

SUMMARY

The Jeugddorpsraad Stramproy is a youth village council established in 2016 to enhance community life and youth participation in Stramproy, a rural village in the southern Netherlands with approximately 4 150 residents. It was initiated by local young people seeking a more continuous and meaningful role, beyond the region's traditional annual carnival celebrations where they are normally engaged. The council involves youth aged 13 to 16 and is supported by the Stramproy village council and the Weert municipality. The initiative hosts a variety of cultural, social, and leisure activities, offering rural youth the opportunity to lead and contribute to village life. It also serves as a bridge between young people and local governance, ensuring that youth voices are reflected in local decision-making.



Source: Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen

CONTEXT

The village of Stramproy, located in the southern Netherlands near the Belgian border, faces challenges common to many rural areas, including limited youth engagement, limited cultural activities, and low representation of young voices in local governance. Despite being part of the bigger Weert municipality, young people often lack platforms to develop leadership skills and participate in decision-making processes.

To address this gap, the youth-driven initiative Jeugddorpsraad Stramproy was established to create a space where young residents can propose and lead community projects. The council not only organises recreational activities, but also advocates for youth involvement in governance, thereby fostering stronger community ties and building social cohesion.

OBJECTIVES

- > **Strengthen youth participation** by offering opportunities to take active role in community planning and decision-making;
- > **Foster social cohesion and cultural enrichment** through a range of community events and initiatives for people of different backgrounds;
- > **Develop leadership skills** among young people to enhance their civic engagement and social responsibility;
- > **Promote intergenerational solidarity** through community service and activities that connect youth with older residents.

Themes: Demography, democracy and participation, youth, sports, culture and leisure.

Country: The Netherlands

Organisation(s):

- > Jeugddorpsraad Stramproy youth village council, NGO
- > Dorpsraad Stramproy village council, public authority
- > Weert municipality, public authority
- > Citizens, volunteers

Start & end date: 05/2016 - ongoing

Budget: N.A.

Funding sources:

- > Community contributions and voluntary support
- > Local municipality funding (2025-2027)

Website: <https://dorpsraad-stramproy.nl/jeugddorpsraad/>

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The Jeugddorpsraad Stramproy is **led by a team of ten youth members**, aged 13 to 16, who meet monthly to plan and coordinate community activities. Supported by the Stramproy village council and the Weert municipality, the youth council implements a variety of initiatives aimed at enhancing local engagement and cultural life.

The initiative started with the **formation of the council in 2016**, with early meetings focusing on **identifying youth needs** through meetings and consultations with people in the village and planning initial events. Since then, it has established itself as a dynamic platform for youth leadership and community involvement.

The council regularly organises **cultural and recreational events** to promote social interaction and community pride. Events such as the 'Hapjes & Sapjes' tour (a culinary waling event), escape rooms, pub quizzes, sport events and seasonal festivities attract both young people and adults, fostering a sense of community belonging.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the council organised a **community service project** where volunteers, including council members, prepared and delivered lunch packages to elderly residents, helping to alleviate social isolation.

The youth council also coordinates **educational visits** to the European Parliament, the last of which – in October 2022 – included a tour by Member of European Parliament Jeroen Lenaers and a fellow villager from Stramproy. The youth council is also a **member of the Dutch Rural Pact network** launched in June 2024, and the **EU Rural Pact**, which brings European governance and rural development practices closer to young members.

The council actively **collaborates with the Stramproy village council** to **advocate for youth perspectives in local policies**, ensuring that young voices are integrated into decision-making. A village council appointed member hosts **periodic meetings** with the youth council to ask for input.



RESULTS

- > **Enhanced youth participation** in community life, with over **200 young people engaged** since 2016;
- > **Increased social connections and cultural offer in the village** through community events and activities that connect diverse age groups and **strengthened intergenerational solidarity** through community service projects, including COVID-19 support initiatives for vulnerable groups;
- > **Active representation in local governance**, ensuring that youth perspectives are considered in municipal decisions and **long-term leadership development**, with former council members transitioning to supervisory roles or other community leadership positions;
- > **Sustained engagement through partnerships** with the Stramproy village council and Weert municipality. As a result of its active role and advocacy efforts with the Weert Municipality city council, a proposal by four political parties passed in September 2024 to grant the youth council a **structural subsidy**, recognising its ongoing contribution to the community.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Youth-led approach**: empowering young people to take initiative in community projects leads to **greater engagement and local pride**;
- > **Partnerships with local governance**: collaboration with the Weert municipality and village council ensures **sustainability and political support**;
- > **Diverse and flexible programming**: offering a variety of activities helps maintain interest and participation among youth and adults alike;
- > **Resilience and adaptability**: overcoming challenges, such as permit issues for events and the impact of COVID-19, demonstrates the council's **flexibility and problem-solving capacity**.



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