



S.T.A.R.

Story Tours Alternative Routes

ERASMUS+ PROJECT

Policy Advocacy Paper

Recognizing Educational Walking Tours
as a Public Youth Work Instrument



This policy paper was created within the **S.T.A.R: Story Tours Alternative Routes** project, a transnational initiative that brings together organisations with experience in youth work, non-formal education, international volunteering, intercultural learning and community-based educational practices.

Coordinated by **Servizio Civile Internazionale APS** in Italy, the project involves **Space for Sustainable Development** in Jordan, **Projekte Vullnetare Nderkombetare** in Albania, **Center for Intercultural Dialogue Association** in North Macedonia, **Volonterski Centar Vojvodine** in Serbia and **Servei Civil Internacional de Catalunya** in Spain.



The project is co-funded by the **European Union** through the **Erasmus+ KA220 Cooperation Partnership** programme, with the support of the **Italian Youth Agency**. This support made it possible to develop shared methodologies, strengthen youth participation and promote Educational Walking Tours as tools for inclusion, active citizenship, digital skills and community engagement.

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1. Executive Policy Message

Across Europe and EU-accession contexts, public authorities face a converging set of challenges: declining youth participation, skills mismatches, weakened community cohesion, and limited mechanisms for engaging young people in democratic and local development processes. While strategies consistently prioritise active citizenship, social inclusion, and transversal skills, applied tools capable of delivering these outcomes at the community level remain under-institutionalised.

This policy paper advances a clear position grounded in multi-country research: Educational Walking Tours (EWTs) constitute a functioning youth work instrument that already delivers public value, yet operates outside formal policy frameworks. The absence of institutional recognition, quality systems, and sustainable financing prevents this proven methodology from being embedded, scaled, and safeguarded.

Based on mixed-methods research involving youth surveys, organisational interviews, and focus groups across multiple European and accession contexts, this paper calls on ministries, EU actors, donors, and local governments to formally recognise and integrate Educational Walking Tours into youth, education, cultural, and local development policy architectures.

Formalizing the EWT methodology is not the creation of a new programme. It is the consolidation of an existing one.

<p>1 KEY CHALLENGES ACROSS EUROPE</p>	 <p>Declining youth participation</p>	 <p>Skills mismatches</p>	 <p>Weakened community cohesion</p>	 <p>Limited mechanisms for youth engagement in democratic and local development</p>	
<p>2 POLICY GAP</p>	 <p>Although policies prioritise active citizenship, social inclusion and transversal skills, effective community-level tools remain under-institutionalised.</p>				
<p>3 CORE POLICY POSITION</p>		<p>Educational Walking Tours (EWTs) are a functioning youth work instrument that already delivers public value, but still operates outside formal policy frameworks.</p>			<p>The lack of institutional recognition, quality systems, and sustainable financing prevents the methodology from being embedded, scaled and safeguarded.</p>
<p>4 CALL TO ACTION</p>	 <p>MINISTRIES of youth, education, culture and local development</p>	 <p>EU ACTORS European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the EU</p>	 <p>DONORS Foundations, international financial institutions</p>	 <p>LOCAL GOVERNMENTS Cities, municipalities and regions</p>	 <p>This paper calls on them to formally recognise and integrate Educational Walking Tours into youth, education, cultural and local development policy architectures.</p>
<p>FORMALISING THE EWT METHODOLOGY IS NOT THE CREATION OF A NEW PROGRAMME. IT IS THE CONSOLIDATION OF AN EXISTING ONE.</p>					

2. The Policy Problem: Innovation Without Institutional Anchoring

Youth policy frameworks across Europe increasingly emphasise participation, non-formal learning, community engagement, and social cohesion. Yet, in practice, many of the most effective

methodologies delivering these outcomes remain confined to short-term projects. The research underpinning this paper identifies four systemic barriers:

- **Lack of formal recognition:** Educational Walking Tours are rarely recognised as youth work or educational methodologies. As a result, they remain marginal to public programming, excluded from youth policy instruments, and weakly connected to education and cultural frameworks.
- **Absence of sustainable financing mechanisms:** Implementation relies predominantly on temporary grants. This creates discontinuity, limits professionalisation, and prevents long-term territorial planning.
- **Fragmentation between policy sectors:** Youth, education, culture, tourism, and local development policies operate in silos. Community-based educational practices fall between mandates, lacking institutional ownership.
- **Insufficient quality and professional frameworks:** High-impact methodologies addressing sensitive community issues remain without standardised training pathways, ethical guidelines, or professional validation.

POLICY GAP

The consequence is structural underutilisation: a methodology that produces public value operates without public infrastructure.

3. What the Evidence Proves

The research emphasises that Educational Walking Tours are not experimental initiatives, but functioning youth work instruments delivering outcomes sought by public policy.

Youth development and learning

93.9% of participants reported satisfaction or high satisfaction; 87.5% reported improvement in digital storytelling skills; 75% reported increased confidence in leadership and teamwork. These results confirm strong pedagogical effectiveness, high engagement, and competence development aligned with employability, communication, and collaboration priorities.

Civic participation and social inclusion

Over 80% reported deeper understanding of social inclusion and local context. 62.5% reported increased motivation to engage with local social issues. This demonstrates that EWTs convert awareness into agency, positioning youth not only as learners, but as community actors.

Community-level public value

Educational Walking Tours created new spaces for dialogue; documented oral histories and marginalised narratives; re-activated public spaces as sites of memory and identity; and strengthened intergenerational and intercultural relations. The methodology operates as a place-based social intervention, contributing to cultural vitality and social cohesion.

Organizational and youth work development

The methodology expanded capacities in participatory facilitation, ethical engagement, community partnership building and applied digital practice. At the same time, organisations articulated clear needs for professionalisation, quality frameworks and institutional support, indicating readiness for structured integration.

What makes EWTs different and important

They are place-based and territorially embedded; youth-led and co-created; low-cost and high-engagement; simultaneously educational, civic and cultural; and immediately deployable at local level.



4. Why Policy Action Is Necessary

The research shows that the principal constraint on the EWT methodology is not effectiveness, but governance. When a practice consistently delivers transversal competences, civic participation, inclusion and community engagement, its sustainability cannot depend solely on organisational goodwill and fragmented funding.

At this point, public responsibility emerges. Formal recognition and integration are governance mechanisms required to protect quality and ethics, enable professional standards, stabilise financing and ensure continuity of public benefit.

5. Policy Position

POLICY POSITION

Educational Walking Tours should be formally recognised and institutionally integrated as a non-formal youth work instrument operating at the intersection of education, inclusion, culture and local development.

They should be treated not as events or tourism products, but as youth work infrastructure, in order to ensure ethical safeguards, accessibility and public accountability.

place-based | youth-led | low-cost | deployable at local level

6. Strategic Policy Framework

The research supports the establishment of a coordinated policy framework built on four pillars.

<p>1 Formal recognition and quality frameworks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise EWTs within youth, education and cultural policy instruments. • Establish competence and ethical standards. • Link learning outcomes to validation systems such as Youthpass, micro-credentials and national certification. 	<p>2 Sustainable financing mechanisms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate EWTs into municipal, regional and national budget lines. • Establish accessible public support schemes for community-based implementation. • Shift from project funding to programme-level investment.
<p>3 Cross-sector governance and territorial embedding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish coordination between youth, education, culture and tourism sectors. • Embed EWTs in local development, youth participation and cultural strategies. • Promote partnerships between municipalities, schools, youth organisations and heritage institutions. 	<p>4 Community empowerment and youth leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify regulatory access for community-based educational tours. • Prioritise initiatives that foreground marginalised narratives and dialogue. • Invest in organisational capacity and youth leadership pathways.

COST-EFFECTIVE PUBLIC VALUE
 Educational Walking Tours require limited infrastructure investment, rely primarily on existing public space, and are implementable by local youth organisations with modest public support. Their cost-effectiveness compares favourably to large-scale participation or employability programmes, while delivering multi-sector outcomes.

7. European and Strategic Relevance

Formal recognition of Educational Walking Tours directly contributes to the European Youth Strategy, particularly participation, inclusion and empowerment; national digital and competence agendas; democratic engagement and civic resilience; social cohesion and territorial development; and EU accession alignment through recognised youth work principles.

8. Call to Institutional Action

Actor	Institutional action
Ministries	Recognise, regulate and integrate Educational Walking Tours within youth, education and cultural policy architectures.
Municipalities	Embed EWTs in local development strategies, youth infrastructures and cultural programming.
Organisations	Ensure delivery, ethics, quality assurance, ongoing capacity building and youth engagement.
EU institutions and delegations	Support recognition pathways, pilot programmes and cross-border policy learning.
Donors	Prioritise institutionalisation, professionalisation and long-term frameworks over isolated project delivery.

9. Concluding Policy Perspective

Educational Walking Tours already function as public instruments without public infrastructure. They empower youth, activate communities, preserve heritage, foster inclusion, contribute to employability and cultivate civic participation.

Formal recognition is the next step from successful practice to sustainable public infrastructure.



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Educational Walking Tours (EWTs) are already delivering youth work, civic learning, inclusion and community value across Europe and EU-accession contexts. This paper calls for their formal recognition, sustainable financing and integration into youth, education, cultural and local development frameworks.

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Coordinator

