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Modelling and testing the processes of construction of youth active EU citizenship in school: Recommendations from the CATCHEyoU intervention  
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The purpose of the intervention was to stimulate young people’s interest and engagement in European affairs in schools. The core pedagogical idea was to build with schools an opportunity to involve students in a participatory action research (PAR), on social issues that young people identify as relevant and would be willing to address.

Three processes were at the core of the intervention:
- involving young people in the analysis of concrete social issues with an European dimension and affecting young people and community members;
- involving young people in elaborating possible strategies to address them;
- stimulating young people to reflect on social issues’ complexity and on the opportunities to address them either individually or collectively, that can be developed at the local and European level.

We wanted to make the role of the EU more visible and concrete in students’ everyday life, and develop their sense of agency and of ownership on democratic processes.
The intervention was structured as a multilayered process of PAR (The EyoU-PAR) involving two rounds of the cycle (the first one more rooted in local community, the second framed at the EU level), respectively in two subsequent school years.

The intervention started with the selection of the schools and sharing the methodology with the teachers (phase 1: “Preparing”).

The school intervention engaged young people in a “problem solving” process that started from the local community, and from finding and defining concrete social issues that the students perceived relevant locally and directly or indirectly relevant to the EU dimension (phase 2: “Identifying and locating”). Students were asked to choose a social issue that they perceived as a problem for young people and the local community, and that they were enough motivated and willing to address. Moreover, they were asked to consider an issue that should be potentially relevant also beyond the local community context, including other countries. In the second step (second year), the process moved from the local dimension to the EU.

The issues became like a “foot in the door” that allowed participants to confront with local/national and European institutions, organizations, and with their representatives, on how to address the social issue at EU level.

The steps toward this final aim included: during the first year, participants’ involvement in a (scientifically guided) research process with the aim to map and understand their chosen social issue (phase 3: “Mapping and understanding the social issue”).
their sharing of the research results and proposals with others, in the local community (e.g. organising a local exhibition) (phase 4: “Sharing findings”), reflecting on the issue and on the feedback received by stakeholders and experts in the local community (phase 5: “Reflecting”).

Before proceeding to a new cycle of the research (phase 6: “Mapping and understanding the social issue at EU level”), development/refinement of proposals (phase 7: “Developing proposals for EU institutions”) and sharing (phase 8: “Sharing proposals”).

Throughout the process the participants (students and schools) were encouraged to network with the community, with experts and stakeholders, as well as among the five schools (e.g. using online platforms, such as eTwinning).
**THE IMPLEMENTATION**

**WHERE, HOW, WHICH ROLES FOR TEACHERS AND UNIVERSITY**

- Gymnazium Žďár nad Sázavou, Brno
- Liceo Attilio Bertolucci, Parma
- Lobdeburgschule, Jena
- Secondary School Dr. Joaquim Gomes Ferreira Alves, Vila Nova de Gaia
- Alléskolan, Hallsberg

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**DIFFERENCES** The different ways of implementing the project in the five schools impacted on aspects like selection of students (e.g. involvement of existing classes vs. volunteers from different classes), timing of intervention (e.g. existing curricular constraints such as final exams), students’ motivation and stability (vs. dropout), group dynamics, the available amount of time and other resources, the degrees of freedom in developing the various steps of the intervention.

**COMMONALITIES** Common across the five schools was teachers’ collaboration in adapting as far as possible to the requirements of the intervention, ensuring the participation of most of the students, also to the two joint lectures given by IMB board members on how to draft proposals for the EU as well as at the project conferences. The school authorities also collaborated positively in giving the intervention the attention by relevant local and national actors and networks as requested by the intervention.
### RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Students became more aware of what the EU is. They developed more positive attitudes toward the EU. They reduced their political alienation. They reframed their concept of active citizenship including networking skills and critical consciousness. Teachers recognized that students developed specific competences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Students developed a more nuanced view of the EU. They revised their idea of active citizenship including being informed and knowledgeable as a key dimension. They developed a more critical outlook on the EU. Teachers recognized that students developed specific competences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Students revealed a more articulated vision of active citizenship, including general political interest and creation of awareness. Over time they developed a more complex view of the EU, and recognized different opportunities that the EU offers to young people. No change in self efficacy and political alienation was detected.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>Students gained larger self-confidence, thanks to the dissemination activities. They declared themselves more willing to engage and express their opinions. They were critical toward the EU from the beginning and they maintained this outlook. Teachers saw their students engaged in new activities and more interested in politics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Students developed stronger ties towards the EU. They became more engaged in EU discussions. They became more critical toward EU politics on specific issues. Students increasingly characterized the EU in a negative light. Their self efficacy increased over time.</td>
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The intervention showed a significant capacity to increase students’ awareness on EU social and political issues, increased students’ knowledge on EU issues, and supported students to develop a more complex, articulated, and sometimes critical vision on the EU and active citizenship. Teachers and other adult observers involved in the project recognized that students have been challenged by the tasks proposed by the intervention (actively researching social issues), but they also acknowledged the acquisition of new skills and knowledge in the students who participated.

We collected evidence of a redefinition of young people’s views of active citizenship, where critical awareness became a key seminal dimension. In students’ terms, being aware and knowledgeable about the EU and social issues is more important, at their age, than being active, even if they recognize the relevance of democratic forms of participation. Students started out from a conventional, more narrow understanding of active citizenship as merely voting and taking part in public demonstrations. Along the intervention process and the different activities they experienced, they widened the modes and the relevance of actions like political talk in everyday networks and paying attention to news in various media. They learned to look behind the more visible and manifest public acts paying attention to the more substantial requisites and preconditions for becoming publicly active.
EVALUATION METHODS

A scientific mixed method approach to evaluation was adopted, including different kinds of qualitative and quantitative instruments, that allowed to triangulate sources of data and perspectives (students, teachers)

- A longitudinal questionnaire including relevant scales (EU and national Identity, Representations of the EU, Trust in institutions, Political interest, Learning about the EU, Political alienation, General efficacy and empowerment, Political efficacy, Participation) that was administered three times, at the beginning of the first year of the intervention (end of 2016), at the beginning of the second year (end of 2017) and at the end of the second year (May 2018). The questionnaire was submitted to the students who took part in the intervention and to a control group.

- Focus groups with students, at the beginning and at the end of the first year of the intervention and at the end of the second year. The questions assessed students’ representations of active citizenship and of the EU to monitor changes in how students are reasoning on these issues before and after the experience. Focus group questions were also aimed to assess students’ experience about the activities performed.

- Interviews with teachers in charge, to assess the experience of the intervention during the first and second years, respectively, and their perceived changes in students following their participation in the intervention. Interviews were collected at the end of each school year.

- A brief monitoring questionnaire for students including scales to measure the quality of participation experience. The questionnaire was filled in at different phases of the activity in order to assess how the students perceived the different activities that were proposed to them.
Our findings point to the importance of enhancing young people’s agency, through a direct involvement in the process of research on locally experienced social issues (ownership), requiring critical analysis of information sources (including direct access to the sources of information: e.g. stakeholders), in order to better understand their nature and their root causes and reflect on measures that can be adopted to address them, in dialogue with stakeholders and other adults. Having young citizens equipped with critical awareness, skills in debating and discussion, and capacity to independently value sources of contrasting information will make the young citizens less vulnerable to fake news, and propaganda. It will add to EU democracies more vibrancy, resilience and sustainability.

**Needed conditions**

- The intervention should ensure students’ agency in the process (e.g. in the choice of relevant social issues, in the research process, etc.);
- The intervention should start from a local experienced issue (by the community);
- The students should work in group with a scientific approach (e.g. critical evaluation of various sources);
- It is important to organize initiatives where the students can present and share their work with the community;
- The intervention should be incorporated into the school curriculum;
- Teachers should be engaged and responsible for the activities to some extent, in order to ensure sustainability;
- There should be a minimum requirement on the training to be provided to the teachers (on pedagogical approaches and research methods: e.g. PAR; on EU issues; on the theoretical rationale of the intervention);
- There should be collaboration of the school with external actors (school-community partnerships);
- The collaboration with the University is important, and a clear division of roles and responsibilities should be established.

**Wanted conditions**

- Providing the students of **different schools in the EU** opportunities to **collaborate** on **joint intervention** projects;
- Ensuring that adequate resources (including funding) are provided to support the joint participation of the students to the intervention activities and the **creation of EU framework** for sharing and discussing social issues.
CATCH-EyoU has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme Grant Agreement No. 649538.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT NAME</th>
<th>Constructing AcTive CitizensHip with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions (CATCH-EyoU)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COORDINATOR</td>
<td>Elvira Cicognani, ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - UNIVERSITA DI BOLOGNA, Bologna, Italy, <a href="mailto:elvira.cicognani@unibo.it">elvira.cicognani@unibo.it</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>CONSORTIUM</td>
<td>ETHNIKO KAI KAPODISTRIAKO PANEPISTIMIO ATHINON –UoA– Athens, Greece</td>
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<td></td>
<td>FORUM NAZIONALE DEI GIOVANI ASSOCIAZIONE –FNG– Rome, Italy</td>
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<td>FRIEDRICH-SCHILLER-UNIVERSITAT JENA– FSU JENA – Jena, Germany</td>
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<td></td>
<td>LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE –LSE– London, United Kingdom</td>
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<td>UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO –UP-CIEE– Porto, Portugal</td>
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<td>DURATION</td>
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<td>BUDGET</td>
<td>EU contribution: 2,498,786.00 €</td>
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<td>WEBSITE</td>
<td><a href="http://www.catcheyou.eu/">http://www.catcheyou.eu/</a></td>
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<td>FOR MORE INFORMATION</td>
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