Imagining Futures, Sharing Power

OurCluj – An urban living laboratory for youth wellbeing

A workbook

*workbook — a manual for guidance, reflection and learning

OurCluj
Empowering Youth Wellbeing

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What do we mean by...

PART 1

Why this workbook

"workbook" - a manual for guidance, reflection and learning

In a world consumed by the relentless pursuit of economic growth and productivity, we have lost sight of what truly matters – our core values, our wellbeing, and our care for future generations.

We need to re-evaluate and develop new approaches towards societal and planetary wellbeing, approaches that are bottom-up, collaborative, and inclusive.

With half of the global population under 30 years old, engaging young people in social and civic innovation to shape our future is critical. With over half the world's population living in urban areas, how can we forge these new pathways together with young people in cities?

The OurCluj living laboratory is a pioneering 10-year urban innovation initiative in Cluj-Napoca, a vibrant intermediary city in Romania. OurCluj seeks to improve the wellbeing of young residents by creating a space for collective reflection and connection. It aims to cultivate a novel approach to urban innovation, by fostering change based on trust and care before just economic growth.

This workbook emerges midway through the OurCluj journey, in year five, when the project aims to create a locally owned collaborative governance and funding model, with and for the benefit of young people in the long term.

The workbook offers readers insights into the living laboratory's progress so far. It serves as a guiding companion, inviting readers – public sector leaders, activists, artists, entrepreneurs, educators, philanthropists, and others – to reflect on the past while imagining and co-creating the future trajectory of OurCluj, where power is shared.

Additionally, this workbook aims to share valuable knowledge with other cities in the OurCity initiative, and urban innovators around the world, highlighting how prioritizing youth wellbeing can serve as the cornerstone of 21st-century urban development.

The OurCity global initiative

OurCluj is part of the OurCity global initiative in multiple cities around the world.

OurCity is one of Fondation Botnar's key initiatives, aiming to support select cities around the world to implement coordinated programs and transform them into places where young people's wellbeing and opportunities are prioritized. OurCluj is the only such initiative in Europe. Cities so far include **Cluj-Napoca in Romania, Barranquilla in Colombia, Manta in Ecuador, Tanga in Tanzania, and Kofuridua in Ghana.** Fondation Botnar convenes OurCity global gatherings to share knowledge and experience across cities and partners. The first OurCity gathering took place in October 2023 in Tanga, Tanzania.

OurCity prioritizes localization, ownership, and collaboration across sectors to ensure positive and lasting change.

In each city, the municipality and the city council serve as anchor partners, aligning efforts with local and national policies as well as regional priorities. This approach encourages involvement of various funders, including government, businesses, and other foundations to support sustainability, inclusion, and accountability in the long term.

> " *OurCluj, and the OurCity initiative, are lessons of humanity and friendship for us all.*
>
> **– Emilia Botezan,** *Head of International Affairs and Foreign Investments Development, Cluj-Napoca Municipality*
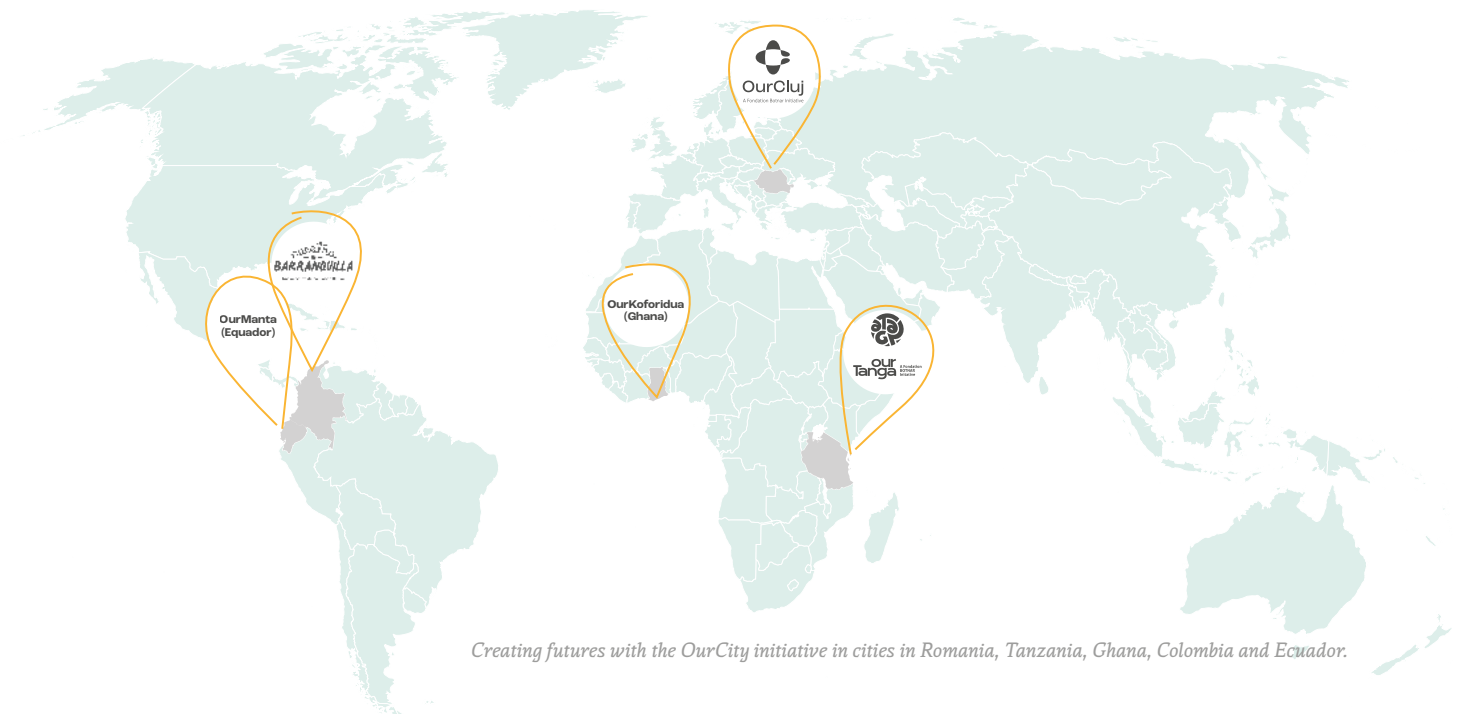
Creating futures with the OurCity initiative in cities in Romania, Tanzania, Ghana, Colombia and Ecuador.

PART 2

● The OurCluj story

How would we innovate with young people, municipality, and other city actors if wellbeing was prioritized before just economic growth?

In 2019, a collective of urban innovators supported by Fondation Botnar, a leading Swiss foundation, gathered in Cluj-Napoca. They began asking: could using a different set of values to guide urban transitions create a city where young people can thrive?

Over the past five years, the OurCluj initiative emerged. OurCluj is a living laboratory to collaborate for youth wellbeing. It is an arrangement of over 20 social innovation projects, created together with city stakeholders – nonprofits, youth, municipality, artists, universities, and businesses. These projects include a range of research studies, participatory mapping initiatives, and social innovation projects in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, tackling challenges in education, healthy nutrition, mental wellbeing, and social infrastructure – all contributing to the wellbeing of Cluj youth.

OurCluj is a 10-year initiative because systemic change needs time and persistence.

OurCluj is funded by Fondation Botnar under the OurCity initiative, and stewarded by social design intermediary SDG Colab, who work closely with the foundation and city stakeholders to build local capacities and ownership over time.

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is a positive state experienced by individuals and society. It encompasses physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of life. There is no one single definition of wellbeing; it varies by culture and context.

Wellbeing is relational; it emphasizes the interconnectedness between individuals and their broader context. An individual's wellbeing is influenced by personal, societal, and environmental processes and structures.

Wellbeing can be objective and subjective. Objective wellbeing is impacted by material conditions and social attributes like education, health, and connections, which affect quality of life. Subjective wellbeing describes an individual's experiences of happiness, purpose, and life satisfaction.

Reflective activity 1:

Imagining a city where young people flourish

Imagine it is 2040. You are the first Vice-Mayor for Future Generations in your city. Your "NextGen City" initiative has transformed the city by moving the needs and wellbeing of young people to the forefront of city policies and actions.

Substantial changes have been made to tackle social inequities, education, mental wellbeing, social media pressures, climate change, and the economic instability young people are facing.

You've been asked to write a three-minute speech about how you made that possible. Describe what you did and why it has been successful. What are the simple lessons you wish to share?

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Cities in transitions

For young people living in cities, challenges and opportunities collide.

Today, more than half of the global population lives in cities. By 2050 this figure will rise to two thirds. Cities are strongholds of job opportunities, economic growth, and productivity, but they are also significant drivers of growing environmental and social challenges. While cities only occupy 2% of the world's total land, they represent 70% of the global economy, and contribute 70% of the world's waste and greenhouse emissions.

A growing number of young people live in cities. By 2050, 60% of the urban population in developing countries will be under 18 years old, according to UN-Habitat. However, they have little say over the decisions that shape their future. Young people face many structural barriers when exercising advocacy and leadership, from resistance by authorities, to exclusion from decision making, to tokenization, and siloed youth events.

Youth engagement in Cluj-Napoca

Cluj-Napoca is a vibrant intermediary city in Romania, pursuing transformative pathways towards a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future.

A dynamic multicultural city and the historic capital of Transylvania, Cluj has an urban population of over 286,000, with more than 425,000 people living in its wider metropolitan area. It has a large and diverse youth population of around 100,000 people aged from 10 to 24.

The city has positioned itself as an innovation hub in Europe, building on its rich education ecosystem (10 universities and over 40 high schools in the metropolitan area), and foreign investments. The city's rapid economic growth has created job opportunities but exacerbated problems like social inequality, discrimination, and corruption. Cluj has come a long way from its post-communist government yet a culture of mistrust with the city's administration, and between diverse communities, persists.

The engagement of young people in shaping decisions that affect their future, as well as the future of the city, is still limited.

Cluj was designated the European Youth Capital in 2015. On its path of democratic transition, a culture of civic and social innovation has evolved in Cluj. This includes involving youth in participatory budgeting for community projects, and a wide variety of other community innovations through arts and culture. Cluj-Napoca's municipality established a Cluj Innovation and Imagination Centre to encourage debate and collaboration among community representatives and city stakeholders.

However, incentives, including public funding, to promote active youth participation, civic and social innovation are constrained. Research has revealed the contradiction of a "youthful city" that denies agency to young people. Despite the opportunities Cluj offers, the current urban and social infrastructure of the city does not meet young people's needs for development, expression, and social interaction. Young people living in the metropolitan area have limited opportunities to acquire basic life skills to help them cultivate emotional wellbeing, and develop the autonomy and critical thinking that would empower them to become active citizens.

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Creating futures: OurCluj urban living laboratory

OurCluj is a living laboratory dedicated to collaborating for the wellbeing of the city's young residents. It is a novel approach to urban innovation in Romania and Europe, that activates values of trust and care in urban transitions.

Since its establishment in 2019, OurCluj has generated over 20 multi-sectoral social innovation projects, working with nonprofits, youth-led groups, universities, administration, and businesses.

OurCluj is envisioned as a 10-year endeavor in four phases, which will then gradually transition to local ownership. The four phases are: Introduction, Development, Transformation, and Transition (see page 17, OurCluj timeline). Such long-term commitment by Fondation Botnar comes from an understanding that any systems change requires time and persistence.

Vision

Co-creating a city where all young people thrive.

The OurCluj vision and mission are inspired by the OurCity initiative, one of Fondation Botnar's key global projects, which aims to transform select cities into places where young people's wellbeing and opportunities are prioritized.

In year five, midway through the OurCluj learning journey, partners are invited to self-organize open discussions or join facilitated meetings, to co-create and improve the OurCluj vision and mission working statements.

*working statements

Mission

Collaboratively developing and implementing innovative solutions that significantly enhance the wellbeing and future prospects of young residents in Cluj.

OurCluj aims to take a systems approach to wellbeing: instead of focusing solely on individual aspects such as physical health, mental wellbeing, or education, OurCluj looks at the complex interactions between individuals, communities, environments, and social structures - all of which collectively contribute to youth experience of the city.

What is a living laboratory?

Think of an open collaborative environment, with a series of projects and meetings, where multiple stakeholders - youth organizations, government agencies, universities, nonprofits, companies, and citizens, come together to creatively design, test, and develop innovative solutions to complex urban challenges. The co-creation process integrates research and innovation into real-life communities and settings. These solutions can translate into new policies, campaigns, or technologies, making the city a better place to live over time.

So far, OurCluj has identified five priority interconnected areas that can significantly enhance youth wellbeing in Cluj over time:

- Rethinking learning and education

- Improving health, especially mental health

- Creating a local ecosystem for social and civic innovation

- Cultivating individual and collective youth agency

- Creating an enabling environment for youth engagement

These areas were identified through research and participatory mapping studies, conducted in collaboration with young people and city stakeholders. They serve as an initial compass to navigate the complexities of youth wellbeing in the city.

For example, a need for systemic interventions in education was highlighted as particularly vital, indicating a leverage point with potential for positively impacting all other areas.

See Part III for these projects.

What is social innovation?

Social innovation is the process of developing and deploying effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues, in support of social progress. Solutions often require the active collaboration of government, business, and the nonprofit world.

What is civic innovation?

Civic innovation improves the functioning of civic or public institutions, systems, and processes, as well as enhancing citizen engagement and participation in governance.

It fosters more responsive, inclusive, and effective governance, while empowering citizens to actively shape and contribute to decision-making processes.

OurCluj values & principles

OurCluj is guided by a set of core values and principles. OurCluj research has found these values – especially those of trust and care – are essential for fostering relationships and collaborative efforts aimed at enhancing wellbeing. These values and principles may evolve over time to adapt to changing needs.

Values

Prioritizing values of trust and care is a requirement for creating outcomes such as programs and policies that support youth wellbeing. This was demonstrated by the social research study "Activating values in urban transition", which documented the co-creation of OurCluj (see page 23).

Trust

Trust is a fundamental element of healthy relationships, whether they are personal, professional, or societal, and it forms the foundation for collaboration, and social cohesion.

Care

Care involves a deep sense of regard and consideration for the wellbeing of ourselves, others, and the environment, whether it's expressed through acts of service, emotional support, advocacy, or other means.

Principles

OurCluj embodies principles essential for creating a future where young people flourish. Each principle represents the living laboratory's commitment to creating a meaningful and lasting impact in the community. They have been developed with the OurCluj participants with the intention of continuous improvement

YES!

Inside out and bottom-up — *Top-down*

Collaborative co-creation — *Expert-led*

Inclusivity and diversity — *Discrimination*

Learning from failure — *Criticizing failure*

Building networks and systems — *Working in silos*

Measuring in human relations — *Measuring in transactions and numbers*

Joy and play — *Serious and joyless*

NO ⊗

*Artwork by Zsófia Bernát,
ArtiViStory Collective*

Reflective activity 2:

Transforming a city by creating caring communities

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the fragility of the current model of economic growth and competition in your city. Social services, healthcare, education, and other systems were severely strained, and unacceptable numbers of people were left without provision.

The response in your city was the creation of a citizen assembly to learn and discuss how to weave a new social fabric and cultivate caring communities. Issues of care are not only essential in families, but also relevant to local communities, neighborhoods, schools, public libraries, and parks. Discussions centered around a need for mutual support, public spaces, shared resources, and functioning democratic processes.

You've been invited to join the citizen assembly's deliberations, and present recommendations to the City Council in a three-minute speech. Describe what kind of infrastructure and innovations are needed to create caring communities.

OurCluj approach: A values-based urban living laboratory

We call the OurCluj arrangement of projects a "Values-Based Urban Living Laboratory" (VBULL), because it focuses attention on values in project work: building trust and cultivating care.

In environments where trust is low, these values are particularly important.

The OurCluj living laboratory aims to shift a narrative of innovation from being understood as purely economic to a social model of innovation towards youth well-being. This is accomplished through a set of foundational social design practices: **imagining futures, remembering the past, and sharing power.**

These collaborative design practices are cultivated through:

- Participatory development of OurCluj social innovation projects – including research projects, mapping projects, implementation, and communication projects

- Informal OurCluj Meetups, co-hosted with different partners in different urban spaces each time, and including diverse OurCluj partners, both existing and new

- Participatory development of a collaborative governance and funding model

See Part II and Part III for these participatory projects.

> " *The values are the pillars for building resilient cities and societies where the citizens, including young people, can experience wellbeing.*
>
> – **Susanna Hausmann,** *Fondation Botnar's Cities Portfolio Lead*

From social innovation to systems transformation

When solutions address the root causes of systemic issues like education, and involve collaborative approaches, they can lead to systems transformation.

The OurCluj living laboratory aims to foster social and civic innovation projects in a way that leads to systems transformation.

A systems approach involves addressing the root cause of an issue rather than simply reacting to a symptom. In a system undergoing transformation, there is a shift to a new state of thinking that reflects improved outcomes, increased resilience, and greater sustainability. This is usefully explained by the iceberg model of systems thinking, which is a way of understanding the origin of a problem.

What is the root cause of the problem?

Iceberg model of systems thinking

EVENTS
What just happened?

— **React**

PATTERNS / TRENDS
What's been happening?
What's changing?

— **Anticipate**

STRUCTURES
What influences these patterns?
What are the relationships between parts?
What are the rules, norms, cultures, values, and policies?

— **Design**

MENTAL MODES
What assumptions, beliefs & values do
people hold about the system?
What beliefs keep the system in place?
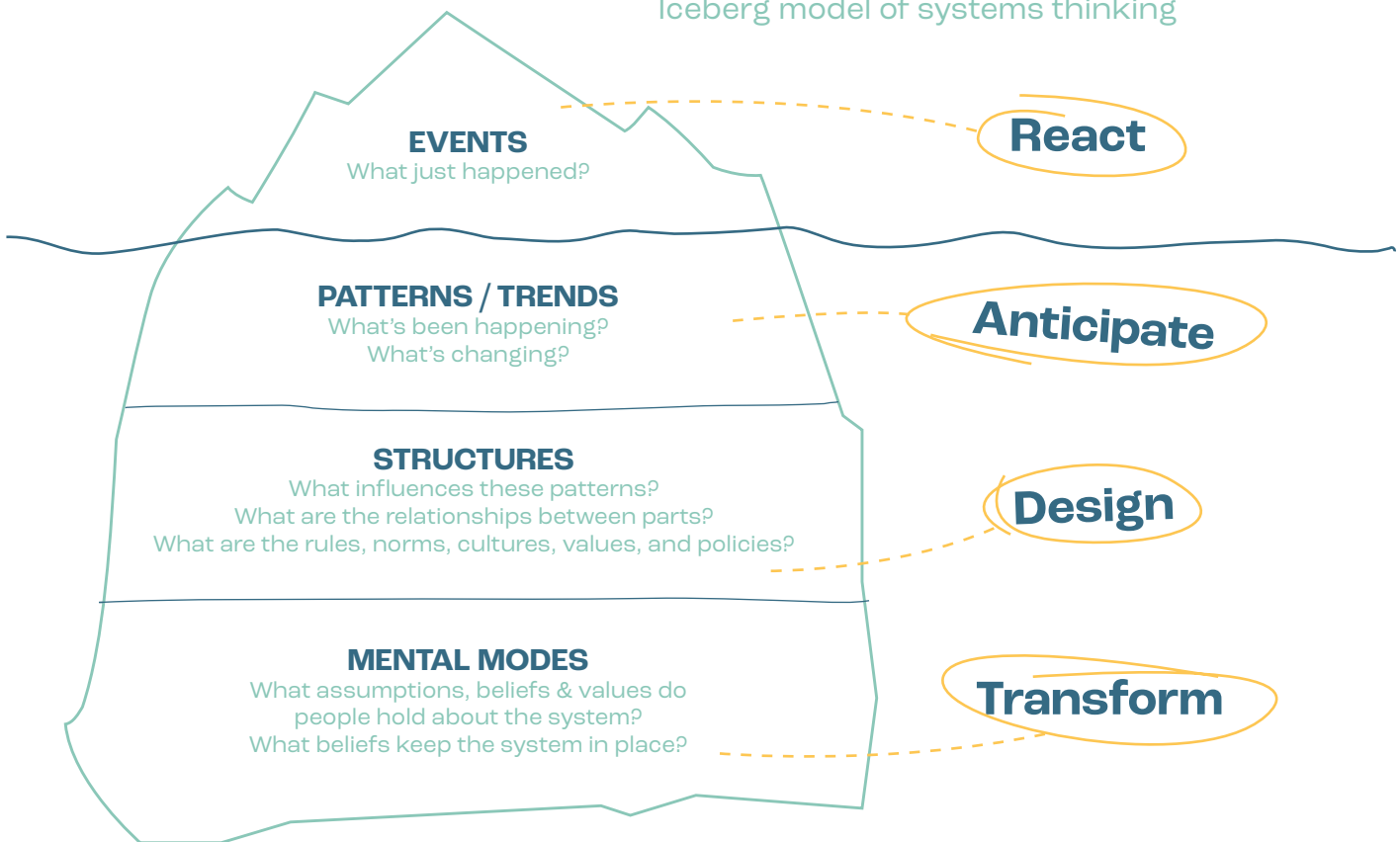
— **Transform**

OurCluj as a whole is more than the sum of its individual projects.

OurCluj aims to shift away from supporting individual projects, towards designing a collective program that can transform systems challenges like education. Focusing solely on individual social innovations, without acknowledging the interconnectedness between them, overlooks the crucial relationships and networks that form among projects and people. These relationships are the driving force behind potential transformative change within any system they are targeting, such as social innovation ecosystems or the education system in the city.

What is systems thinking and systems transformation?

Systems thinking is a holistic way of understanding the world by looking at the interconnections and relationships between various components. Rather than focusing solely on individual parts or projects in isolation (linear thinking), a systems perspective considers how these parts or projects interact and influence each other within a larger framework, or system. This can lead to potential systems transformation.

For example, if looking at education, systems thinkers would consider factors such as access to resources, teacher training, curriculum relevance, and extracurricular activities, in addition to the quality of education provided in schools. They would analyze how these factors interact with each other and with broader societal influences.

OurCluj Timeline: Transitioning to local ownership

OurCluj is a 10-year initiative, engaging partners to build local ownership over time.

See Part III for further details of projects referenced in this section.

Transitioning to local ownership is a deliberate process designed with local partners in four phases (**Introduction, Development, Transformation, and Transition**). This participatory process is facilitated by an independent intermediary and Fondation Botnar, with an objective to develop a local backbone structure with a collaborative governance that can sustain long-term and attract both local and other international funding.

In the **Introduction phase (2019 – 2021)**, OurCluj developed a research study of youth wellbeing in Cluj (LEAP project), providing direction for the living laboratory's activities and serving as a baseline for actions and future funding decisions. Alongside this research, it tested a set of initial social innovation projects (e.g. EduAlert, MagicHelp, and Wello) in the city ecosystem.

This was followed by the **Development phase (2021 – 2022)**, comprising in-depth social research of OurCluj (the "Activating values in urban transitions" study, and ArtiViStory) and various participatory mapping studies of the education system, youth organizations, and environments (e.g. EduMapping, Com'ON Mapping, Cluj Youth Mapping, and Cluj Atlas). In this phase OurCluj expanded with further social innovation projects (e.g. Cluj Innovation and Experiment Fund with first edition of FIX Cluj and Learning QUB), and developed an initial Theory of Change.

In the **Transformation phase (2023 – 2025)**, OurCluj experimented further with scaling social innovation projects while improving inclusivity and participation (e.g. Cluj Innovation and Experiment Fund with second edition of FIX Cluj, Com'ON Next and School of Health). It developed a visual identity through a year-long participatory process, introduced novel engagement and a listening mechanism with the use of generative AI (School of Possibilities), participatory systems mapping (Wellbeing System Map), and monitoring and evaluation of individual social innovation projects. Now in place, this can be adapted as needed.
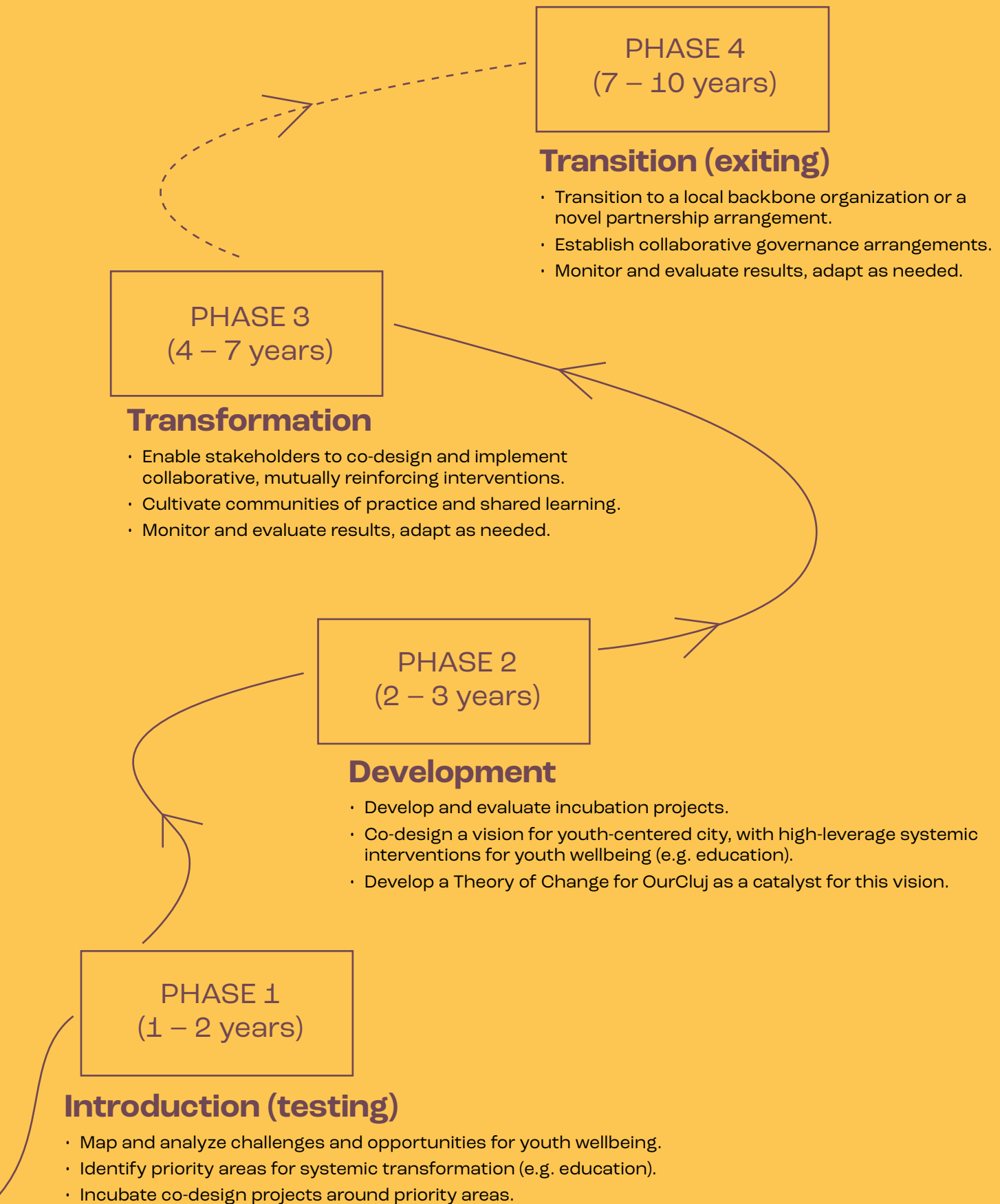
Today, OurCluj is a loose arrangement of several existing and emerging social innovation projects, all led by various non-profits in collaboration with local youth, administration, entrepreneurs, academia, schools and businesses. OurCluj Meet-ups, introduced in 2022 to convene existing and new partners, continue opening up conversations about how to imagine future, remember the past, and reflect on how power can be shared. These informal gatherings are based on caring principles and co-hosted by different local partners.

Since 2024, a deliberate process has been in place to create possible collaborative governance for OurCluj. This would benefit local actors and, most importantly, young people in Cluj, as well as laying foundations for the Transition Phase (2025 onwards).

This phase will test possible local backbone structures, or a new partnership arrangement, with inclusive and collaborative governance sharing power and distributing funding to identified priority areas.

Here is a visual representation of the OurCluj journey so far.

OurCluj Timeline

PHASE 4
(7 – 10 years)

Transition (exiting)

- Transition to a local backbone organization or a novel partnership arrangement.
- Establish collaborative governance arrangements.
- Monitor and evaluate results, adapt as needed.

PHASE 3
(4 – 7 years)

Transformation

- Enable stakeholders to co-design and implement collaborative, mutually reinforcing interventions.
- Cultivate communities of practice and shared learning.
- Monitor and evaluate results, adapt as needed.

PHASE 2
(2 – 3 years)

Development

- Develop and evaluate incubation projects.
- Co-design a vision for youth-centered city, with high-leverage systemic interventions for youth wellbeing (e.g. education).
- Develop a Theory of Change for OurCluj as a catalyst for this vision.

PHASE 1
(1 – 2 years)

Introduction (testing)

- Map and analyze challenges and opportunities for youth wellbeing.
- Identify priority areas for systemic transformation (e.g. education).
- Incubate co-design projects around priority areas.

Social design practices

Establishing the OurCluj living laboratory has included a range of simultaneous actions, encompassing three core design practices, with 10 recommended activities:

Imagining future:

Openly articulating possible futures

1. Creating physical and digital spaces for imagination
2. Mapping relationships
3. Engaging local artists and creatives

Remembering the past:

Actively confronting histories and spaces that present barriers to achieving desirable futures

4. Creating safe spaces for reflection
5. Mapping environments

Sharing power:

Taking actions to distribute power, reduce social inequities, and promote democratic principles

6. Identifying and empowering trust brokers
7. Funding what's value-driven, not just economically valuable
8. Establishing opportunities to experiment with processes
9. Embracing failure as a learning opportunity
10. Evaluating and sharing learnings

See research study Activating Values in Urban Transitions referenced in Part III for further details

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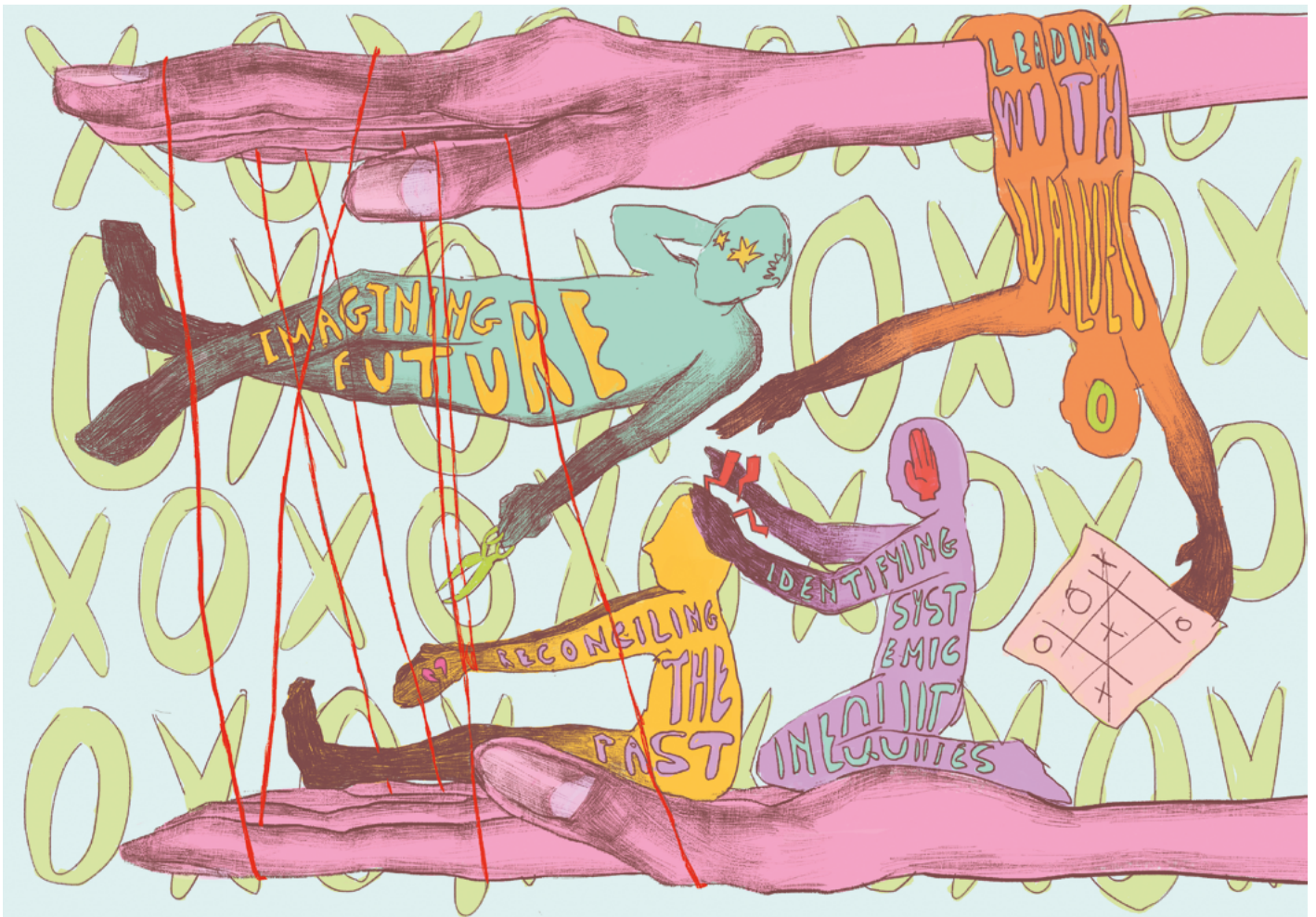
Artwork by Dariana Ilie,
ArtiViStory Collective

Building trust and cultivating care is central in all design practices. Trust and care emerge from "in-between" spaces, where relationships and connections take place: between different people, organizations, communities, places, stories, generations, fields of knowledge, mindsets, and perspectives.

These are liminal spaces where new relationships and collaborative pathways emerge as counterpoints to individualism and competition.

Creating a living laboratory that is owned and sustained locally means sharing values, and having a long-term strategy, persistence, and dedication. Building a community that carries these values is an essential function of OurCluj.

What is a social design practice?

Social design practice reimagines and reengineers existing social structures to be more resilient and just, and more conducive to keeping those living within it well. It is the creation of new social conditions, pathways, or structures in cities, organizations, communities, or teams. Social design aims to deepen civic or cultural engagement and increase creativity, resilience, equity, social justice, and wellbeing.
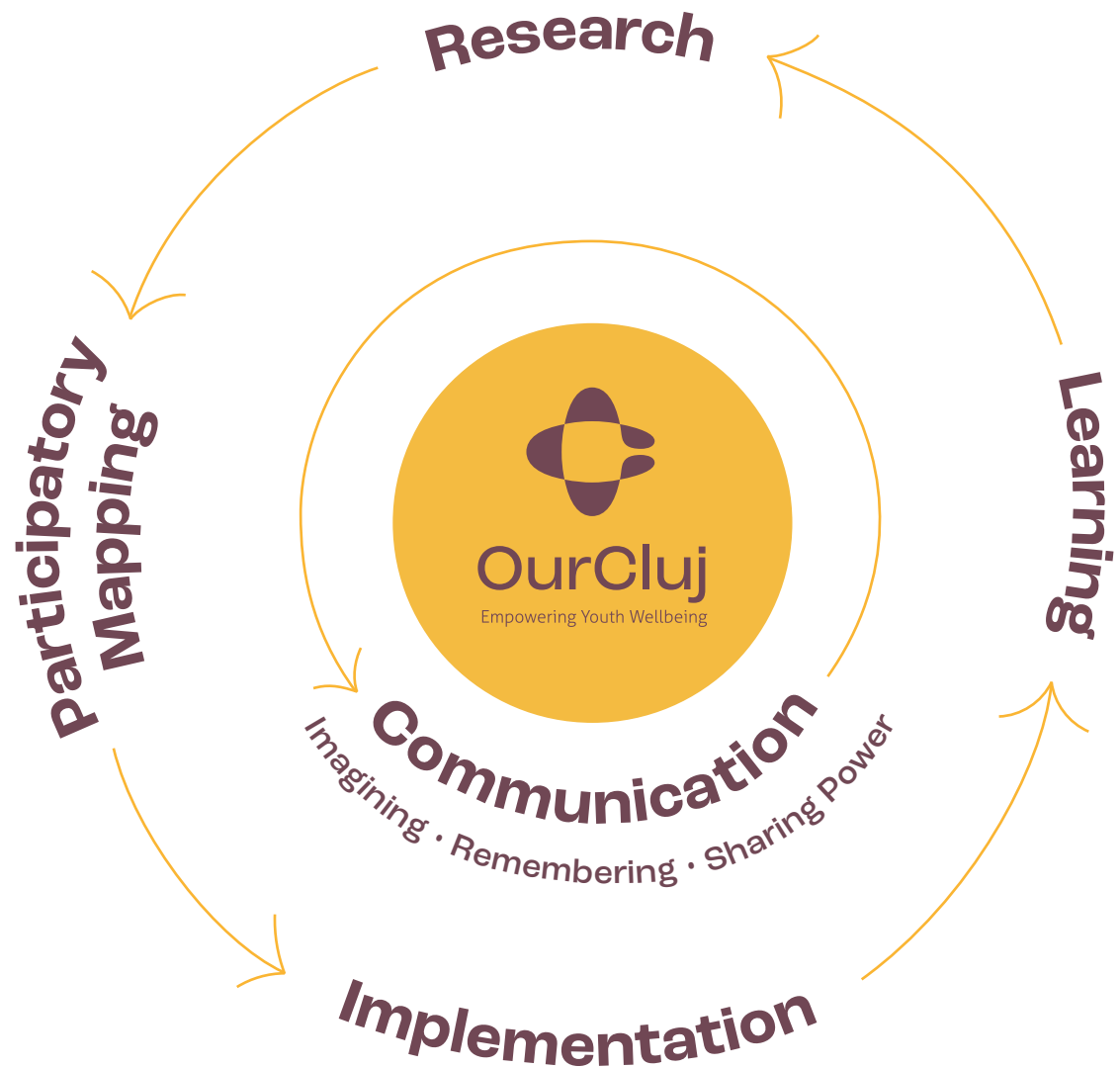
PART 3

● OurCluj social innovation projects

The OurCluj living laboratory is an arrangement with 22 social innovation projects developed over the past five years together with local government, non-profits, businesses, and academia.

They all address various aspects of youth wellbeing in the Cluj Metropolitan Area. They integrate design practices: **imagining future, remembering the past,** and **sharing power**.

There are five different types of social innovation projects, and they coexist in OurCluj:

- **Research projects** – interdisciplinary research addressing areas of youth wellbeing and urban innovation

- **Participatory mapping projects** – mapping of environments or particular topics with local partners and communities. The OurCluj living laboratory has at its core engagement of young people and communities. It has introduced participatory mapping as an engagement method to foster inclusivity, cultivate ownership, gather local knowledge, inform public debates and decision-making, and provide easily understandable visual representation of issues.

- **Implementation projects** – social innovations addressing the identified needs of young people.

- **Communication projects** – exchanging information and fostering shared understanding.

- **Learning projects –** monitoring, evaluation, and learning of participatory processes and projects, considering systems thinking perspective.

Research

Learning

Participatory Mapping

Implementation

Communication
Imagining · Remembering · Sharing Power

OurCluj
Empowering Youth Wellbeing

OurCluj living laboratory with five types of social innovation projects and three dynamic design practices of imagining, remembering and sharing power.

Legend for OurCluj projects

Types:
- Research
- Mapping
- Implementation
- Communication
- Learning

Priorities:
- Learning and education
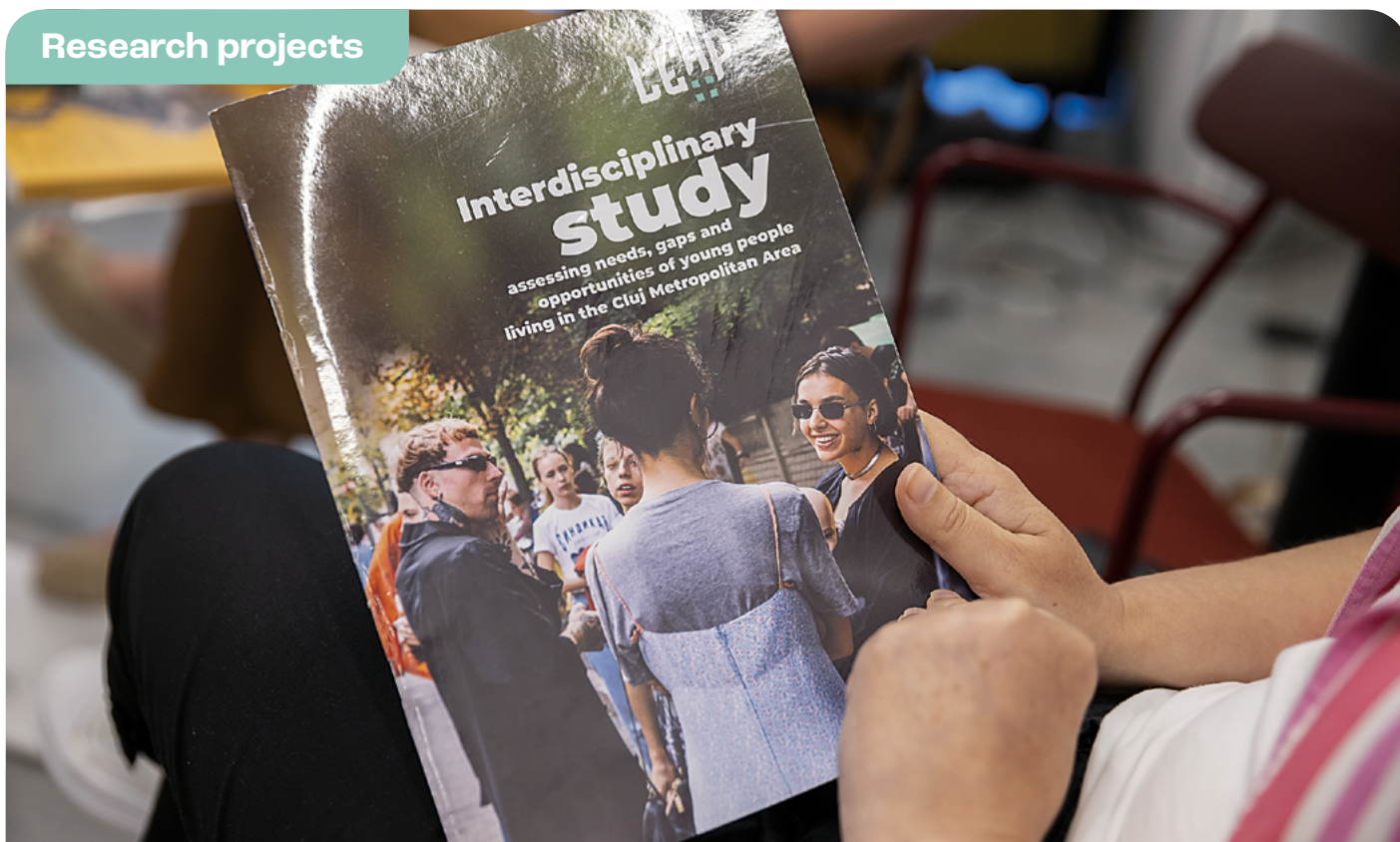- Health
- Social and civic innovation ecosystem
- Youth agency
- Enabling environment

Status:
- Completed
- Ongoing
- Proposal

LEAP study of young people's needs and opportunities

Type: Research **Priority:** All five priorities **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: Babeș-Bolyai University (UBB), School of Public Health with UBB FSPAC, Political Science, PONT Group, Cluj Cultural Centre supported by Advisory Group

> **A pioneering interdisciplinary study evaluating youth needs and opportunities in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, covering objective wellbeing (health, learning, agency, and enabling environment) and subjective wellbeing for youth (10 to 24 years old). The study was launched together with the municipality in January 2021.**

Challenge:

Despite a large youth population in Cluj, there is a lack of basic data about their needs and wellbeing that can be used to develop successful long-term interventions. Wellbeing is not well understood; it is perceived and imagined by youth and other citizens or institutions in various ways. Some understand it as a need to address basic living conditions, such as housing or employment. Others prioritize self-development, life satisfaction, and fulfillment.
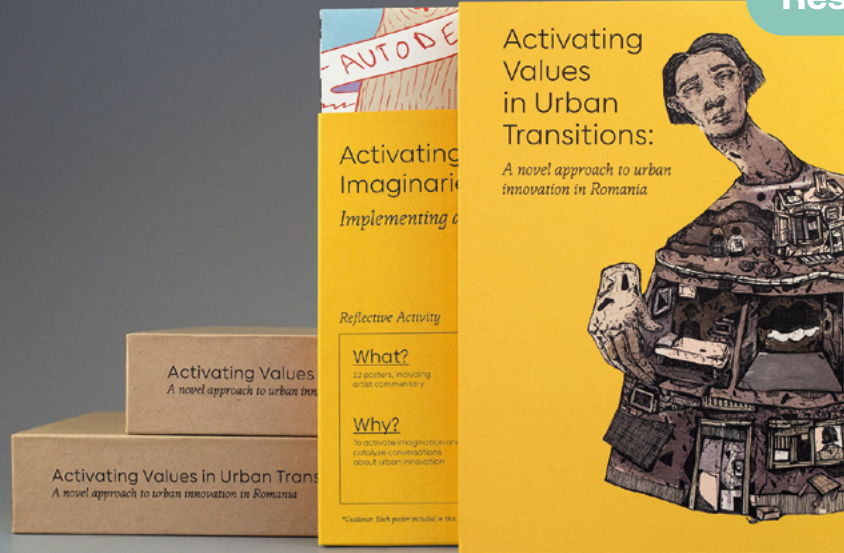
Approach:

The LEAP study employed a variety of methods, emphasizing stakeholder participation and an interdisciplinary approach. It identified priorities for action that would support the wellbeing of young people, considering how the city can enable better health, learning and education, and agency for Cluj's young residents.

Social impact:

The LEAP study is the first of its kind to assess the needs and opportunities of almost 100,000 adolescents and youth living in the Cluj Metropolitan Area. It provides a strong basis for the design of meaningful interventions across four key dimensions of wellbeing: health, learning, agency, and enabling environment.

How can I engage?

The continuation of this research, now called LEAP 2.0, is in development and coordinated by Babeș-Bolyai University, School of Public Health. Further information about the study is available at *leapcluj.ro.*

Activating values in urban transition - A novel approach to urban innovation in Romania

Type: Research   **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem   **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: SDG Colab and Engagement Lab at Emerson College
with UniversitArt Association and University of Arts and Design in Cluj-Napoca

> **A social research study documenting the co-creation of the OurCluj living laboratory, a multi-sectoral arrangement of social innovation projects that activates values of care and trust in urban transitions. It explores what it looks like to prioritize youth wellbeing before just economic growth in urban innovation. The study was launched locally in May 2022 and internationally during the World Urban Forum (WUF 11) in Katowice and at Devex World in Washington D.C.**

Challenge:

As cities grow in size and importance, negotiating just urban transitions is critical for our shared future. In 2019, a collective of urban innovators in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, began asking if a different set of values could guide urban transitions. What if goals of wellbeing were prioritized over just economic growth? What if care were prioritized over efficiency? What if the cultivation of trust was more important than expediency?

Approach:

Research examined OurCluj, a Values-Based Urban Living Laboratory (VBULL), which is a way of creating innovation in cities that is values focused, not market driven. It aims to activate values of care and trust for outcomes such as youth wellbeing. The study describes the work of VBULL in three parts: imagining futures, remembering the past, and sharing power. It explores how these practices contribute to urban innovation culture that is both unique to the Eastern European context and potentially applicable to cities in other regions. Visual art plays a central role in the study, not just as visualization, but as a part of the methodology.

Social impact:

This research highlights the role of intermediary cities and participatory engagements in forging transformative pathways in post-COVID-19 recovery. It provides 10 design recommendations for practitioners to use VBULL in their spaces. It is complemented by a reflective activity using 12 full-color artistic posters to provoke imagining alternative frames for urban innovation and communities.

How can I engage?

The book, accompanying reflective activity, and 12 artistic posters are available online: _ourcluj.city._

> " _This contribution is an excellent and visionary work; it is offering us light in some aspects we need and it is going to be part of the city strategy._
>
> – **Mayor Emil Boc,** _Cluj-Napoca Municipality at the launch of the study_

ArtiViStory

Type: Research **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem **Status:** Completed

Partners: UniversitArt Association of University of Arts and Design in Cluj-Napoca with SDG Colab, Engagement Lab at Emerson College, and Art Museum Cluj-Napoca

> ArtViStory stands for "artistic visual storytelling". This project created a space for collective imagination and engagement, delivering artistic documentation and visual storytelling of the OurCluj research and design processes through the perspectives of young local graphic artists.

Challenge:

Systemic challenges facing cities - including falling trust in government, social exclusion and climate change - necessitate deliberate imagining of alternatives to the status quo. How can artistic practice, with its unique ability to open our minds and reconnect us with our feelings, help us imagine new possibilities to engage with the world?

Approach:

Creation of the ArtViStory Collective, a group of graphic art students working with faculty members, to document the invisible relational aspects of the OurCluj journey. This included making elements of the creative process and values visible and felt. Two public exhibitions - Imagining Futures and Voices of Youth, along with a series of public talks - engaged youth and the broad public in the city through mediated visits. The project archive contains over 500 artworks, including illustrations, urban comics, graphic narratives, and animations.

Social impact:

The artists created the aesthetic and affective platform for meaningful participation in the design processes of OurCluj. They did this by creating a space for collective imagination, or civic imagination. This active imagination, shared with a community of people, served to bind different stakeholder groups and communities with a common purpose.

How can I engage?

Artworks and artists' commentaries in the research publication and accompanying reflective activity are available online: *ourcluj.city.*
For further information, reach out to the ArtiViStory Collective: *artivistory.com.*

What is civic imagination?

Civic imagination is the act of collectively envisioning better societies, or alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions. Before acting in the world, individuals and groups construct and find power in imaginaries. This necessarily requires being able to imagine the process of change, seeing oneself as capable of making change, feeling solidarity with others, joining collectives, and bringing imaginative dimensions to real-world spaces and places.

Artwork by Melinda Ureczki Lázár, ArtiViStory Collective

Reflective activity 3:

Activating urban imaginaries through art

We invite you to reflect on the artwork included here to explore the role of values in urban innovation. Beginning with the three discursive practices – imagining futures, remembering the past, and sharing power – take a moment to consider the kind of values present in your own community's efforts.

- What does this artwork make you think and feel?
- What stories are being told about urban futures?
- What stories are being told about the past?
- What values could drive urban transformation?

Reflective activity from the research study, Activating Values in Urban Transitions along with 12 posters and available at **www.ourcluj.city**

School of Possibilities

Type: Research   **Priorities:** Learning and education   **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: Youth Data Collective and SDG Colab with Engagement Lab at Emerson College, Cluj County Students Council (CJE), Ava Research and Tranzit House

> **The School of Possibilities (SoP) is an innovative research and engagement project that invites high-school students to reimagine education in Romania through the use of generative AI. Co-designed with young people, SoP's goal is to shape new practices for amplifying youth voices and hold institutions accountable for listening to them and improving the education system.**

Challenge:

High-school students in Romania confront a high-pressure environment, top-down teaching methods, and an overwhelming focus on exams and grades, resulting in high stress levels. Additionally, they often feel neglected, not listened to, and unsupported by teachers and the school system.

Approach:

Design of a hybrid physical and digital experience, using generative AI with AI-enabled chatbots that bring to life inanimate and animate "school agents," such as textbooks, exams, gradebooks, peers, teachers, etc. Interactions are facilitated through illustrated physical cards with QR codes, inviting young people to share their stories and imagine different approaches to education. This is analyzed in real time by the AI system, represented by a series of insights from the school agents, visible in the app or projected on the screen.

Social impact:

The initial testing of School of Possibilities took place at Tranzit House in January 2024 over three days, and engaged more than 275 students from different schools in the Cluj county. Students reported having a safe space for expression, feeling heard, feeling hopeful, and feeling empowered to potentially contribute to real change. The generative AI backbone of the process provoked curiosity and motivated interest and persistent participation. The findings will help inform Romanian educational reform.

How can I engage?

If you are a student, teacher, parent, educator, youth facilitator, policy maker, or someone who cares about education, join the Youth Data Collective to further shape the School of Possibilities: *schoolofpossibilities.org.*

> ❝ *It matters that high-school students are at the center of the Youth Data Collective to reimagine education in Romania. We have been part of the project design process and wish to get our voices heard.*
>
> *- **Daria Ciufudean,** President, Consiliul Județean al Elevilor Cluj*
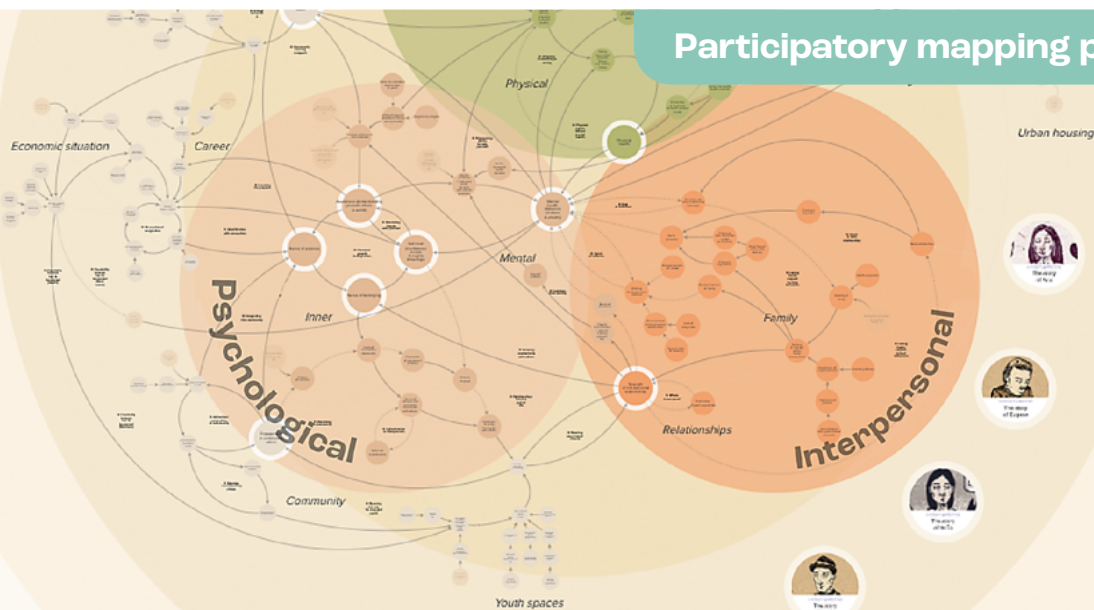
Wellbeing System Map

Type: Mapping	**Priorities:** All five priorities	**Status:** Ongoing

Partners: System Mapping Academy and SDG Colab with UBB,
School of Public Health, DASM, PONT Group, Wello and Rural Senses

> **A first-of-its-kind Wellbeing System Map of young people in Cluj, developed together with local stakeholders including youth. This interactive visual map of factors and relationships that influence youth wellbeing serves as a navigational tool, helping demonstrate complexity and possible solutions. The map is presented through systems stories" and personas.**

Challenge:

The interacting factors which influence youth wellbeing are often not considered from a holistic perspective. Innovations often focus on improving isolated factors, and not relationships between them. Instead of designing effective interventions based on a systems perspective, social innovation projects often only treat symptoms, and therefore do not address the root causes of the challenges they aim to address.

Approach:

This project engaged over 40 local stakeholders - public, private, academic, and civic - in participatory mapping to identify factors influencing youth wellbeing, and the connections between them. This process involved creating four systems stories, featuring personas representing the diverse lives of Cluj's youth. These stories illustrate the interconnectedness between various factors of youth wellbeing, and present an accessible approach to understanding that wellbeing is relational.

Social impact:

The project revealed strong interdependencies between various factors that influence the wellbeing of the city's young residents. They include individual (psychological, physical, and interpersonal), societal, and environmental factors. It identified very low awareness of the role of mental wellbeing, the critical role of education in helping youth to flourish, multiple inequalities to access services, and a lack of prioritizing the built and natural environment.

How can I engage?

Explore the Wellbeing System Map and the identified connections in the system. Engage with the help of personas and systems stories by visiting *ourcluj.city/system-map*.

What is participatory mapping?

Participatory mapping is a method for engaging communities in the planning process. It involves the creation of various maps by local communities, often with the participation of supporting organizations. Participants contribute their experiences, details of their relationships, and ideas. They identify key stakeholders, services, and the areas they serve. They can pinpoint gaps and facilitate collaboration in a given geographical area, such as a neighborhood, a city, or metropolitan area.

Cluj Youth Mapping

Type: Mapping   **Priorities:** Youth agency   **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: Cluj Youth Federation and SDG Colab with PONT Group, Cultural Students House Cluj-Napoca, Youth Center of Cluj-Napoca and Municipality Cluj-Napoca

> A participatory mapping project with the objectives of identifying and mapping formal and informal youth organizations in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, exploring engagement with young people, and highlighting challenges and opportunities. The interactive visual map will foster inclusion and agency in participatory decision making, to improve the wellbeing of young residents in Cluj, while serving as an example to other cities in Romania, Europe, and the world.

Challenge:

Despite a vibrant youth eco-system in Cluj, there is a lack of awareness about numerous youth organizations and their activities. In addition, institutions working with youth do not share a collective vision, dedicate limited resources, and rarely include youth in decision making.

Approach:

The project is conducting participatory mapping of over 100 formal and informal youth organizations and their activities, working together with 25 volunteers, 15 youth workers, and over 15 core team members. 45 participants have been engaged in focus groups, helping to create a publically available visual map and a living database that serves to foster connections and collaborations between non-profit organizations, public administration, and the private sector.

Social impact:

The participatory process as well as the visual map, database, and a public-facing report, fostered collaborations among youth organizations and highlighted opportunities for youth engagement. The report
- Found education ranked as the top area of youth engagement
- Mapped available public financing and gaps
- Mapped key local, national, and EU policies and
- Identified opportunities for advocacy and concluded with a set of actionable recommendations.

How can I engage?

Read the project findings and its actionable recommendations, explore the visual map, or join organizations on the map as a volunteer or trainer via *mapping.clujforyouth.ro*

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Com'ON Cluj Mapping - The urban youth landscape through Com'ON Cluj participatory budgeting process

Type: Research   **Priority:** All five priorities   **Status:** Completed

Partners: PONT Group with UBB, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work

> The Com'ON Cluj Mapping project reviewed the impact of four editions of the pioneering Com'ON Cluj participatory budgeting process, which was first conducted in 2015. Since then, the process has resulted in over 800 small-scale innovation proposals. This work provided insights for future editions of the project, and explored how such processes can be scaled to contribute to the social innovation ecosystem in Cluj, and to impact the future development of communities and the wellbeing of Cluj's young residents.

Challenge:

Inadequate understanding of how to mobilize youth and local communities in democratic processes of deliberation and decision-making, in order to determine the best way to spend part of the public budget.

Approach:

Mapping different areas of focus across 800 ideas that came from over 520 informal groups, formed by more than 1,800 young people, with over 107,000 votes cast by the citizens of Cluj from 2015 to 2020. In the four editions, 260 initiatives were funded and implemented.

Social impact:

Outlining short and medium-term measures for future editions of Com'ON Cluj participatory budgeting, aiming for strategic enhancements alongside other civic, youth and city initiatives while shaping the program to become more inclusive, accessible, and prioritized by the Cluj municipality. In the reviewed Com'ON Cluj editions, an estimated 27,000+ young people (14 to 35 years old) were reached in Cluj-Napoca.

How can I engage?

Explore new editions of Com'ON at *comoncluj.ro*. Read the report available at *pontgroup.org*.

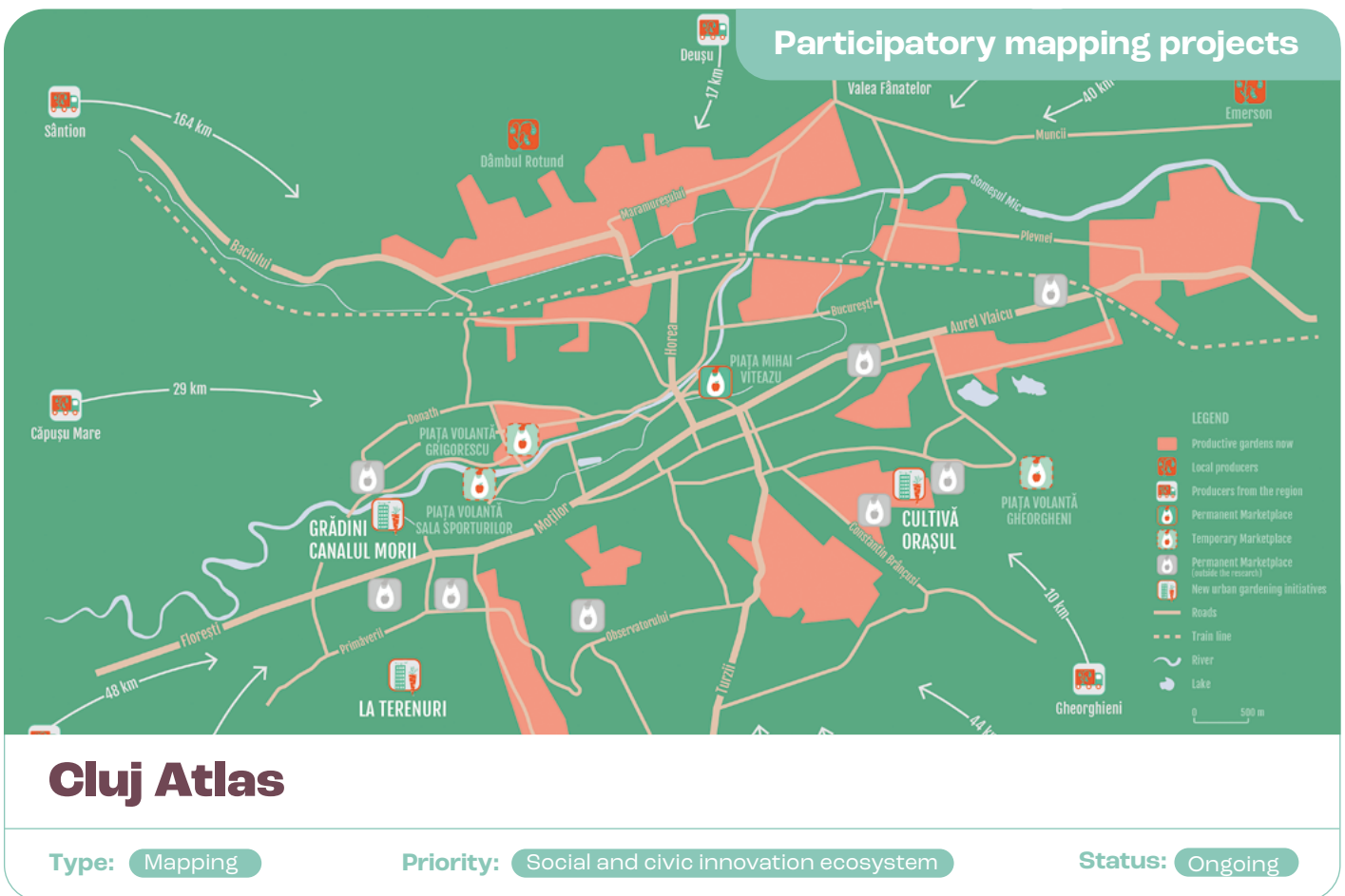*Cultural map showing the Hoștezeni community and emerging gardening initiatives in Cluj-Napoca from Cluj Atlas project*

Reflective activity 4:

Mapping environments through interactive walking tours

Your city is planning to significantly encourage urban gardening - from herb and vegetable gardens to beekeeping - and is organizing a public debate with diverse communities.

You are a young person who loves gardening and has recently moved into a new neighborhood. You organize an interactive walking tour to meet your neighbors and understand the surroundings, inviting them to take pictures of the places where they see opportunities for gardening. You ask them to share their stories with you and the community, and develop a visual map to inform the public debate.

You've been asked to present the community map and write a three-minute speech about your community's perspectives. Describe your community's views and ideas.

Cluj Atlas

Type: Mapping   **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem   **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: MiniMass and SDG Colab with University of Arts and Design in Cluj-Napoca, UniversitArt, ArtiViStory Collective, and artist Maria Brudasca

Cluj Atlas is a participatory mapping project, developing alternative cultural maps of Cluj from young people's perspectives. Envisioned as a series of visual maps depicting topics relevant for the wellbeing of communities, it has so far explored the past and present of urban gardening, and farmers' markets as alternative food networks in Cluj.

Challenge:

A need to explore communities and young people's perspectives on how local history and memory inform practices of urban innovation, and possible futures. What are the places most in need of attention to improve the wellbeing of communities? Where are physical resources lacking? What spaces in the city are most often forgotten?

Approach:

Developing participatory mapping workshops with young people, in collaboration with architects, sociologists, urban planners, anthropologists, and artists. This resulted in visual cultural maps on two topics; urban gardening and local food supplies. The first, explored the history of the Hoștezeni gardening community, and other community gardening initiatives, which supplied the city with fresh fruits and vegetables from the 16th century but was later almost completely demolished. The second, Cluj Atlas, drew attention to the importance of local food supply networks in the undeveloped green hinterland surrounding the city.

Social impact:

The participatory process tapped into a wealth of local knowledge that would otherwise not be readily available. Youth participants learned new insights and contributed their perspectives to address issues that directly impact them, such as growing urban-rural challenges and environmentally-friendly food networks in the Cluj Metropolitan Area.

How can I engage?

Reach out to OurCluj if you are interested in accessing the visual maps or further developing Cluj Atlas: *ourcluj.city.*

EduMapping

| **Type:** Mapping | **Priority:** Learning and education | **Status:** Completed |

Partners: Asociaţia de Dezvoltare Intercomunitară Zona Metropolitană Cluj (ADI ZMC) with C-EDU, SDG Colab, Cluj-Napoca Municipality, Cluj County School Inspectorate, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences

> **The EduMapping project reviewed the formal and non-formal education ecosystem in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, to gain a better understanding of the non-formal educational landscape. It included stakeholders' perspectives on key aspects of education such as accessibility, inclusivity, diversity, and financing. The report was launched in 2022.**

Challenge:

The Romanian education system has developed greatly in the past decades, however, it still faces difficulties with regard to quality, access, inclusivity, and resources. Cluj-Napoca is recognized for its formal education ecosystem, yet little is known about the non-formal education sector.

Approach:

Following the roundtable "Education for the 21st century – Working together to address challenges and opportunities in Cluj-Napoca", co-hosted by OurCluj with Cluj Cultural Centre, this work was informed by the LEAP study. Over 300 diverse educational stakeholders were surveyed to gain a comprehensive understanding of challenges and opportunities for young people in the non-formal learning ecosystem.

Social impact:

The research resulted in a report titled "EduMapping in Cluj Metropolitan Area", highlighting a need for connection between formal and non-formal education and providing valuable insights to open up further public conversations with educational stakeholders.

How can I engage?

To learn more and contribute, reach out to OurCluj, ADI ZMC or C-EDU.

Cluj Innovation and Experiment Fund (FIX Cluj)

Type: Implementation   **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem   **Status:** Ongoing

C-EDU with PONT Group, Municipality of Cluj-Napoca, Cluj Youth Federation, NTT Data Romania, Bosch, AROBS, Vitrina Advertising, BCR, Salt & Pepper and other partners

Cluj Innovation and Experiment Fund (FIX Cluj) is a pioneering social innovation fund in Cluj-Napoca, designed collaboratively with youth and entrepreneurs. Now in its second edition, it empowers young social entrepreneurs (aged 16 to 26), while fostering vibrant learning communities. It is one of the largest incubation programs in Romania focused on social innovation.

Challenge:

The current model of economic growth lacks financial and human resources to build a strong social and civic innovation ecosystem in Cluj-Napoca. Limited resources, financial and educational, are available to young people for development of social and civic innovations that improve the lives of communities.

Approach:

A first-of-its-kind co-design and locally owned social innovation and experiment fund in Romania, to strengthen the city's social innovation ecosystem. The program supports teams of young people through grants of up to 50,000 Euros to experiment, test, and develop their innovative ideas, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to become social entrepreneurs and contribute to their communities.

Social impact:

Raising awareness about the importance of social and civic innovation, and contributing to strengthening the local social innovation ecosystem. FIX Cluj's first and second editions each activated 40 teams of social innovators and awarded 10, while providing supportive communities and learning to all teams.

How can I engage?

Create a team with your friends aged between 16 and 26, and apply to the annual call with one of your social innovation ideas, or join the community of social innovators. Read more at *fixcluj.eu*

> *I applaud the QRSign, a social startup led by a group of dedicated young deaf people passionate about helping others, to come up with QR codes with insightful tourist information on points of public interest with translations including the Romanian sign language and thus making Cluj a more inclusive environment."*
>
> *– FIX Cluj participant*

Com'ON NEXT

Type:	Implementation	Priority:	All five priorities	Status:	Ongoing

Partners: PONT Group with Cluj Youth Federation, Municipality of Cluj-Napoca, including the Inclusion Board and a wide range of public, private, and third sector partners

> **Com'ON NEXT is a new and expanded edition of a participatory budgeting program with youth, first introduced in 2015. Young people can obtain small-scale funding for their innovative initiatives through community voting - and part of the public budget is invested based on youth and community decisions.**

Challenge:
Lack of financial and human resources to build a strong social and civic innovation ecosystem in Cluj-Napoca. Young people want to engage and share their ideas, but lack support and resources, financial and educational, leading to disparities in community involvement across different areas.

Approach:
Empowering youth through participatory budgeting, fostering collaboration and innovation for their development. Com'ON NEXT creates a participatory context through which young people - aged 14 to 35 - participating in the program become more responsible, active, and adaptive, offering role models to their peers while building trust and care in the community. In turn, the social environment becomes more inclusive, sustainable, and more supportive towards young people.

Social impact:
In this program, estimated to reach over 27,000 young people, youth are enabled to address community challenges firsthand, gaining valuable experience. By involving the local community in providing feedback on their proposals, awareness of youth issues is raised, aiming to activate engagement of the local government in supporting and scaling up the Com'ON NEXT program, and contributing to building a stronger social innovation ecosystem.

How can I engage?
Join Com'ON NEXT and participate in workshops, talks, and activities, or co-create various processes through creative labs. See more at *comoncluj.ro.*

School of Health

Type: Implementation   **Priority:** Health, Learning and education   **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: Wello Association with PONT Group, Interact, Learning QUB, Inim Institute, Cluj County Student Council and Cluj County School Inspectorat

> The School of Health aims to improve the wellbeing of children and families by promoting and empowering healthy lifestyle choices. A comprehensive health program comprising learning workshops, camps, and the use of digital technology operates in partnership with 50 schools.

Challenge:

Educational policies prioritize school performance and competencies without integrating consideration of the wellbeing of students, teachers, and the educational environment. There is a lack of public resources dedicated to strengthening social innovation infrastructure in urban environments.

Approach:

Prioritizing youth, ensuring their voices shape the development process for the program. By engaging schools and building a strong network of partners, the School of Health creates digital and physical solutions that are well adapted to the needs of young people. This includes creating health and lifestyle educational programs for children and families, developing a safe platform for sharing knowledge in community settings, and changing mindsets in schools to highlight mental wellbeing, physical activities, and healthy nutrition.

Social impact:

The project is reaching 50 schools in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, and working to reduce youth obesity and mental health challenges by promoting healthy habits and lifestyle choices. This will lead to improved health indicators and a decrease in mental health issues, reaching an estimated 100,000 young people.

How can I engage?

Join the School of Health workshops and help shape and test digital solutions with young people, educators, and parents at schools and in summer camps. Read more at *wello.ai/school.*

Learning QUB

| **Type:** Implementation | **Priority:** Learning and education | **Status:** Ongoing |

Partners: Cluj Cultural Centre with PONT Group, WELLO, Babeș-Bolyai University, Municipality of Cluj-Napoca, Cluj Youth Federation, Cluj County Students Council, Rural Senses, UAD, ArtiViStory with LEAP and Com'ON projects

> **The Learning QUB project includes creation of QUB, a STEAM resource center, which collaborates with 35 schools in the Cluj School Network (CSN). The project works to enhance education in local communities through co-creation of projects driven by young people's ideas.**

Challenge:

The Romanian education system struggles to adapt to students' interests and a rapidly changing society. It lacks opportunities for collaborative learning, blending disciplines, and sharing knowledge. This is widening an existing skill gap preventing young people from flourishing in the 21st century.

Approach:

The creation of a QUB community space for open schooling and STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics), which fosters lifelong learning among pupils. QUB is offering curriculum-linked teaching resources, a STEAM club for peer support, career networking, and student co-creation in collaboration with 35 schools in the Cluj Metropolitan Area.

Social impact:

Through student, teacher, and community involvement, activated through workshops and clubs, there's a deeper appreciation for collaborations and how both science and art contribute to society. Estimated to have reached over 150 teachers and 9,000 children and young people over the past four years.

How can I engage?

Join the QUB learning program, or contribute your ideas on how to shape further initiatives. Read more at _qub.education._

EduAlert

Type: Implementation   **Priority:** Learning and education   **Status:** Completed

Partners: Romanian Health Observatory with Cluj County School Inspectorat, Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Preventis Association, and New Horizons Foundation

> **EduAlert was among OurCluj's first experimental projects. A technology-supported program in five Cluj-Napoca schools helped children stay in school by combining predictive technology for assessing dropout risk with evidence-based psychological interventions.**

Challenge:

Romania has a very high rate of school dropout and absenteeism. Early school leaving is linked to unemployment, social exclusion, poverty, poor physical and mental health, and health risks such as smoking and being overweight. Schools lack innovative approaches to address these challenges.

Approach:

AI and an early warning system design was used to identify students at risk of dropping out, to enable mentoring and psychological support interventions. This created long-term relationships between mentors and mentees, leading to a stronger social bond in the community.

Social impact:

The early warning system decreased absenteeism, lowered school dropout rates, and improved digitalization in schools. Mentorship proved key to increasing graduation rates and improving future professional success. EduAlert reached 490 direct beneficiaries and over 1,800 indirect beneficiaries.

How can I engage?

This experimental project is now complete. Valuable insights can be obtained from the Romanian Health Observatory or OurCluj at *observatoruldesanatate.ro.*

MagicHelp

Type: `Implementation` **Priority:** `Social and civic innovation ecosystem` **Status:** `Completed`

Partners: Magic Association with Cluj-Napoca City Hall, Cluj County School Inspectorate, Autism Transylvania, Kaufland Romania, Hoteliers Association Cluj-Napoca, EBS Radio, and pediatric hospitals in Cluj

> **MagicHelp, one of the first experimental projects by OurCluj, engaged local partners through the Cluj Helping Network and brought communities together around children with serious illnesses.**

Challenge:

Quality medical care for children with serious conditions is often postponed or abandoned because their parents lack financial resources.

Approach:

A network of partners collaborated via an app and discount card to offer families of children with serious conditions convenient, free, 24/7 access to accommodation, meals, transportation, and medical supplies.

Social impact:

By mobilizing access to resources, the project reduced financial burdens associated with diagnosis and enhanced access to care. The platform became a modern resource for information, support, and telemedicine services for youth in Romania.

How can I engage?

This experimental project is now complete. Valuable insights can be obtained from the Magic Association or OurCluj. Read more at *asociatiamagic.ro/MagicHELP.*

Histrioniada

Type: Implementation **Priority:** Youth agency **Status:** Completed

Partners: Cluj County Students Council (CJE) with Cluj Youth Federation, local artists and schools

> **Histrioniada is a long-standing theater festival organized by high-school students. It enables and inspires students nationwide to pursue their acting dreams, and embraces diversity by welcoming participants from all backgrounds.**

Challenge:
The educational system in Romania lacks encouraging creative expression and inclusion of theater and performance in curricula. This results in disinterest or discourage young people from pursuing theater as a career due to societal biases, limiting their opportunities for growth.

Approach:
Organizing a high-school theater festival supported by professional artists and showcasing performances from six theater groups, tackling themes such as depression, violence, self-image, and the importance of imagination. As well as performances, students engaged in diverse workshops led by experts.

Social impact:
Engaging more than 300 high-school students and 60 volunteers, promoting art and culture in Cluj and encouraging young talent to pursue careers in the arts. While targeted at high-school students, Histrioniada attracts a diverse audience of all ages. The festival promoted social skills and helped build relationships and community.

How can I engage?
Join as a participant, spectator, or volunteer at the annual event. Find more information at _facebook.com/histrioniada._

Cluj for Youth 2030

Type: Implementation   **Priority:** Enabling environment   **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: PONT Group with Municipality of Cluj-Napoca, Cluj Youth Federation, and ADI ZMC

This project involves the development of a dedicated youth strategy for the Cluj Metropolitan Area. It aims to consolidate a fragmented youth ecosystem, while exploring governance models and ensuring foundations are laid for young people to secure better future prospects and the agency to be involved with decisions that impact them.

Challenge:

Cluj-Napoca, with its large youth population, 10 universities and over 40 schools, lacks an overarching vision and a strategic plan for young people. Existing city strategies do not address the needs and challenges of young people effectively, and young people are mostly not engaged in decision making about urban development.

Approach:

Consulting diverse city stakeholders including youth, and creating a youth strategy to empower young people in the Cluj Metropolitan Area. This is done by integrating communities and promoting collaborative decision-making for sustainable development, while implementing practices of monitoring and evaluation.

Social impact:

Prioritizing youth wellbeing and learning, agency, and active participation, providing support, and empowering an estimated 82,000 young Cluj residents aged 14 to 35 to thrive.

How can I engage?

Engage with the Cluj-Napoca Consultative Youth Council. Read more: *clujforyouth.ro.*

> " *Fondation Botnar's presence in Cluj works kind of like a magic mirror for our ecosystem: it makes us see each other better - even with the ones we had our backs turned to - and shows us all in better colors and moods. It is what we needed to work together.*
>
> **– Oana Buzatu,** *Innovation Strategy Officer at Cluj-Napoca municipality*

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Knowledge-based Youth Development Strategy (KYDS)

Type: Implementation   **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem   **Status:** Proposal

Partners: Intercommunity Development Association Cluj Metropolitan Area (ADI ZMC) with UBB Social Work Department, UNICEF, and Alt Art

> KYDS is a new project proposal to improve young people's wellbeing within segregated and rural communities in the Cluj Metropolitan Area. The project seeks to focus on education and health initiatives, using participatory methods for assessment, policy input, and intervention implementation, in line with the European Child Guarantee initiative.

Challenge:

Ensuring young people's rights in Romania faces hurdles such as unequal access to healthcare, education, and job opportunities. This particularly affects young people with disadvantaged backgrounds, including marginalized groups like the Roma community, who are often confronted with systemic violence, discrimination, and poverty.

Approach:

Focusing on young people aged 10 to 18 from segregated and rural communities, the project will use community-based methods like Participatory Action Inquiry to consult directly with young people and communities, and tailor interventions according to their needs.

Social impact:

Through targeted interventions developed in collaboration with communities, KYDS seeks to empower and protect young people, ensuring their wellbeing and a brighter future.

How can I engage?

This proposal is in development. If you are interested in participating, reach out to OurCluj or ADI ZMC: _clujmet.ro._

Third Place

Type: Implementation   **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem   **Status:** Proposal

Partners: Casa Tranzit with Cinema Arta, Reactor, ZIZ Art and Social Area, UBB Faculty of Theater, Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Letters and University of Arts and Design in Cluj-Napoca with a network of international partners

> **This project proposes to establish a Free Creative School for young people of diverse age groups in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, promoting creative engagement and critical thinking for holistic wellbeing. Additionally, an International Residency Network fosters cultural literacy and the exchange of knowledge and practices, as well as global awareness of youth wellbeing.**

Challenge:

Several studies, including the LEAP study and OECD Cultural Participation Barometer, show that encouraging participation in the cultural scene has a significant impact on young people's wellbeing, sense of agency, and involvement in the hands-on development of their communities and city. This is particularly important in Romania where young people lack agency and have been prone to risky behaviors, anxiety, and depression, according to UNICEF.

Approach:

Third Place proposes a novel collaborative framework engaging local cultural and academic partners for cultural, psychological, and social transformation. They provide spaces for creative learning and international exchanges, empowering youth to think creatively and critically, and to take action for their wellbeing and that of others.

Social impact:

The project seeks to put in place a multi-layered intergenerational framework for transformation, where youth and communities can explore new perspectives and connect with diverse cultures. It seeks to provide a hub for reflection and creativity, fostering youth agency, development, wellbeing, and mental health through cultural and creative engagement.

How can I engage?

Learn more by contacting Casa Tranzit: *tranzithouse.ro.*

Participatory development of the OurCluj visual identity

| Type: | Communication | Priority: | Social and civic innovation ecosystem | Status: | Completed |

Partners: Studio PUNKT with OurCluj project partners and SDG Colab

> To help communicate the core values of OurCluj – trust and care – as well as its story and mission, a year-long process worked with local partners to develop the OurCluj visual identity. Local partners were asked what OurCluj meant to them. The process resulted in a logo, a collection of visual elements, and a concept of "in-between" spaces - between generations, ethnicities, fields of knowledge, mindsets, communities, organizations, and projects - where trust and care emerge.

Challenge:

After almost four years of experimentation and research, the OurCluj living laboratory needed a consistent visual identity to create recognizable representation of the initiative across communication channels, and with partners. It sought to represent the invisible and the vulnerable, rather than the visible and the dominant.

Approach:

Starting in Spring 2023, the participatory process culminated in a branding workshop in May at the Cluj Youth Center. Grantees, partners, and various youth groups built on extensive research and consultations to co-create visual and verbal vocabulary to inform the OurCluj visual identity. Partners provided feedback on the initial brand identity, which was refined, finalized, and tested at OurCluj Meetups before the OurCluj Brand Guide was shared.

Social impact:

Over 35 representatives from diverse OurCluj grantees and partners including youth groups, businesses, local government, artists, and educators contributed to the creation of OurCluj's visual identity. OurCluj is committed to continuously listening to the changing community and making adjustments to ensure that its visual identity remains relevant and meaningful.

How can I engage?

The OurCluj Brand Guide is available for all partners. Reach out to OurCluj: *ourcluj.city.*

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OurCluj Meetups

Type: Communication **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: SDG Colab with UBB School of Public Health, Cluj Youth Federation (FTC), Cluj Cultural Centre, PONT Group, C-EDU, Wello and School of Health, and Cluj County Students Council (CJE)

OurCluj Meetups are informal gatherings of existing and new partners. Meetups are co-designed caring and listening meetings, which foster open conversations, imagination, and critical thinking, all aimed at fostering trust and sharing ideas for youth wellbeing.

Challenge:

A need for deep listening, open conversations and story-telling to cultivate trust and care among local non-profits including youth, local administration, entrepreneurs and businesses on how to collectively address social challenges and create opportunities for young people.

Approach:

Co-hosting a series of caring gatherings and organizing each Meetup with a different local partner in an urban space of their choice. Designing positive experiences to make participants feel secure and valued. Introducing diverse topics related to the wellbeing of Cluj's young residents, with the co-host sharing personal stories and sparking engaging conversations.

Social impact:

Co-hosted seven Meetups, each with 20-60 participants coming from diverse communities and backgrounds, in different public spaces including schools in the city. Meetups cultivated trust and care through remembering the past, imagining future, and exploring how power can be distributed.

- **First Meetup:** June 27, 2022
Co-hosted with UBB, Department of Public Health (at Stables)
Theme: Youth wellbeing through LEAP study

- **Second Meetup:** March 31, 2023
Co-hosted with Cluj Youth Federation (at Casa de Cultura a Studentilor)
Theme: Cluj Youth Mapping

- **Third Meetup:** May 17, 2023
Co-hosted with Cluj Cultural Centre (at QUB, Cluj Hub)
Theme: Reimagining Education

- **Fourth Meetup:** August 18, 2023
Co-hosted with PONT Group (at Planetarium Cafe during Hungarian Days)
Theme: Alternative narratives of Cluj

- **Fifth Meetup:** October 4, 2023
Co-hosted with Cluster of Education (at Home Abroad during Cluj Education Days)
Theme: Systemic perspective of youth wellbeing and the role of education
Launch of the Wellbeing System Map of Youth in Cluj

- **Sixth Meetup:** March 7, 2024
Co-hosted with Wello and School of Health (at Iuliu Haţieganu School)
Theme: Cultivating health & wellbeing of communities

- **Seventh Meetup:** April 19, 2024
Co-hosted with Cluj County Students Council (at Avram Iancu Theoretical High School)
Theme: From roots to fruits: Nurturing connections

How can I engage?

For the next OurCluj Meetup, reach out to OurCluj: *ourcluj.city.*
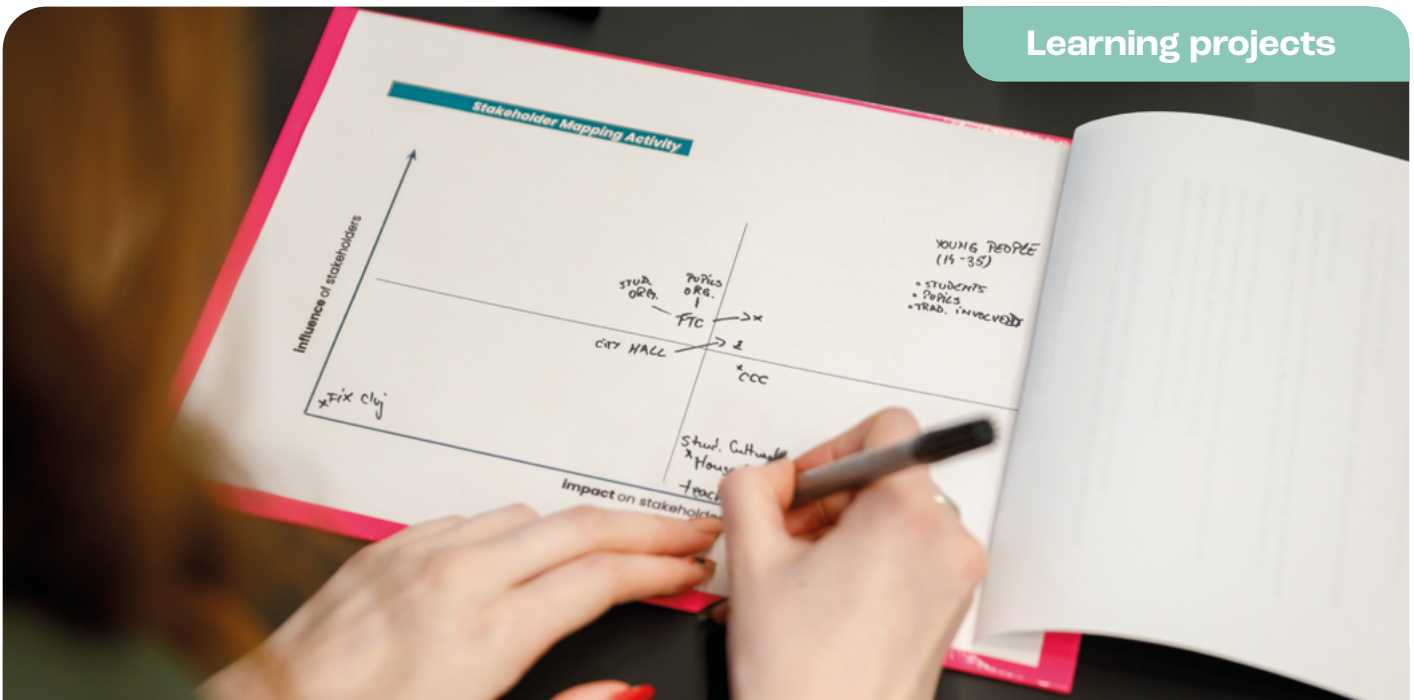
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) for OurCluj

Type: Learning   **Priority:** Social and civic innovation ecosystem   **Status:** Ongoing

Partners: Rural Senses with Wello, Cluj Cultural Centre, PONT Group, C-EDU and UBB School of Public Health with SDG Colab

> In 2023, OurCluj introduced MEL for its social innovation projects through data-driven evaluation and learning, integrating the Social Return on Investment (SRoI) framework for impact assessment. Over time, these efforts will eventually lead to a locally owned MEL for OurCluj as a whole, while serving communities and funders, and informing the future design of OurCluj.

Challenge:

A need for better understanding of the social impact of individual innovation projects and OurCluj as a whole. This would improve the design of the living laboratory, guide need-based priority interventions, enhance collective learning, ensure effectiveness, and provide accountability, all helping to increase the benefit to communities, social innovators, funders, and the city over the long term.

Approach:

Rural Senses' AI-supported data and learning platform has been used to support the monitoring and evaluation of OurCluj projects. This has included integrating evidence from OurCluj research studies, listening to projects' and funder's needs, and incorporating collective feedback to inform future outcomes and the OurCluj's Theory of Change. This began with monitoring four social innovation projects - School of Health, Learning QUB, Com'ON NEXT, and Cluj Innovation and Experiment Fund (FIX Cluj) - and their impact on beneficiaries, and applying Fondation Botnar's Evidence to Action Framework.

Social impact:

Offering hands-on evaluation training including setting a Theory of Change with individual projects, targets and indicators, empowering participants to understand organizational processes, while also educating youth about impact evaluation through the online OurCities program.

How can I engage?

Join workshops to learn data collection skills and become a data collector for OurCluj projects. Stakeholders can also access dashboards, collect data, and provide feedback. Learn more by contacting OurCluj or Rural Senses: *ruralsenses.com.*

PART 4

● **Collaborative governance**

In 2024, OurCluj embarked on a deliberate process to design a collaborative governance and funding model that is locally owned, and developed this together with interested local partners.

Why is OurCluj seeking a collaborative governance and funding model together with Fondation Botnar?

- **The local community knows best what its needs are, and is best placed to design an inclusive process** that involves youth from all backgrounds in shaping the OurCluj governance
- **Funding decisions should be taken by the local community,** not by external funders who are often disconnected from the needs of the community
- **The collaborative governance arrangement could help Cluj-Napoca in attracting additional funding – both locally and internationally** – for youth wellbeing and social innovation projects, increasing the sustainability of the initiative
- **By developing a strong multi-sectoral platform together, we can enable more voices to be heard,** including those that are currently not represented in OurCluj

What is collaborative governance?

Collaborative governance is a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage with non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process. Such processes are formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, and aim to make or implement public policy, or manage public programs or assets, including funding.

Four models have been suggested for the next five years of the OurCluj project, and these are currently under discussion. Other models may also emerge.

1. Individual projects

Funding individual projects over the upcoming years.

2. External independent intermediary organization

Funding an intermediary organization, national or international, external to the Cluj ecosystem to manage funds on behalf of Fondation Botnar, with a local steering committee where power is shared and youth included.

3. Existing intermediary organization in the Cluj ecosystem

Funding an intermediary organization from the Cluj ecosystem, to manage funds on behalf of Fondation Botnar for Cluj, and including a steering committee.

4. New intermediary organization in the Cluj ecosystem

Fund a new inclusive intermediary organization from within the Cluj ecosystem, created by existing or new interested OurCluj partners, where power is shared.

Artwork by Evelina-Maria Grigorean,
ArtiViStory Collective

Reflective activity 5:

Sharing power

It is 2040. You are the new Executive Director of the OurCluj living laboratory for youth wellbeing. You have successfully secured unprecedented new funding for social and civic innovation from the EU, local businesses and international foundations.

You've been asked to propose three new members of the OurCluj Governance Board to foster diversity and inclusion.

Prepare a three-minute speech presenting these candidates, explaining why their experience and expertise matter for the future. Describe why they will be successful in contributing to the OurCluj mission.

Theory of Change for OurCluj

For OurCluj, social innovation and deliberate participatory design, including governance, have a key role in advancing the wellbeing of young people and communities.

The OurCluj living laboratory believes that participatory engagement and collaborative decision making with those directly impacted - young people, educators, families, and communities - is transformative not only for them, but for social innovators, entrepreneurs, activists, researchers, local government, and the city itself.

The idea of who designs the future, and how, is crucial. This is at the core of the OurCluj's Theory of Change and systems transformation.

The first outline of the **Theory of Change** for OurCluj was developed with participants in 2021. It highlighted activities and tactics to achieve outcomes such as raising public awareness about wellbeing, engaging and empowering youth in Cluj, building strong social infrastructure, influencing the city strategy, and planning to integrate youth wellbeing. The image below is an artistic interpretation of the Theory of Change that we are aiming to achieve, with inputs, activities, and outcomes, in the form of a tree.

The OurCluj Theory of Change is evolving and needs an update. In this phase of the living laboratory, OurCluj is an interconnected arrangement of social innovation projects, addressing key areas impacting youth wellbeing in Cluj. Taking a systems view, OurCluj is more than the sum of its individual projects. It involves understanding the relationships, interactions, and feedback loops that exist within and between projects and their networks. Developing a **Theory of Systems Change** with OurCluj partners would be beneficial, allowing projects to learn from and reinforce each other.

What is the Theory of Change?

The Theory of Change is a roadmap that lays out how a project or program expects to create meaningful change. It outlines the causal pathways between actions and desired outcomes, identifying the steps needed to achieve specific goals. It is usually used for a linear, project-based context.

What is the Theory of Systems Change?

The Theory of Systems Change takes a broader and more dynamic view over time. It is a way of understanding how complex systems, like organizations or cities, evolve and transform over a long period. It looks at the interactions between various parts of the system and how they influence each other (e.g. mental health and education), leading to changes in the overall structure or behavior of the system. It is used across various disciplines to understand larger-scale systemic shifts.

OurCluj logic model, illustration by Zsófia Bernát, ArtiViStory Collective

This artistic representation of the OurCluj logic model or Theory of Change shows how the model is intended to work. It presents the relationships among the resources, the activities, and the outcomes to bring about the desired change.

Imagining futures, sharing power

The **OurCluj living laboratory**, midway through its pioneering journey, stands as a beacon of hope, showcasing the potentially transformative power of bottom-up, collaborative, and inclusive approaches to social innovation and "**values work**" for societal and youth wellbeing.

As we reflect on the progress made thus far, let this workbook serve as a call to action for us to collectively imagine the future trajectory of OurCluj, and how power can be distributed and shared.

We imagine a future where locally-owned collaborative governance empowers young residents and inspires cities in Europe and across the world to prioritize wellbeing in 21st-century urban development.

OurCluj was spotlighted in the Financial Times op-ed, "Why We Need to Prioritize Wellbeing Over Growth," by Barbara Bulc, part of the Financial Times series Thriving Cities. This series tracks and highlights the most important initiatives and the policy issues that must be addressed to enable future generations to live healthier and more prosperous urban lives. The piece mentioned OurCluj as an example of promoting new approaches to urban development, which are creating change in people, organizations, and societies.

OurCluj
Empowering Youth Wellbeing

Com'ON Next

FIX Cluj Innovation and Experiment Fund

Cluj Youth Mapping

ArtiViStory

LEAP

School of Possibilities

School of Health

Wellbeing System Map

Learning QUB

Acknowledgements

Imaging Futures, Sharing Power

OurCluj, An urban living laboratory
for youth wellbeing

A workbook

Imagining Futures, Sharing Power

OurCluj – An urban living laboratory for youth wellbeing

A workbook

The OurCluj living laboratory is a pioneering 10-year urban innovation initiative in Cluj-Napoca, a vibrant intermediary city in Romania. OurCluj seeks to improve the wellbeing of young residents by creating a space for collective reflection and connection. It aims to cultivate a novel approach to urban innovation, by fostering change based on trust and care before just economic growth.

This workbook emerges midway through the OurCluj journey, in year five, when the project aims to create a locally owned collaborative governance and funding model, with and for the benefit of young people in the long term. Additionally, the workbook aims to share valuable knowledge with other cities and urban innovators around the world, highlighting how prioritizing youth wellbeing can serve as the cornerstone of 21st-century urban development.

OurCluj

Empowering Youth Wellbeing

www.ourcluj.city

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