

## The Rural Civic Service to involve youth in local development

*The Rural Erasmus created by InSite aims to support project leaders in villages, to promote the vitality and creativity of rural areas and to enable young people aged 16 to 26 to get involved in the development of projects of general interest that strengthen social cohesion, promote heritage and improve the quality of life in the municipalities of regions Occitania, Corsica and Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur.*

### Fostering the vitality of villages

InSite is a French association, which vision is to recognise the challenges faced by rural areas, such as the lack of health and education infrastructures or of employment opportunities, but also to promote the great potential of these territories to build more dynamic, inclusive and resilient societies. Through its missions, InSite intends to promote the assets of these territories, in particular their natural and cultural heritage, local traditions and strong social cohesion.

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At the same time, the association wants to create more connections, especially with newcomers and project leaders from all backgrounds (local representatives, associations, shopkeepers, farmers etc.) to encourage collective dynamics.

The association counts on the energy of young people to achieve this and created the "Rural Erasmus" in 2019. First launched in the Occitania region (France), the programme is now also available in two other mountainous regions: Corsica and Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur.

### Involving youth in local development with the Rural Erasmus

InSite's "Rural Erasmus" consists of young people spending 6 months in a village to participate in local projects on 4 topics: Solidarity and social cohesion:

- Solidarity and social cohesion:
- Culture and heritage
- Environment and sustainable development
- Local development

The missions proposed by InSite within the framework of the programme aim to improve the quality of life and the resilience of the territories and to involve youth in local projects.

The activities proposed by local authorities (municipalities or associations of municipalities) are diverse and do not require any particular skills, apart from enthusiasm and a taste for teamwork. In 2020, a total of 41 missions were carried out in 38 municipalities with 22 young people, for example to support the development of an eco-village in Corsica, to meet with older adults to discuss their needs and promote home-stay accommodation, to run a co-working area or to support local initiatives launched after the first lockdown.



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New missions are available for the coming months, for instance to:

- [Improve sustainable mobility in the Communauté de Communes Pays de Forcalquier-Montagne de Lure](#) (Alps): the young people recruited will participate in the animation of workshops for pupils on the topic of mobility, in the mapping of the needs of inhabitants in terms of mobility and in the promotion of already existing sustainable mobility offers through participation to cultural and sports events.
- [Enhance the heritage of a medieval village in Larzac](#) (Occitania): by participating in promotional activities of the village, supporting the mayor's office in its application to obtain the "Most Beautiful Villages of France" label, and by designing new innovative activities.

The feedback from participants in the "Rural Erasmus" programme shows the usefulness of the initiative to acquire professional skills, such as the use of digital tools, public speaking, teamwork, coordination of different actors, but also the ability to listen to stakeholders and to adapt to the environment. Young people also reported a better knowledge of the rural environment and of territorial stakeholders.



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## Governance and resource

Young people who participate in the "Rural Erasmus" programme sign a Civic Service contract: a scheme that exists in France and in other European countries to support the professional insertion of young people while promoting missions of general interest. There are certain conditions to be eligible, such as being between 16 and 26 years old and not having done any Civic Service before, but it is a quite flexible scheme as no diploma is required and participants can keep a student or salaried activity in parallel. Although referred to as "rural Erasmus", this programme has a considerable advantage: it is not restricted to students and is not bound to a particular academic or vocational trajectory, thus reaching out to all young people. Young foreigners are also eligible, which facilitates more cultural exchanges.

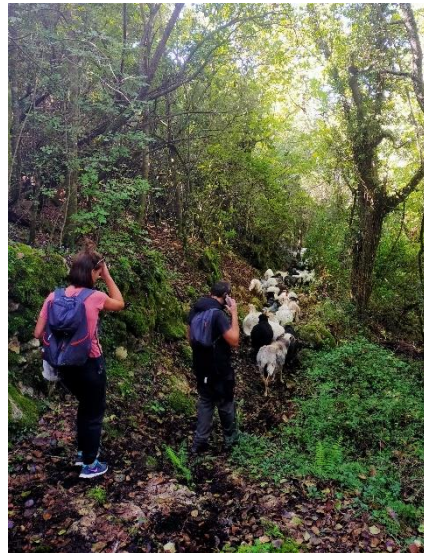
Young people in Civic Service commit to carry out their mission for a minimum of 24 hours a week for a maximum of 6 months. They are supervised by a tutor during their mission and receive a monthly financial allowance of €580. This allowance comes mainly from the French State (which pays €473.04) and is completed by the host organisation (which pays €107.58). The Civic Service is therefore attractive for small villages with few resources. Furthermore, although the provision of accommodation is not usually compulsory for the host organisation, InSite has chosen to integrate the housing component into the offer, by asking municipalities to provide accommodation to young

people. Most villages provide municipal housing in the village, which also facilitates the integration of young people into community life. At the end of their Civic Service, they also receive a certificate attesting to their participation in the programme, which is an important asset for professional insertion.

In the management of the Civic Service, available throughout France and for multiple missions, InSite acts as a real interface between rural stakeholders with projects and young people who wish to support these initiatives, develop their professional and interpersonal skills while experiencing daily life in a rural mountainous area. The association is responsible for the recruitment of young people and the administrative procedures - another benefit for small municipalities with limited resources and time. During the mission, InSite also participates in the communication about the project and continues afterwards to promote the actions carried out locally.

### Innovative aspect

Rural Erasmus programmes are multiplying in Europe with the objective of enhancing the skills of young people and promoting the advantages of life in rural and mountain areas among the younger generation. The originality of the missions proposed by InSite lies in the smart use of the Civic Service scheme for the profit not only of municipalities with few resources but also of all young people, not only students, who want to get involved in these territories. The initiative can be transferred to any type of specific contract for youth existing in other countries.



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