personal reflection.

Examples included:

What does democracy mean to me?

Why is freedom important in our everyday lives?

Does every voice matter in a democratic society?

How can we contribute to a better Europe?

What can different generations learn from each other?

What does being a European citizen mean to me?

4. Individual and Collaborative Writing

Participants worked individually on their poems and essays, while group activities encouraged the exchange of ideas, inspiration, and experiences.

This combination allowed everyone to express themselves at their own pace while benefiting from interaction with other participants.

5. Storytelling and Personal Experiences

Participants were encouraged to use personal memories, observations, and real-life situations as inspiration for their texts.

This approach helped connect abstract democratic concepts with everyday life and encouraged participants to share their personal perspectives.

6. Reading and Sharing Literary Works

Participants had the opportunity to present their poems and essays to the group.

Reading their work aloud helped develop confidence, public speaking skills, and appreciation for different perspectives.

It also created opportunities for meaningful dialogue between generations.

7. Feedback and Evaluation

At the end of the workshops, participants shared their impressions, experiences, and opinions about the activities.

Their feedback was collected and used to evaluate the educational, social, and emotional impact of the workshops.

Selected poems were also translated into English to facilitate international dissemination and make participants' creative contributions accessible to a wider European audience.

6.2.3. Impact

The creative writing workshops generated positive results at individual, organisational, community, and European levels.

Individual Impact

Participants benefited from:

Improved writing, communication, and creative expression skills.

Increased confidence in expressing personal opinions and ideas.

Greater awareness of democracy, European values, freedom, and active citizenship.

Enhanced critical thinking and the ability to reflect on social issues.

Stronger appreciation of diversity and respect for different opinions.

Increased motivation to participate in cultural, educational, and civic activities.

Intergenerational Impact

The workshops created opportunities for meaningful interaction between young people and senior citizens.

Participants exchanged experiences, perspectives, and ideas, discovering common values and different ways of understanding democracy and society.

This interaction strengthened mutual understanding, empathy, respect, and solidarity between generations.

The activities also challenged stereotypes related to age and demonstrated that both young people and senior citizens can actively contribute to cultural and democratic life.

Impact on the Organisation

The activity strengthened the organisation's experience in using creative writing as a non-formal education method.

It contributed to the development of innovative educational practices and created new opportunities for involving different generations in cultural and civic activities.

The organisation also gained valuable experience in documenting, evaluating, and disseminating the results of intergenerational workshops.

Community and European Impact

The poems and essays created during the workshops represent concrete educational and cultural outputs.

They were shared through online communication channels and other dissemination activities, allowing participants' messages to reach a wider audience.

The translation of selected poems into English further supported the European dimension of the project, promoting intercultural dialogue and awareness of shared democratic values.

Participants' Voices – Feedback from Young People and Senior Citizens

Participants’ feedback is an important part of the qualitative evaluation of the creative writing workshops. Both young people and senior citizens were invited to share their thoughts, feelings and personal experiences after taking part.

Here are two special perspectives: one from a young participant and one from a senior, who share their thoughts and feelings after taking part in this experience.

„It was a very nice experience. I feel I have a much better understanding how the generations before us think and how we can better connect with them" Delia Holeiciuc, 18 years old.

„I was delighted to attend this meeting, because it was very successful. I have the nicest thoughts about the young people I was with, together. I see them as young people with great talent, of high value, and I take pride in them. I wish them a lot of luck" Lucia Elena Popa, 80 years old.

6.2.4. Tips and Tricks

Based on the experience gained during the workshops, the following recommendations can help organisations and educators implement similar creative writing activities:

1. Create a Safe and Inclusive Environment

Make sure participants feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions without fear of criticism or judgement. Facilitators play an essential role in encouraging equal participation and valuing every contribution.

2. Choose Relevant and Inspiring Topics

Democracy, freedom, equality, human rights, European identity, solidarity, and community life can provide meaningful starting points for creative writing.

3. Use Open-ended Questions

Questions that encourage reflection and personal interpretation often generate more interesting ideas than questions with predefined answers.

4. Encourage Freedom of Expression

Do not impose strict writing rules or a particular literary style. Participants should feel free to express themselves through poetry, essays, short stories, or personal reflections.

5. Adapt Activities to Different Age Groups

Consider participants' writing experience, educational backgrounds, and individual needs. Allow sufficient time for everyone to develop their ideas.

6. Promote Intergenerational Cooperation

Encourage young people and senior citizens to share their experiences and learn from one another. Avoid treating one generation as the teacher and the other as the learner. Both have valuable knowledge and experiences to contribute.

7. Combine Individual and Group Activities

Individual writing allows personal reflection, while group discussions and feedback encourage interaction and mutual inspiration.

8. Avoid Excessive Correction or Criticism

Focus on the message, creativity, and personal contribution rather than grammatical perfection or literary expertise.

9. Encourage Participants to Read Their Work Aloud

Public reading can increase self-confidence and help participants appreciate the diversity of opinions and writing styles.

10. Document and Disseminate the Results

Collect the poems and essays, take photographs with participants' consent, gather feedback, and share the results through websites, social media, educational platforms, and European networks such as EPALE.

11. Evaluate the Activity through Participants' Feedback

Ask participants what they learned, how they felt during the workshop, and what they found most valuable. Their feedback can help improve future activities and demonstrate the real impact of the workshops.

12. Celebrate Every Contribution

Each text represents an individual's voice and perspective. Recognising participants' efforts is essential for maintaining motivation and encouraging further creative activities.

Lessons Learned

The Timișoara experience highlighted several important lessons:

Intergenerational activities are most effective when based on equality and mutual respect.

Senior citizens are active contributors to cultural and democratic life, not only beneficiaries of activities.

Young people value opportunities to express themselves in creative and meaningful ways.

Poetry creates a natural framework for discussing complex social and democratic issues.

Essay writing encourages critical thinking and the development of personal arguments.

Cultural participation strengthens community ties and promotes social inclusion.

Simple and accessible methods can generate meaningful learning experiences.

Every generation has something valuable to teach and something new to learn.

Final Recommendation

Do not focus exclusively on producing perfect literary works. The real value of creative writing workshops lies in giving people the opportunity to think, express themselves, listen to others, and discover that every voice matters in a democratic society.

The MACU project demonstrated that culture, poetry, essay writing, and dialogue can become powerful tools for bringing generations together, promoting inclusion, and strengthening democratic participation in contemporary European society.

6.3. Educational trips – Journey for Knowledge

6.3.1. Objective

To connect the history of political change and democratic values with local cultural heritage through direct encounters with historic sites, shared reflection and intergenerational learning.

6.3.2. Methods and techniques

In planning the excursions, we prepared educational routes connecting historically significant sites with opportunities for guided interpretation, discussion and personal reflection. We considered transport, the pace of visits and participants' differing practical needs so that heritage learning would be accessible.

Before the trips, we used registration and direct communication to identify support needs, including mobility, health-related limitations, transport arrangements and the amount of walking involved. This information helped us adapt the practical organisation and provide clear guidance to participants.

Participant selection followed equal-opportunity and non-discrimination principles. Participation was not restricted on grounds of gender, economic circumstances or health status, and we sought to avoid unnecessary barriers related to age, disability or previous educational experience. We treated individual support needs as practical considerations to be accommodated where possible, rather than reasons for automatic exclusion.

Before departure, we communicated the itinerary and practical requirements to seniors. We explained where and when the group would meet, what would happen during the excursion, what physical demands might arise and whom to contact with questions. Advance communication was important in reducing uncertainty and building trust.

For Journey for Knowledge, our route connected Košice, Štós Spa and the Premonstratensian Monastery in Jasov. The guided historical account offered a context for discussing regional development, religious heritage and experiences of socialism.

During discussions on the excursions, we used open questions and invited participants to compare historical interpretation with their own experiences. We did not treat recollections as tests of historical knowledge; instead, we encouraged respectful exchange and recognition of different perspectives.

Our second example was the visit to Barca on 15 October 2026. The programme combined a guided historical tour of the park, a visit to the manor house and library, presentations by local and European-information representatives, a discussion and a photography workshop.

In the Barca photography workshop, we first introduced the historical setting of the places visited. Participants then chose subjects to photograph and expressed their own perspective on the local heritage. The task linked observation, creative expression and discussion.

Following the Barca excursion, we collected anonymous feedback through a short questionnaire comprising closed questions, a multiple-response question and an open-ended question. Seven completed responses were received between 20 and 24 October 2026. We calculated the descriptive counts and percentages using the seven valid responses and reviewed the written comments for practical lessons. Since the overall attendance and response rate were not recorded in the evaluation report, we interpreted the findings as the views of respondents rather than as representative evidence for the whole group.

The photography exercise used a simple participatory approach: seniors could record details of buildings, landscapes or moments that they considered meaningful. Their photographs then became material for a dedicated gallery and further reflection on the experience.

6.3.3. Impact

The December 2025 excursion involved 14 seniors aged 65 or over and six representatives of the partner organisations. Its immediate outputs included the completed educational itinerary and opportunities for discussion about heritage, religious freedom and political change.

The October 2026 Barca excursion offered a second Slovak example, combining local historical learning with active photography and discussion of European opportunities for adult learning.

The post-event evaluation provided supporting evidence of immediate satisfaction and perceived learning: all seven respondents reported acquiring new historical information and expressed willingness to join a similar activity. The results did not measure retained knowledge or long-term changes in civic engagement. We also identified an accessibility improvement: the audibility of guided commentary could be strengthened by using a portable microphone or another appropriate amplification system.

The guided historical tour of the park and manor house was the most frequently selected highlight (6 of 7 respondents, 85.7%). Learning new information and the Erasmus+ project presentations were each selected by five respondents (71.4%), while three (42.9%) highlighted opportunities to meet and talk with others. Respondents could select several highlights. Open comments praised the welcoming atmosphere, the organisers and presenters, and the opportunity to discover less familiar places. One response drew attention to difficulties hearing the guides without amplification, offering a concrete lesson for future accessible excursions.

Barca evaluation indicator	Responses (n = 7)
Overall rating	Excellent: 5 (71.4%); good: 2 (28.6%)
New knowledge of Barca's history	A great deal: 4 (57.1%); some interesting facts: 3 (42.9%)
Organisation	Very good: 6 (85.7%); good: 1 (14.3%)
Would attend a similar event	Definitely yes: 7 (100%)
Most valued: historical tour	6 (85.7%); multiple responses permitted
Most valued: new information / Erasmus+ presentations	5 each (71.4%); multiple responses permitted

Table: Anonymous post-event questionnaire, 20–24 October 2026. Percentages are based on seven responses and rounded to one decimal place; multiple-choice selections do not sum to 100%.

All numerical findings refer to the seven valid responses only. The total attendance and questionnaire response rate were not documented in the evaluation report; consequently, the figures describe respondents' views rather than the entire participant group. This evaluation captured immediate perceptions rather than verified long-term learning or civic outcomes.

6.3.4. Tips and tricks

Select places with a clear connection to your learning objectives. Check transport, walking distances, accessibility and opportunities for rest in advance. Explain practical details to senior participants and provide a contact for questions.

For a photography workshop, invite participants to capture places or moments they find meaningful. Treat their photographs as interpretations of heritage, and obtain appropriate permission before publishing images or captions.

6.4. Intergenerational dialogue (workshops with students)

6.4.1. Objective

To enable an equitable exchange of historical knowledge and life experience between students and seniors, strengthen active listening and develop skills in oral history, critical reflection and democratic dialogue.

6.4.2. Methods and techniques

We implemented the intergenerational interviews in cooperation with the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. On 18 May 2026, Associate Professor Adriana Jesenková delivered the lecture “Identity, Memory and Intergenerational Relationships”, and I led a practical seminar on editorial work, qualitative interviews and oral history.

In the next part, we examined how to formulate questions. We discussed open descriptive questions about a typical day or a specific experience, structural questions to clarify relationships and contrasting questions to explore differences. We also covered active listening, paraphrasing, follow-up questions and avoiding leading or confrontational wording.

I led the practical methodological seminar in my role as CEREHIS director and trainer, Zdenka Bencúrová. I presented the main approaches to oral-history interviews, the relationship between memory and narrative and the importance of allowing respondents to speak in their own language. We discussed trust-building, clear explanations of the interview’s purpose and the interviewer’s responsibility to listen more than they speak.

Associate Professor Adriana Jesenková was a key academic collaborator. She supported cooperation with the department, helped engage students, coordinated university rooms and contributed to the ethical preparation and subsequent reflection of the programme.

At the preparatory meetings, we also explained to students how the recordings would work in practice. We clarified the schedule, roles, location and the need to explain the purpose of the interviews and the use of audiovisual material to seniors in understandable language.

The preparatory programme comprised several steps: an introduction to CEREHIS and the international MACU project; the lecture “Identity, Memory and Intergenerational Relationships”; a practical session on oral history and editorial questions; and independent drafting of interview questions followed by feedback.

Ethical preparation was a separate professional task. Associate Professor Jesenková provided CEREHIS with two examples of information sheets and informed-consent forms from previous projects. We used them as references in preparing documentation appropriate to MACU. Participants needed clear information about the purpose and recording of interviews, the handling of personal data and the intended publication of videos.

Administrative and coordination work covered student outreach and recruitment; communication with and scheduling of senior respondents; collecting registration and contact information; room bookings and timetable changes; preparing attendance sheets, information materials, informed-consent documentation and participation certificates; coordinating filming and processing the footage; and collecting feedback and recording the outputs for project reporting. This amounted to a substantial administrative workload beyond the visible interview sessions.

After presenting the methodological foundations, we asked students to prepare their own draft interview questions. They submitted the drafts by email, and I provided individual feedback, explaining why certain questions were appropriate, too broad, leading or otherwise unsuitable. The exercise made it possible to refine both the questions and students’ understanding of respectful approaches to respondents before the actual interviews.

Students contributed to selecting specific topics. According to their interests, they explored political transformations, everyday life, family relationships and personal experience across generations. We used a shared thematic framework, but did not require each student to follow an identical rigid script.

Organising the recordings also required suitable rooms and scheduling. In May 2026, we arranged the availability of university rooms and adjusted the timetable to make the meetings manageable for students and senior respondents. Separate spaces were considered to reduce disruption during filming.

The students’ preparation process was itself an educational outcome. Following the lecture on identity and memory, they translated concepts into practical interview questions and developed their understanding through individual feedback. This connected theoretical reflection with applied oral-history and communication skills.

After the interviews, we also focused on students' reflections. Associate Professor Jesenková prepared discussion prompts for the meeting of 2 June 2026, addressing satisfaction, new knowledge and skills, surprises, willingness to participate again and suggestions for future activities.

The Slovak programme took place on 18, 21, 22 and 26 May 2026. It combined preparatory workshops with three meetings devoted to interviewing seniors. Students asked their own questions within the jointly agreed educational framework.

We prepared interviews using flexible themes rather than a fixed script. They covered everyday life before 1989, political transition, democratic rights and present-day civic life, while leaving room for questions on family, relationships and personal priorities.

Across the Slovak activities, we used questionnaires for three different purposes: preliminary assessment of access and practical needs; thematic preparation; and immediate participant feedback. These served different functions and were not treated as a single instrument for measuring long-term impact.

When evaluating the programme, we distinguished implementation evidence from immediate participant assessments. Attendance, completed meetings and edited videos documented the outputs, while questionnaires and reflections provided qualitative indications of participants' experiences.

6.4.3. Impact

The meetings enabled reciprocal learning and exchange between generations, including different memories of the socialist period. Students practised communication and analytical skills, while seniors had an opportunity to share experiences with an attentive younger audience.

6.4.4. Tips and tricks

Prepare students in advance and explain the purpose and practical arrangements of interviews to senior participants. Avoid leading or confrontational questions. Give respondents time to answer and allow them to decline questions they do not wish to address.

Obtain informed consent before recording, and clearly explain how video recordings, quotations and photographs will be edited, stored and published. Provide an opportunity to ask questions and agree on the intended use of materials.

6.5. Digital documentation and dissemination methodology

We used three complementary online channels to document, organise and communicate the project's work. For the project website, we structured information around the partnership and the main activities, prepared accessible descriptions and photographs, and connected relevant materials to the corresponding activity pages. The website functioned as a common point of reference for stakeholders in all three partner countries and as an archive of project outputs.

For YouTube, we prepared audiovisual material from the intergenerational conversations for publication as edited recordings. This required selecting and editing material, providing suitable contextual information and paying attention to the scope of participants' informed consent for recording and public dissemination. For Facebook, we communicated project activities in shorter formats and used posts to direct readers to more substantial information and outputs. We treated publication and dissemination as follow-up stages of the educational process: activities were documented, selected content was prepared for the appropriate channel, and materials were made available for future educational use.

In planning digital dissemination, we also recognised that online access alone did not guarantee inclusion, particularly for people with limited digital confidence or access. We therefore combined digital communication with direct contact and face-to-face participation. For future replication, organisations should ensure clear responsibilities for updating each channel, accessible language, permission to publish identifiable photographs or video, and long-term maintenance of published resources.

Table SK2. Transferable Educational Methods and Their Links to European Values

Method	How to apply it	European value / competence
Accessible heritage-based learning	Plan a manageable itinerary, opportunities for rest and expert interpretation; invite participants to share memories and compare experiences without forcing agreement.	Dignity, equality, inclusion and respect for cultural and religious diversity.
Intergenerational testimonies	Prepare students for active listening; ask open questions, distinguish personal memories from verifiable statements and secure consent for recordings.	Freedom of expression, pluralism, critical thinking and democratic dialogue.
Participatory photography	Offer voluntary photography of meaningful heritage features; invite participants to provide their own captions and obtain permission before publication.	Cultural participation, personal initiative and respect for different perspectives.
Appropriate reflection and evaluation	Assess access needs, facilitate thematic reflection and gather voluntary feedback; distinguish participation and responses from long-term effects.	Accountability, accessibility and evidence-informed adult education.

Note: Outputs and immediate participant reflections are reported descriptively; no long-term impact measurement is claimed.

Links to European values and competences. The Slovak methodology provides practical opportunities to address the values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. Listening to different life stories encourages human dignity and pluralism; inclusive access promotes equality; discussing religious freedom and political transition supports the understanding of liberty and democracy; and shared learning strengthens solidarity between generations.

Transferability and responsible evaluation. Organisations can replicate the approach through an accessible heritage excursion, facilitated reflection, carefully prepared intergenerational interviews and participant photography. Evaluation should distinguish delivered outputs and immediate feedback from any claims of lasting changes in civic behaviour.

For European adult education, the key lesson is that local heritage can open discussions about shared democratic principles, while seniors' personal testimonies help younger people recognise that historical events have different meanings across generations.

6.6. Development workshops based on coaching methods and work with emotions

6.6.1. Objective

The aim of the development workshops with seniors and young people on values, motivation and intergenerational communication was to create a space for integration, mutual understanding and trust between generations. The workshops also gave participants space to share their own stories, deepen their understanding of democracy and create a basis for further work on the performance "Driven by Democracy".

6.6.2. Methods and techniques

Development workshops were based on coaching methods and work with emotions using the model of non-violent communication. In order to understand the differences between us we used the methodology based on individual differences (applied by FRIS®).

6.6.2.1. Coaching

The International Coaching Federation defines coaching as a partnership that provokes thought and a creative process, inspiring individuals to maximise their personal and professional potential (ICF). In our development workshops, this approach helped us build relationships based on partnership and trust, where everyone, young or old, had the right to express themselves without being judged or corrected.

The coaching approach is based on participants' resources. We began from the assumption that younger and older participants are not simply recipients of advice from the trainer or one another. Each person already has knowledge, experience, strengths, values, abilities and social resources that can be mobilised for development and sharing.

An important coaching tool is asking powerful, open questions that stimulate reflection, awareness and new perspectives rather than prescribe solutions. Well-posed questions deepen the conversation and help participants look beyond what they have already discovered. Conversation is central to coaching, and insightful questions lie at its core (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2022; Jeruszka, 2025).

Alongside questions, coaching offers other tools that can make conversation more open and effective. Examples include:

active listening – attentive listening, paraphrasing, summarising and reflecting emotions/meaning,

reflection and self-reflection – helping the participants examine assumptions, experiences, emotions and patterns,

feedback – providing information that increases participants' awareness of behaviour and its consequences.

reframing – helping younger and older participants consider an experience or problem from a different, potentially more useful perspective.

We used this approach and these tools to encourage younger and older participants to engage in dialogue and share their resources and experiences. Coaching also helped them move beyond stereotypes and misconceptions.

Coaching is more goal-oriented than problem-oriented. It helps turn a general intention into a meaningful, sufficiently concrete goal. This enables participants to focus on what matters to them and what they can influence through their own initiatives, strengthening their sense of agency.

6.6.2.2. Work with emotions - Nonviolent Communication approach

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg, is an approach to communication that aims to strengthen empathy, mutual understanding and connection rather than blame, judgement or coercion. It is both a communication process and a way of directing attention: toward what happened, what we feel, what we need, and what we would like to ask for.

In this approach feelings provide information about our needs: they can indicate that important needs are being met (at that moment what we feel is pleasant, e.g. joy or peace) or are not being met (in this case we experience our emotions as being not very pleasant for us, e.g. anger, sadness). Emotions are not simply reactions that should be controlled, suppressed or judged as “good” or “bad.” Instead, they can help us understand what is important to us in a particular situation.

There are four components of this type of communication:

1. Observation – What happened?

Participants described what they observed—what was said or done—without judgement, interpretation or evaluation, using description alone.

2. Feelings – What do I feel?

Participants identified the emotion or bodily feeling arising in relation to the situation, distinguishing feelings from thoughts or interpretations.

3. Needs – What is important to me?

Participants identified the underlying human need or value connected with the feeling—for example, safety, respect, autonomy, connection, trust or clarity. We used cards with emotions and needs to support this identification.

4. Request – What would I like to happen?

Participants formulated a specific, concrete request, rather than a demand. A request leaves the other person free to say no.

We developed the messages including all these four elements based on specific scenarios brought forward by seniors and young people. The impact was profound—participants gained a greater awareness of what they truly need, what they can influence, and how they can communicate this.

6.6.2.3. Individual differences

The FRIS® approach is a model for describing individual differences in thinking and acting. Its central idea is that people can encounter the same new situation but notice different information first, give different information different importance and consequently interpret the situation, make decisions and act differently.

FRIS describes these differences through four cognitive perspectives: Facts, Relations, Ideas and Structures:

the Facts perspective focuses attention on information that appears concrete, objective and useful for achieving a particular goal. It tends to recognise cause-and-effect relationships quickly and move toward a practical solution;

the Relations perspective focuses on connections between people, objects and events, with particular attention to the interpersonal context. These connections are often perceived intuitively and personally,

the Ideas perspective moves beyond the current situation and searches for possibilities, alternatives and new ways of approaching a problem. It is associated with questioning the existing state of affairs and discovering new connections,

the Structures perspective seeks a complete, detailed and coherent understanding of a problem. It pays attention to components, relationships between them, precision and logical organisation.

The key value of this approach is that it provides a simple language for explaining why two people can respond differently to exactly the same situation. It does not tell us what people are like. It helps us notice that people may start from different places when making sense of the same reality. Understanding these differences can make communication less judgmental and more flexible.

While working with seniors and youth under this framework we used mainly self-reflection and self-diagnosis. Participants considered how they usually approach new situations, solve problems and communicate with others. They discussed which FRIS perspective feels most natural to them and which requires more conscious effort.

6.6.3. Impact

The development workshops contributed to creating a space for integration, mutual understanding and trust between seniors and young people. By combining coaching methods, Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and the FRIS approach to individual differences, participants had the opportunity to increase their self-awareness, identify their personal values and sources of motivation, and develop their communication and interpersonal competences.

Sharing personal stories and experiences helped participants explore democratic values from an individual and intergenerational perspective, recognising the importance of respect, freedom, equality, empathy, dialogue and responsibility in everyday life. Participants were encouraged to appreciate different perspectives, listen to others without judgement and recognise their own capacity to influence their communities.

The workshops also provided a foundation for further intergenerational cooperation and creative expression through the Driven by Democracy performance. Their potential wider impact includes inspiring other organisations and educators to use coaching-based, empathetic and participatory methods in working with different generations, as well as promoting democracy as a shared everyday practice based on dialogue, mutual respect and active participation.

6.6.4. Tips and tricks

Our workshop experience leads to the following recommendations:

1. Ask powerful, open-ended questions; probe further and remain curious throughout the dialogue.

2. Encourage reflection on matters within your control; shift the discussion from focusing on a problem to working toward a goal.

3. Do not fear differences or the fact that people may view the same situation from different perspectives. Treat this as an asset rather than an obstacle—while remaining mindful that communication challenges may still arise.

4. Refrain from judging your own emotions or those of others. Instead, observe them and take responsibility for your own feelings by identifying the underlying needs they represent.

5. When working with young people and seniors, take care of yourself, get to know yourself, and leverage your own strengths; share your discoveries and build a partnership with the participants.

6.7. Eco-friendly art workshops led by seniors for young people

6.7.1. Objective

The eco-friendly art workshops enabled older participants to share practical knowledge and skills developed during the socialist period, when conserving resources, reusing materials and repairing everyday items were common practices. The aim was to pass on seniors' knowledge of reusing materials, spend time together and learn about one another's perspectives.

6.7.2. Methods and techniques

During the workshops, young people - guided by seniors - worked with scraps of paper, creating and attaching decorations to a "tree of transience" (representing the seasons). In other sessions, participants used techniques such as iris folding and quilling to create pictures out of paper scraps.

Iris folding is a paper-folding technique in which narrow strips of paper are folded and layered over an opening in a template, following a spiral pattern that resembles the iris of an eye. When working with scraps, small pieces of leftover paper can be folded into strips and arranged in successive layers to create geometric patterns and decorative images.



Quilling is a paper-art technique that involves rolling narrow strips of paper into coils and shaping them into different forms, such as circles, leaves, petals or spirals. These elements are then glued together to create pictures or decorative compositions. Paper scraps can be cut into narrow strips and reused for this purpose.



Greeting cards and decorations created by the youth from paper scraps using the quilling technique.

Both techniques are well suited to creative reuse of paper waste, while also developing manual skills, creativity and opportunities for intergenerational learning.

Within the eco-friendly art workshops, seniors acted not only as instructors but also as partners and knowledge holders, creating opportunities for intergenerational learning. The following techniques were particularly useful:

instruction - giving clear, step-by-step guidance on how to perform a particular craft technique, while allowing young participants to work independently,

demonstration - showing the technique in practice before or while participants try it themselves,

questioning and answering - encouraging young people to ask questions and seniors to respond, creating a two-way exchange rather than one-way teaching,

encouragement - supporting participants' attempts, recognising their effort and encouraging them to experiment with materials and develop their own ideas,

learning by doing - participants acquire the technique through direct practice, while seniors provide support when needed,

co-creation - seniors and young people jointly develop an artistic object or composition.

6.7.3. Impact

The value of eco-friendly art workshops lies not only in learning an artistic technique or reusing materials, but in creating a meaningful situation in which seniors and young people learn from one another and experience participation, cooperation and dialogue in practice.

Impact on seniors:

strengthening active participation – seniors take an active role as knowledge holders, mentors and co-creators rather than being passive recipients of activities,

recognition of their experience and competences – sharing knowledge about reusing and saving materials gives value to experiences acquired during earlier periods of their lives,

increased self-confidence and sense of usefulness – having something valuable to teach younger people strengthens seniors' sense of agency and social contribution,

intergenerational openness – direct cooperation with young people reduced social distance and challenged stereotypes about other generations.

Impact on young people

learning from seniors' experience – young participants gained practical knowledge,

• development of communication and cooperation skills – participants practised asking questions, listening, giving and receiving feedback and working towards a shared goal (e.g. the tree of transience and values),

• environmental awareness – reusing paper scraps demonstrates in a practical way how creativity can be combined with responsible use of resources,

• appreciation of intergenerational knowledge exchange – young people experienced that learning can take place outside formal educational settings and in both directions.

Working together on a tangible artistic product provided a natural reason to communicate and created opportunities for informal conversation, storytelling and exchange of perspectives.

6.7.4. Tips and tricks

During the workshops, we learned that it is worthwhile to:

• provide clear instructions, speak slowly and understandably, and ensure that the instructions have been properly grasped by the young participants,

• encourage young people to be active, ask questions, and take the initiative,

• develop participatory methods rather than one-way knowledge transfer,

• improve facilitation of dialogue – creative activities create natural opportunities for conversation, active listening and exchanging perspectives,

• combine environmental and social education - integrate ecological awareness with cultural learning and intergenerational cooperation,

• whenever it is possible make use of co-creation methods and techniques!

6.8. Theatre – the performance “Driven by Democracy”

6.8.1. Objective

The objective of “Driven by Democracy” performance was to use theatre as a participatory tool for intergenerational dialogue and democratic engagement. The performance brought together seniors and young people to explore the experience of living under socialism, the transition towards democracy and the meaning of democracy in everyday life. It aimed to create a space in which seniors could share their memories and experience with younger generations, while both generations could contribute their own perspectives and ideas. The performance also aimed to demonstrate how culture, history, music and personal stories can stimulate reflection, dialogue and civic engagement.

6.8.2. Methods and techniques

For seniors and young people, co-creation was central: it gave them a sense of influence over the play and the freedom to choose what they wanted to perform. Participants contributed ideas for dialogue, movement, lyrics, costumes, props and stage design. In developing the performance, we also used:

• storytelling and personal memories – participants drew on their own experiences of their life,

• theatre and role-play – acting provided a safe and engaging way to explore historical experiences and values related to democracy,

• music and songs – songs from the socialist period evoked historical context and stimulated discussion, emotional engagement and exchange between seniors and young people,

• discussion and reflection – dialogues, rehearsals and a post-performance panel created opportunities to discuss democracy and intergenerational relations,

• learning by doing – participants developed acting, singing and stage skills through regular practice and rehearsals,

• professional mentoring and feedback – an experienced theatre practitioner and a musician supported the cast while respecting participants' contributions and ideas,

• use of visual materials – historical photographs and multimedia elements supported understanding of the period presented,

• public performance – presenting the production to a mixed audience extended the dialogue beyond the workshop group and created an opportunity for civic reflection. It also evoked strong emotions, reinforcing the play's message.

6.8.3. Impact

The production had an impact at individual, intergenerational and community levels. For seniors, it created an opportunity to share personal memories, knowledge and cultural experience, strengthened their sense of agency and visibility, and enabled active participation in a public cultural event. For young people, it provided direct contact with older generations, increased understanding of the historical experiences of seniors and created opportunities to develop communication, artistic and cooperation skills. For both generations, joint rehearsals and performances supported the development of relationships, trust and mutual understanding. Participants experienced that different generations can contribute complementary perspectives to a common cultural project.

For audiences, the performance created an opportunity to reflect on democracy, historical change and the relationship between generations. The post-performance debate extended this reflection by bringing together seniors, young people, researchers and cultural practitioners.

For educators, cultural organisations and senior/youth organisations, the production provides an example of how theatre, personal stories and cultural heritage can be used as tools for intergenerational learning and democratic participation. In line with MACU project objectives, the activity demonstrated that seniors' experience can become a resource for engaging both generations in dialogue and civic reflection.

6.8.4. Tips and tricks

The following issues were important in our work on the performance:

• give seniors an active role as knowledge holders, co-creators and performers, rather than treating them only as recipients,

• allow young participants to contribute their own ideas and creative solutions,

• combine personal stories with artistic forms such as theatre, music, photographs and movement to make historical topics accessible and emotionally engaging,

• establish a clear artistic vision, while leaving space for participants' suggestions and co-creation,

• use regular rehearsals and clear responsibilities; a demanding production requires commitment and good organisation,

• provide professional support in areas where participants may need it, such as acting, directing, music or stage design,

• allow sufficient time for informal interaction. Conversations during breaks can be as important for intergenerational integration as structured activities,

• be prepared for changes in participation, especially among young people whose school or other commitments may affect continuity,

• treat the final performance as the beginning of dialogue, not only its conclusion. A discussion with the audience can transform an artistic event into a space for democratic reflection,

• have fun while working with seniors and youth!

Conclusion – value added of the MACU project

The MACU project, through the action "Power of Poetry", provided European added value by promoting intergenerational dialogue, cultural participation, and democratic values through creative expression. Across Europe, societies are facing demographic changes and an increasing need to strengthen connections between generations. By bringing together young people and senior citizens in collaborative creative writing workshops, the project encouraged mutual understanding, solidarity, and respect between age groups. The use of poetry, essays, and storytelling as tools for civic engagement represents an innovative cultural approach that can be replicated in other European communities. The teaching methods and good practices developed during the workshops can be shared with cultural organisations, educators, adult education providers, and community groups across Europe.

Combining visits to historical sites with intergenerational encounters within the MACU action “Journey for knowledge” created a coherent learning sequence: from public heritage and places to individual memories and personal interpretation of political change. The Slovak activities also included the Barca excursion on 15 October 2026 and its participatory photography workshop. Together these formats demonstrated how seniors could actively interpret heritage, share experience and engage in dialogue with institutions and younger people. The Slovak experience offers a practical model for organisations with limited resources: begin with accessible local heritage sites, connect guided interpretation with participants’ memories, and use modest creative and recording tasks to extend learning.

The performance “Driven by Democracy” as well as its preparatory phase including development and eco-friendly art workshops created a space for democratic participation through culture and intergenerational dialogue. Seniors were not only recipients of cultural activities but became active contributors who share their memories, experiences and reflections on democracy with younger generations. The performance and the workshops demonstrated that intergenerational cooperation can produce both tangible and intangible creative outcomes.

The international cooperation within the MACU project strengthened the value of self-agency and social involvement by bringing together partners from Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The performance created an opportunity to compare different historical experiences of the socialist period and democratic transformation, while identifying shared European values such as freedom, human rights, participation, solidarity and responsibility. By encouraging senior citizens to actively participate in cultural dialogue and empowering young people to listen to and learn from previous generations, the MACU project contributed to building a more inclusive and participatory European society.


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