YOUTH MOBILITY EXPERIENCE REPORT



Forum Synergies Scholarship Programme (August 2026)

My name is Sofiia Maksymovych, I'm from Ukraine and I'll share my experience with FS scholarship programme on this page. On the 7th of August I arrived in Ballybunion, County Kerry, to spend nearly three weeks at The Barna Way farm**.** It felt like stepping into an inspiring sanctuary of nature, community, and active citizenship. From the moment I arrived, I was warmly welcomed into an environment where sustainable living is not just a theoretical concept, but a daily, joyful reality.

The Barna Way spans 19 acres of native woodlands, biodiversity plots, organic fruit and vegetable gardens, artist studios, and community gathering spaces co-created by artist-activists Lisa Fingleton and Rena Blake. Stepping onto this land and immediately participating in the

daily rhythm of farm and community life gave me a profound sense of purpose, cross-cultural connection, and hope.


The
Barna Way

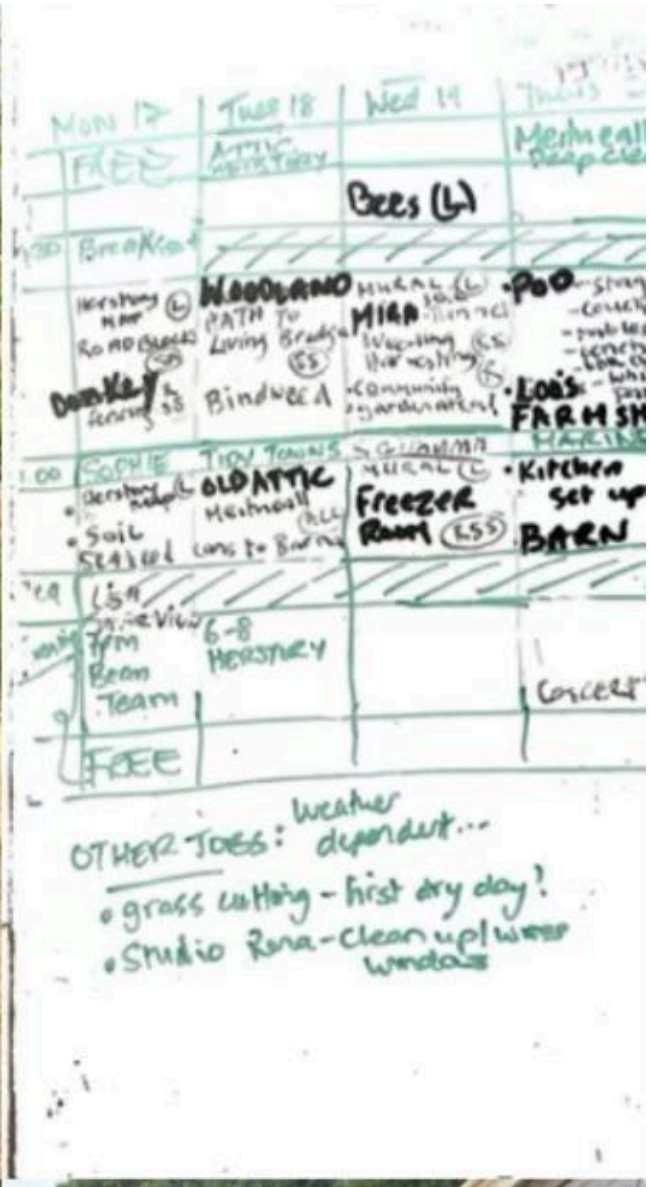
- **How did the Forum Synergies support me?**

“i want to express my gratitude to Forum Synergies organisation”

By creating direct, hands-on bridges between rural initiatives across Europe, Forum Synergies provides young participants with an irreplaceable opportunity to learn regenerative agricultural practices, engage with diverse communities, and bring meaningful insights back into their own life journeys. The organization's commitment to supporting bottom-up rural development, eco-feminism, and youth empowerment is truly extraordinary and vital for the future of sustainable, inclusive European communities.

Overview of daily activities and shared practices




MON 17
TUES 18
WED 19
FREE
Bees (L)
BREAKFAST
WOODLAND
PATH TO
MIRA
POO
Living Bridge
Bindweed
Community gardening
LOIS
FARM SH
SOPHIE
TIDY TOWNS
OLD ATTIC
Heatmoll
Freezer
Room
Kitchen
set up
BARN
Soil
LISA
7pm
6-8
Bean
Team
HERSTHEY
Concert
FREE
OTHER JOBS: weather dependent...
• grass cutting - first dry day!
• Studio Rona - clean up! wash windows




THE
BARNA

My placement was grounded in a balanced, co-created daily routine. Morning mindfulness and shared meals: Starting each day with mindfulness, yoga, and organic breakfasts prepared and shared with the host team and fellow volunteers.Organic horticulture and land care**:** Engaging communal work practices—harvesting vegetables in the polytunnel, seed saving, managing meadows, and caring for rescued donkeys (Biddy and Rory). Educational presentations and discussions**:** Daily sessions led by Lisa, covering eco-feminism, local food sovereignty, climate action, and community resilience.Creative connections and cultural exchange**:** Participating in eco-art projects, and preparing a dedicated Ukrainian cultural and artistic installation for the *Ballybunion Bean Festival*.


ЦІ КАМІНЦІ РОЗФАРБУВАЛИ УКРАЇНЦІ
ЗБЕРЕЖІТЬ У СОБІ ЛЮБОВ,
І ВІДЧУТТЯ ДОМУ ЖИТИМЕ У ВАШОМУ СЕРЦІ
These stones were painted by Ukrainians.
keep the love within you, And the Feeling of HOME
WILL LIVE IN YOUR HEART.

Thematic deep dive

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1. Gender issues and eco-feminism

At The Barna Way, gender empowerment and eco-feminism are actively lived rather than just discussed theoretically. As a queer female couple, Lisa and Rena have created an inclusive, safe, and supportive rural space.

“We often say that it's easier to be gay than green here sometimes, that people are very accepting of us as a lesbian couple but sometimes the environmental issue is more difficult for people to take..”, - Lisa.

Women in nature restoration: This project underscores women’s leadership in sustainable agriculture and land stewardship. Their work challenges traditional patriarchal farming models by prioritizing ecological restoration, community care, and creative expression over intensive exploitation.

2. Access to land

Redefining land use: The Barna Way demonstrates how private land ownership can be repurposed as a community asset. Through native woodland schemes (over 10,000 trees planted), peace paths, community gardens, and social farming, the land serves local social and ecological needs.

“We didn't set out to do this type of work, it just became something that happened... like a river, it kind of meandered its way through…”,- Rena Blake

3. Intergenerational cooperation and cultural exchange

The exchange between generations and cultures was a defining feature of my mobility experience.**Mutual learning:** working alongside experienced hosts and local community members allowed for a rich two-way exchange of knowledge. I learned practical organic farming, biodiversity management, and resilience strategies, while contributing my energy, perspectives, and Ukrainian heritage.**Cultural traditions and community integration:** we shared personal stories, and food. Preparing traditional Ukrainian dishes like *borscht* and dumplings, fostered deep cultural understanding and I really felt a big emotional solidarity.







Evaluation, reflections and advice for future volunteers

Personal takeaways:

1. **Cooperation with nature:** realizing that allowing space for wildness brings biodiversity back naturally.
2. **Power of community:** recognizing the crucial importance of open communication, social connection, and safe spaces for young people in rural development.

My advice for young people considering Forum Synergies

Be open and curious: don't worry if you don't know everything about farming or rural development before you arrive. The most important quality is your willingness to listen, ask questions, and learn along the way.Share your culture: bring your own background, traditional recipes, songs, and personal stories. Cultural exchange is a two-way street, and hosts love learning from youth as much as youth learn from them. Embrace the routine: immerse yourself fully in daily community tasks, whether it's communal cooking, seed saving, or morning mindfulness. These moments often yield the deepest conversations and friendships.Take initiative**:** propose small creative ideas or installations during local events or festivals. It enriches the host project and gives you a meaningful legacy to leave behind.

Recommendations for Forum Synergies

Continue supporting young people on youth placements in rural eco-projects that integrate social justice, gender equality, and eco-feminism alongside agricultural practices.
Promote non-formal intergenerational spaces**:** Encourage host organizations to incorporate traditional cultural sharing mechanisms (such as story-sharing, music, and communal meals) to deepen intergenerational bonds.

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