



Germany

**Topic:**  
Transformation

**Achievement:**  
Cross- Sectoral  
Pioneers Cross- Sectoral  
Policies and Governance

**Sector:**  
All CCS and Cross-  
sectoral

## Third Places - Houses of Culture and Exchange Furthering Democracy

Third Places is a funding programme in Germany addressing shared challenges of rural spaces in Europe through an alternative way of local cultural development. By consistently practicing a participatory approach they enable sustainable civic engagement, as demonstrated by 45 ongoing projects and an increasing local youth activity for positive transformation.

# Challenge

Rural areas face considerable challenges in coping with transformations. Related support and funding programmes often take, insufficiently, into account the specific needs and characteristics of these areas. Cultural spaces can be part of the solution if they are designed to be accessible and open for all. This is so far not always the case. Reciprocal trust between the town administrations and civil society, and trust building, are crucial for sustainable rural development and active citizenship. However, the considerably fragmented populations, as well as the fact that many cultural funding projects are developed in institutional or thematic silos so far, cause further problems.

# Solution

Encouraging positive change in rural areas can be achieved by a focus on rural strengths. Many people in rural areas engage on a volunteer basis or are active in associations. The objective of the Third Places programme is the empowerment of these strata of populations to go a step further with broader and more ambitious programmes. Project promoters are then assisted throughout the whole project in order to grow with their tasks. No one is left alone with questions during the whole concept and implementation phase.

# Impact

The Third Places programme is a large-scale demonstration of how civic engagement and democracy can be strengthened in rural areas. 45 projects are being implemented through a high-quality, open, cross-sectoral governance approach focused on active networking. Visible changes are emerging at the local level. High credibility is encouraging increased engagement from the next generation as active participants and stakeholders in Third Places projects.

# Milestones & Learnings

The launch of “Third Places” showed that an open, participatory process can deliver concrete results through broad, strategic stakeholder involvement.

Rigorous quality criteria are applied to all projects to ensure sustainable outcomes and strengthen civil society in rural areas.

The programme enjoys broad political support, including from opposition parties, thanks to the strong involvement of local partners and the creation of new, trust-based networks.

# Key Takeaways

- Territory-specific approaches are key success factors for cultural development and funding. Programmes focussing on rural areas have to be designed specifically by taking into account the local needs and characteristics.
- Furthering democracy in rural areas requires consequent cross-sectoral and open (governance) approaches on the level of public administrations as well as related to local implementation teams and project coordinators.
- Transformation processes require sufficient time in order to be sustainable. Continued encounters are needed for the engagement with local citizens. These processes must not end with the end of a funded project.

Learn more about Third Places on the [official website](#).