

Euroconnect

Strengthening Civic Competences and EU Democratic Life

Summary of WP2 for the Basis of WP4 Activities

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Summary of the Project

EuroConnect is an Erasmus+ cooperation project coordinated by the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at the University of Tartu, which runs until October 2027 and focuses on strengthening civic competences and participation in EU democratic life among young people. The consortium (University of Tartu, University of Göttingen, University of Siena, and CSC "Danilo Dolci") develops and tests transnational learning formats – online student debates, school workshops, teacher training activities, and a project-based university course – linking EU-level issues to local realities and curricula.

The best practices, the feedback and the results of the activities will be recorded and transformed into a toolkit, providing a set of concrete actions and guidelines, which can be implemented in the future practices of civic competence education. The project aims to generate both direct impact on students' civic skills and robust evidence and tools (guidelines, toolkit, recommendations) to help European education systems integrate civic competence development more systematically.

Key results of this project will be the improved knowledge of civic competences among students, as well as an enhancement of their own civic competences. There will also be the formulation of updated practical methods in civic competence education to achieve this enhancement. Additionally, teachers working on civic competence education will be able to facilitate more engaging experiences for students working on civic competences and students will find their educational experience improved.

Table of Contents

Deliverable information 1
Project coordinator 2
Version history 2
Author list 3
Summary of the Project 4
Table of Contents 5
List of abbreviations 6
Statement for open documents and Copyrights 7
Executive summary 7
1. Introduction and WP2 Objectives 9
2. Design of the Debate Format 10
3. Topics, Calendar and Moderation 12
4. Pre-debate Preparatory Materials 14
5. Survey and Evaluation Design 15
6. Recruitment and Communication 21
7. Implementation of the Activities 23
8. Participation monitoring 30
9. Survey results and feedback 34
10. Challenges and adaptations 61
11. Conclusions 75
References 79

List of abbreviations

Acronym	Description
WP2	Work Package 2 - Emboldening Civic Competences Through Transnational Discussions
WP2A2	Work Package 2 Activity 2 - Online European Issue Debates
WP2A3	Work Package 2 Activity 3 - Online Curriculum Discussions
WP2A4	Work Package 2 Activity 4 - Online Local Issue Discussions
WP2A5	Work Package 2 Activity 5 - Pre- and Post-activity Surveys
WP2A6	Work Package 2 Activity 6 - Form Basis of WP4 Projects
WP4	Work Package 4 - Collaborative Use of Civic Competences and Formalisation of Methods
EIDs	European Issues Debates
CDs	Curriculum Discussions
LIDs	Local Issues Discussions
DoA	Document of Agreement
UNISI	University of Siena
UT	University of Tartu
UG	Georg August University of Göttingen
CSC	Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo Danilo Dolci – ETS

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Executive summary

Work Package 2 (WP2), Emboldening Civic Competences Through Transnational Discussions, created a nine-week programme of ten structured online discussions for students from the Universities of Siena, Tartu and Göttingen. Four European Issue Debates, three Curriculum Discussions and three Local Issue Discussions combined student-selected subtopics, student-led transnational breakout groups and a common Future Workshop sequence of Critique, Utopia and Realisation.

This report presents the quantitative and qualitative results of WP2 and summarises the experiences of the students and staff involved. It draws on registration and attendance records, 61 group-allocation records, Padlet outputs, lead observations,

open comments and three anonymous surveys. At least 77 students attended one or more activities, generating 245 verified student-event attendances; 60 of 61 recorded group allocations included students from at least two universities. Survey responses indicate a generally positive experience, especially in relation to respectful discussion, listening, collaboration and comparing perspectives, while also identifying the need for more time, more accessible pre-debate preparatory materials and more balanced opportunities to speak.

1. Introduction and WP2 Objectives

Work Package 2 (WP2), *Emboldening Civic Competences Through Transnational Discussions*, represents the principal component of EuroConnect directly involving university students in transnational civic-learning activities. Coordinated by the University of Siena with the Universities of Tartu and Göttingen and the Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo "Danilo Dolci", it gave students repeated opportunities to discuss European, curricular and local issues with peers from different national and institutional contexts.

The formal objectives of WP2 were threefold. First, it aimed to provide students with a transnational forum in which to discuss issues of relevance both to the EU and to their own lives. Through participation in these discussions, students were expected to strengthen civic competences and develop a better understanding of the contribution they could make to addressing common political and societal challenges. Second, it aimed to collect information on students' opinions, knowledge, and previous experiences, as well as on their perceptions of the activities and of their own civic competences. Third, it sought to use the data and practical experience generated through the work package as a foundation for the further development of applied methods of civic competence education. These objectives were implemented through four European Issue Debates, three Curriculum Discussions and three Local Issue Discussions, supported by a pre-event survey and two post-event surveys.

This report constitutes the principal output of WP2A6. It concentrates on implementation outcomes and on the quantitative and qualitative findings produced by the activities. Quantitative evidence describes recruitment, attendance, continuity, group composition and survey responses. The surveys were anonymous and were not linked at respondent level. Survey comparisons are descriptive, comparing the

respondents available at each wave, and do not establish individual-level change or causal effects. Qualitative evidence comes from the Padlet outputs, open survey comments, lead observations and staff debriefings. Together, these sources show what students discussed, how the format functioned and which aspects should be retained or refined.

2. Design of the Debate Format

The WP2 format combined participatory civic education with deliberative pedagogy. It was informed by the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture and by approaches that treat discussion as a process of reasoning together, considering competing arguments and remaining open to revising an initial interpretation (Council of Europe, 2018, 2021; Shaffer, 2014). Research on deliberative pedagogy also informed the emphasis on examining trade-offs, reflecting on competing positions and assessing learning outcomes (Archibugi et al., 2021; Drury et al., 2016).

The EuroConnect activities translated these principles into a common discussion format. Although they were collectively described as "debates," they were not organised as competitive exercises in which students were assigned opposing positions and expected to prevail over one another. Instead, they were conceived as structured spaces for inquiry, reflection and collaborative problem-solving. Students examined questions of public importance, articulated and explained their views, considered the experiences and arguments introduced by others and worked together to identify possible responses. The objective was not to determine a winning position or require each group to reach a single conclusion. Participants could retain different interpretations while developing a more informed understanding of the

issue, the values and interests at stake, and the tensions between alternative solutions.

Each session used the Future Workshop sequence of Critique, Utopia and Realisation. Students first identified problems, then imagined preferable alternatives without immediately limiting themselves to feasibility, and finally considered practical steps, responsibilities and resources. Future Workshops are designed to support democratic and inclusive participation (Alminde & Warming, 2020). Readers seeking a fuller account of the method and the online session structure can consult the EuroConnect Online Events Guidelines (EuroConnect, 2026b).

The common 90-minute format consisted of a short plenary introduction, small student-led transnational breakout groups and a final plenary exchange. Groups documented their discussion on Padlet and moved through the three phases with short prompts. This structure balanced consistency across the programme with substantial student autonomy.

The responsible lead opened each event in plenary, introduced the topic, explained the method and reconvened participants for the closing exchange. Breakout rooms were student-led: after the opening instructions, organisers observed rather than directed the substantive discussion, entering rooms only to monitor progress or address procedural and technical difficulties. A separate technical-support role managed the platform, group allocation and timekeeping. Staff observations were compared during the activities and in debriefing meetings to identify recurring patterns and practical adaptations.

3. Topics, Calendar and Moderation

Development of the topics

Each session followed the Future Workshop methodology. Responsibility for proposing and hosting the events was distributed among the University of Siena, the University of Tartu and the University of Göttingen. Each institution contributed themes connected to its academic expertise and to the objectives of EuroConnect, proposed possible subtopics and moderated the corresponding sessions. Siena led four events, while Tartu and Göttingen each led three.

Four possible subtopics were offered for each event. Once registered, students were invited to vote anonymously on the proposed subtopics. This gave participants a direct and observable influence over the agenda while preserving a coherent programme framework. Voting was closed before the events so that leads could prepare balanced introductions, pre-debate preparatory materials and guiding questions around the selected options.

The two subtopics receiving the highest number of votes for each event were retained. Each breakout room subsequently concentrated on one of these two subtopics, allowing groups to explore a focused question while ensuring that both selected dimensions were addressed within the session.

Response totals varied across the ten topic-selection questions, ranging from 36 for the first Curriculum Discussion to 52 for the European Issue Debate on Sustainability. Table 3.1 presents the selected subtopics and their respective vote counts and percentages.

Table 3.1. Student voting results and selected subtopics

Event	Responses	Selected subtopic 1 Votes (%)	Selected subtopic 2 Votes (%)
EID 1 – Youth and Representation	43	Barriers to participation – 14 (32.6%)	Reforms and innovations – 12 (27.9%)
EID 2 – Democratic backsliding	45	Polarisation and societal cleavages – 19 (42.2%)	Illiberal politics in liberal democracies – 12 (26.7%)
EID 3 – Sustainability	52	Just transition – 19 (36.5%)	External dimensions of the European Green Deal – 16 (30.8%)
EID 4 – Youth and Digital Citizenship	41	Digital literacy and the AI era – 14 (34.1%)	Information and disinformation – 13 (31.7%)
CD 1 – Civic competences in university curricula	36	Political and democratic self-efficacy – 13 (36.1%)	Substantive civic competences as identifiable learning outcomes – 11 (30.6%)
CD 2 – Interdisciplinarity	46	Multidisciplinary perspectives – 14 (30.4%)	The limits of European democracy education in the classroom – 14 (30.4%)
CD 3 – Rethinking Learning Practices	46	Strengthening experiential learning – 16 (34.8%)	Inclusive learning design – 11 (23.9%)
LID 1 – Digitalisation and local public services	46	Citizen participation and digital democracy – 15 (32.6%)	Artificial intelligence in the provision of local services – 12 (26.1%)
LID 2 – Community Regeneration	39	Migration and integration – 17 (43.6%)	Culture in times of financial deficit – 14 (35.9%)
LID 3 – Local sustainability	41	Sustainable mobility – 14 (34.1%)	Sustainable tourism and cultural events – 10 (24.4%)

Note: Percentages use the response total for each event and are rounded to one decimal place. Response totals refer to the individual topic-selection questions and do not establish the number of unique students who voted across the programme.

Calendar

The ten events were held between 4 May and 29 June 2026. Responsibility for hosting and chairing the plenary portions was distributed across the three universities. Table 3.2 records the final programme and the respective chairs; the student-led breakout-room arrangement described in Section 2 applied to every session.

Table 3.2. Final calendar and moderation responsibilities, 2026

Event	Date	Lead university	Chair
EID 1 – Youth and Representation	4 May	Siena	Paolo Marzi
EID 2 – Democratic backsliding	11 May	Tartu	Stefano Braghiroli
EID 3 – Sustainability	18 May	Göttingen	Kristina Kurze
EID 4 – Youth and Digital Citizenship	25 May	Siena	Paolo Marzi
CD 1 – Civic competences in university curricula	28 May	Tartu	Alar Kilp
CD 2 – Interdisciplinarity	4 June	Göttingen	Nicolas Vogt-Reimuth
CD 3 – Rethinking Learning Practices	11 June	Siena	Valentina Pettosini
LID 1 – Digitalisation and local public services	15 June	Tartu	Stefano Braghiroli
LID 2 – Community Regeneration	22 June	Göttingen	Lars Keim
LID 3 – Local sustainability	29 June	Siena	Luca Verzichelli

Note: Event codes and selected subtopics correspond to Table 3.1. All dates refer to 2026.

4. Pre-debate Preparatory Materials

Preparation of the materials followed a decentralised but coordinated model. Each university developed them for the sessions it proposed and chaired, while the consortium established a common framework governing their purpose and presentation. This allowed partners to draw on subject expertise while maintaining a shared approach. A common participant handbook separately explained the

non-competitive format, the three Future Workshop phases, Padlet use, expectations for respectful participation and the practical procedures for each session.

For each session, the responsible university prepared a concise briefing, slide set and/or reading focused on the two student-selected subtopics. The materials were normally circulated approximately one week before the event and were written in English. They combined essential concepts and contextual information with prompts designed to support discussion rather than prescribe conclusions.

The depth and presentation of the materials varied across topics, reflecting disciplinary expertise and the needs of each session. A shared review process nevertheless promoted consistent terminology, accessible framing and alignment with the selected subtopics.

5. Survey and Evaluation Design

The evaluation of the WP2 online debates was designed to assess both the implementation of the activities and their possible contribution to students' civic competences, attitudes and willingness to participate in democratic life. The survey component was therefore not limited to measuring satisfaction with the events. It was intended to establish students' initial profiles, examine how they evaluated the complete debate pathway and assess whether the experience was followed by continued discussion, reflection or interest in other forms of civic participation.

The evaluation used three anonymous questionnaires: a pre-event survey, an immediate post-event survey and a delayed follow-up survey. Together, they examined participants' initial political and civic orientations, their evaluation of the debate pathway and their subsequent perceptions of learning and engagement. The instruments covered political and social attitudes, democratic orientations,

participation, expectations and self-assessed civic competences; the post-event surveys combined selected repeated measures with questions specific to each stage. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent.

To preserve anonymity, no matching code connected respondents across the three waves. Consequently, comparisons capture aggregate differences between responding samples and cannot establish individual-level changes over time. This decision prioritised anonymity and respondent confidence over the analytical advantages of longitudinal matching.

The pre-event survey was available from 29 April to 26 June 2026. Although data collection continued after the debate series had begun, the questionnaire was administered only to newly recruited students before their first participation in an online debate. The extended collection period reflected the gradual enrolment of additional participants rather than repeated or retrospective completion by students who had already attended an activity. The survey can therefore be interpreted as a baseline measure at the individual level, although respondents completed it at different stages of the overall programme.

Post-event Survey 1 collected substantive responses from 30 June to 22 July 2026, following the conclusion of the debate pathway on 29 June. It measured participants' immediate evaluation of the activities, perceived learning, willingness to participate again and confidence in civic competences.

Post-event Survey 2 was administered as a delayed follow-up in September 2026. Substantive responses were collected between 3 and 29 September. It examined continued discussion of the debate topics, willingness to participate in other democratic activities and the competences respondents believed they had improved.

Survey records and analytical samples

The final merged survey dataset contains 161 retained records: 80 from the pre-event survey, 53 from Post-event Survey 1 and 28 from Post-event Survey 2. Consent is recorded directly in the merged file. Respondents who declined consent remain identifiable for sample accounting but are excluded from every substantive analysis. Records without a recorded consent decision and the original LimeSurvey submission-status fields were not retained in the final merged dataset; consequently, the counts below describe the final analytical file rather than reconstructing complete and partial questionnaires from the raw exports.

Affirmative consent was recorded for 73 pre-event respondents, 45 Post-event Survey 1 respondents and 25 Post-event Survey 2 respondents. These are the analytical samples used throughout Section 9. The remaining seven, eight and three records respectively contained a negative consent response and were excluded. The overall consent rate among the 161 records retained in the merged file was 88.8%.

Table 5.1. Survey records and consent status in the final merged dataset

Record or response category	Pre-event Survey	Post-event Survey 1	Post-event Survey 2	Overall
Records in final merged dataset	80	53	28	161
Records included in analysis (affirmative consent)	73	45	25	143
Consent declined	7	8	3	18
Consent rate among retained records	91.3%	84.9%	89.3%	88.8%

Note: The Overall column aggregates the three survey waves. The overall consent rate is calculated from the pooled counts (143/161), rather than as an unweighted average of the three percentages.

The institutional breakdown is reported in Table 5.2. University affiliation was available for 68 consenting pre-event respondents, 35 Post-event Survey 1 respondents and 24 Post-event Survey 2 respondents. The remaining five, ten and one respectively either provided no response or selected “I prefer not to answer”. These records remain in the overall analytical samples but cannot be allocated to a university.

Table 5.2. Consenting analytical samples by university

University	Pre-event Survey	Post-event Survey 1	Post-event Survey 2
University of Tartu	6	8	5
University of Göttingen	42	15	15
University of Siena	20	12	4
No response	2	8	1
I prefer not to answer	3	2	0
Total	73	45	25

Note: Counts refer only to respondents with affirmative consent. “No response” and “I prefer not to answer” are retained here for sample accounting but excluded from university-specific percentages in the substantive analysis.

An exact invitation-based response rate cannot be established because wave-specific counts of students receiving the survey links are not recorded. The final participation tracker nevertheless provides reference populations: 123 registered students, including 69 from Göttingen, 36 from Siena and 18 from Tartu; and 77 students with verified attendance at least once, including 46, 16 and 15 respectively. Table 5.3 uses the registered cohort as the pre-event reference population and the active cohort as the reference population for both post-event surveys.

Table 5.3. Cohort-based coverage of consenting analytical samples

University	Tracker reference cohorts	Pre-event Survey / Registered cohort	Post-event Survey 1 / Active cohort	Post-event Survey 2 / Active cohort
Göttingen	69 registered / 46 active	42/69 (60.9%)	15/46 (32.6%)	15/46 (32.6%)
Siena	36 registered / 16 active	20/36 (55.6%)	12/16 (75.0%)	4/16 (25.0%)
Tartu	18 registered / 15 active	6/18 (33.3%)	8/15 (53.3%)	5/15 (33.3%)

Note: Coverage equals consenting analytical records with a substantive university response divided by the corresponding tracker cohort. These are indicative cohort-coverage measures, not verified invitation-based response rates. Anonymous survey records cannot be matched to individual tracker entries.

Both post-event questionnaires asked students to identify the debates they had attended. Usable binary attendance answers were available for 32 consenting Post-event Survey 1 respondents and 15 consenting Post-event Survey 2 respondents. Table 5.4 reports the number in each responding sample who indicated attendance at each event. These are survey self-reports; verified attendance for the programme as a whole is reported separately in Section 8.

Table 5.4. Debate attendance reported by consenting post-survey respondents

Event	Post-event Survey 1 / Valid N = 32	Post-event Survey 2 / Valid N = 15
EID 1: Youth and Representation	13 (40.6%)	6 (40.0%)
EID 2: Democratic Backsliding, Illiberalism and Societal Polarisation	18 (56.3%)	7 (46.7%)
EID 3: Sustainability	21 (65.6%)	8 (53.3%)
EID 4: Youth and Digital Citizenship	13 (40.6%)	5 (33.3%)
CD 1: Civic Competences in University Curricula	14 (43.8%)	11 (73.3%)

Event	Post-event Survey 1 / Valid N = 32	Post-event Survey 2 / Valid N = 15
CD 2: Interdisciplinarity	15 (46.9%)	6 (40.0%)
CD 3: Rethinking Learning Practices	13 (40.6%)	7 (46.7%)
LID 1: Digitalisation and Local Public Services	13 (40.6%)	6 (40.0%)
LID 2: Community Regeneration	14 (43.8%)	8 (53.3%)
LID 3: Local Sustainability	12 (37.5%)	4 (26.7%)

Note: Percentages use the number of respondents providing usable attendance answers in each wave. Respondents could report attendance at several events, so counts must not be summed to estimate unique students.

Missing data take several forms. Some respondents omitted individual questions or selected a non-substantive response category. For the attendance block, 13 consenting Post-event Survey 1 respondents provided no usable answers. In Post-event Survey 2, eight provided no response and two selected “I prefer not to answer”. These entries are excluded from the denominators in Table 5.4.

Item-level descriptions use the number of substantive responses available for each question. Partial questionnaires can contribute where a valid answer was recorded, while unanswered items, explicit refusals and other non-substantive categories are excluded from substantive percentage denominators. For multiple-response blocks, an unselected option is treated as negative only when the block has been answered; an entirely unanswered block is not treated as a series of negative answers. No additional missing answers or rank positions are filled in during the analysis. Ranking summaries use only complete permutations already present in the harmonised file: 58 pre-event objective rankings and 29 Post-event Survey 1 reconnection rankings. Valid sample sizes are reported alongside the results. The three surveys remain independent responding samples because no individual matching code was collected.

No direct identifiers were collected in the survey datasets, and results are reported only in aggregate form.

The interpretation of the results will need to reflect several methodological considerations. Participation in the debates and surveys was voluntary, meaning that respondents are unlikely to represent the wider student populations of the three universities. Students with stronger initial political interest may have been more likely both to join the debates and to complete the surveys. The absence of an individual matching code also means that differences across waves cannot be interpreted as direct individual change. At the same time, the design offers several important strengths: it combines a baseline with immediate and delayed follow-up measures, records variation in exposure to the activities, includes both closed and open questions, and connects the survey evidence with attendance and qualitative outputs.

The three-stage survey design provided complementary evidence on participants' initial characteristics, their immediate evaluation of the pathway and their reflections after the activities had concluded. Because the questionnaires were anonymous and could not be matched at the individual level, comparisons between survey waves are descriptive and should not be interpreted as individual-level change.

6. Recruitment and Communication

Recruitment combined a common consortium approach with university-specific routes. The partners used a shared flyer, registration form and timetable, while local teams adapted information to their teaching calendars, course structures and recognition arrangements. Initial recruitment began on 2 March 2026 and preceded subtopic voting, which ran from 12 March to 17 April 2026 and provided an early indication of students' interests; recruitment continued through the university-specific

channels described below; the initial deadline of 17 April 2026 was extended to 24 April to accommodate the later start of the Göttingen semester. Students first registered their interest and expected attendance, then voted on subtopics and confirmed their availability. Each university contacted its own students through familiar institutional channels.

Siena recruited through university courses, its Soft Skills framework and promotional flyers; students attending at least three sessions could receive an Open Badge, while those attending at least six could apply for recognition worth 3 ECTS credits. Tartu embedded the series in the 2 ECTS continuing education programme *Transnational Discussions on Civic Competences and EU Democratic Life* and also recruited through lecturers, Erasmus contacts, student networks and faculty communications. Göttingen incorporated EuroConnect into the 8 ECTS block seminar *Challenges to Democracy in Europe*, while allowing independent participants to receive a digital participation certificate; recruitment extended through departments, teaching staff, student councils and international networks. These different routes widened access while preserving a common implementation framework.

The combined approach produced 123 registrations: 69 from Göttingen, 36 from Siena and 18 from Tartu. Of these students, 77 attended at least once – 46 from Göttingen, 16 from Siena and 15 from Tartu – generating 245 verified student-event attendances. Final numbers of ECTS/CFU recognitions, Open Badges and certificates could not be harmonised because these awards were administered locally and were not recorded in a common consortium dataset.

7. Implementation of the Activities

The EuroConnect online discussions took place between 4 May and 29 June 2026, with responsibility for leading the sessions rotating among the Universities of Siena, Tartu and Göttingen. The series moved from broad questions of European democracy and policy to university teaching and, finally, to issues affecting local communities. Each event addressed a general topic divided into two subtopics selected by students before the series began.

All sessions followed the same basic structure. The lead university partner opened the event in plenary, introduced the topic and selected subtopics, and briefly explained the relevant concepts, evidence and Future Workshop method. Participants then joined mixed transnational breakout groups, each focusing on one of the two subtopics. Within each room, students managed their own discussion and division of roles, while organisers observed without directing the substantive exchange. The discussion proceeded through three phases. During Critique, students identified and discussed problems associated with their assigned subtopic. During Utopia, they imagined desirable alternatives, exploring possibilities without immediately restricting their proposals to what appeared politically feasible. During Realisation, they translated these aspirations into more concrete measures, identifying responsible actors and considering the steps needed for implementation. This final phase required students to connect their proposed responses with practical questions about who could act and how change might be pursued. Groups recorded their ideas on dedicated Padlet boards and used these records to organise their conclusions. The event ended with a plenary exchange in which students presented the outcomes of their breakout discussions to the wider group. Students had 15 minutes dedicated for a discussion of each phase in the Future Workshop format.

The Padlet boards provide a particularly valuable record of implementation. They preserve the collective notes generated by the breakout groups, although they do not offer verbatim transcripts of the discussions. The level of detail varied: some group sections document contributions across Critique, Utopia and Realisation, while others contain shorter lists or less developed entries. The exports also retain predefined group sections containing only the Future Workshop instructions, alongside sections with substantive student notes. These unfilled sections do not establish why no contributions were recorded and should not be used independently to draw conclusions about attendance or discussion. The recorded contributions nevertheless allow the main areas of agreement and difference across groups to be identified. The report therefore concentrates on recurring findings across sessions.

In this section, **Connection** refers to problems, aspirations or proposals that appeared across several breakout groups assigned to the same subtopic. **Disconnection** refers not necessarily to open disagreement, but to differences in diagnosis, priorities, institutional scale or preferred policy instruments. The groups rarely divided themselves into entirely opposed camps. More commonly, they agreed on a broad objective while differing over whether change should be radical or incremental, whether responsibility should lie with the European Union, national governments, universities or local communities, and whether regulation, education, technological innovation or participatory reform should be the principal mechanism.

Overview of the ten sessions

Table 7.1. Online discussions, moderation and principal themes

Discussion	Date	Lead	Selected subtopics	Principal themes
EID 1: Youth and representation	4 May	Siena – Paolo Marzi	Barriers to participation; reforms and innovations	Political access, civic education, meaningful youth

				influence and alternative models of representation.
EID 2: Democratic backsliding	11 May	Tartu – Stefano Braghiroli	Polarisation and societal cleavages; illiberal politics in liberal democracies	Social and economic divisions, social media and echo-chambers, institutional safeguards and the role of the EU.
EID 3: Sustainability	18 May	Göttingen – Kristina Kurze	Just transition; external dimension of the European Green Deal	Fair distribution of transition costs, community participation, supply chains and international climate responsibility.
EID 4: Youth and digital citizenship	25 May	Siena – Paolo Marzi	Digital literacy and the AI era; Information and disinformation	Digital inclusion, platform accountability, media literacy and democratic safeguards for new technologies.
CD 1: Civic competences in university curricula	28 May	Tartu – Alar Kilp	Political and democratic self-efficacy; civic competences as learning outcomes	Practical civic learning, institutional knowledge, participation opportunities and curriculum design.
CD 2: Interdisciplinarity	4 June	Göttingen – Nicolas Vogt-Reimuth	Multidisciplinary perspectives; The limits of European democracy education in the classroom	Cooperation across disciplines, flexible programmes and recognition of different forms of knowledge.
CD 3: Rethinking learning practices	11 June	Siena – Valentina Pettosini	Inclusive learning; experiential and participatory methods	Student-centred learning, accessibility, collaboration and practical engagement beyond lectures.
LID 1: Digitalisation and local public services	15 June	Tartu – Stefano Braghiroli	Citizen participation and digital democracy; AI in local services	Digital access, human oversight, privacy, transparency and accountability in local administration, reference to specific case studies.
LID 2: Community regeneration	22 June	Göttingen – Lars Keim	Integration in local communities; culture under financial pressure	Inclusion, local participation, cultural access, stable funding and community resilience.
LID 3: Sustainability	29 June	Siena – Luca Verzichelli	Sustainable mobility; sustainable tourism and cultural events	Accessible transport, local planning, overtourism, cultural sustainability and

				community-centred regulation.

Note: Table 7.1 provides a concise synthesis of the ten discussions.

Connections across the ten sessions

Several connections extended beyond individual events. The first was the central role of **education**. Civic education appeared in discussions of youth participation, polarisation, illiberalism, AI, disinformation, digital democracy and university curricula. Students repeatedly treated education as the foundation for meaningful participation. However, they did not understand it simply as the transmission of factual knowledge. They called for critical media literacy, respectful disagreement, simulation, practical experience and knowledge of concrete opportunities to act.

A second connection was the demand for **meaningful influence rather than symbolic consultation**. Youth councils, student assemblies, digital platforms and migrant-participation mechanisms were criticised when they collected opinions without affecting decisions. The same concern appeared across very different topics. Participants wanted visible feedback, institutional obligations to respond and opportunities to monitor how their contributions were used.

A third connection concerned **social and economic inequality**. Participation required time, education and resources. Climate policies could burden low-income households. Digitalisation could exclude citizens lacking skills or infrastructure. Cultural cuts transformed access into a privilege, while tourism and migration policies distributed costs unequally. The groups therefore rarely treated democratic competence as an individual characteristic alone. It depended on material conditions and institutional support.

A fourth connection was **transparency**. Students called for transparent algorithms, campaign finance, institutional decisions, supply chains, AI systems and

tourism revenues. Transparency was viewed as a condition of trust, although some discussions recognised that information alone was insufficient without accountability and the capacity to appeal decisions.

A fifth connection was the importance of **human contact and deliberative spaces**. Despite the digital format of EuroConnect, participants repeatedly proposed physical or hybrid spaces in which people could encounter opposing perspectives. Third spaces, citizen assemblies, local festivals, cultural centres, student organisations and community projects all served this purpose. The recurrence of these proposals suggests that students did not view digital participation as an adequate replacement for human interaction.

A sixth connection concerned **multi-level governance**. Many topics could not be assigned neatly to a single level. European regulation could establish standards, national governments could redistribute resources, universities could redesign curricula and municipalities could adapt policies locally. Students often advocated combinations rather than exclusive authority. Climate transition, migration, digital regulation and education all generated debates about the relationship between common European frameworks and local flexibility.

Finally, students frequently connected **technological innovation with democratic safeguards**. AI, digital voting and smart transport were not rejected, but their desirability depended on inclusion, human oversight, privacy, environmental sustainability and the possibility of appeal. Technological efficiency was consistently subordinated to broader democratic and social values.

Disconnections across the ten sessions

The most recurrent disconnection concerned **radical versus incremental reform**. Some groups proposed weighted voting, age limits, universal cultural credits,

community ownership of energy or fully automated welfare. Others concentrated on improving current institutions through education, consultation and targeted regulation. The Future Workshop method allowed both positions to appear before the Realisation phase encouraged participants to consider feasibility.

A second disconnection concerned **European centralisation versus local autonomy**. Common standards were proposed for civic education, AI, climate policy, migration and democratic safeguards. At the same time, students worried that centralised policies ignored local conditions, encouraged technocratic distance or weakened national democracy. The groups did not resolve this tension but often moved towards common goals combined with flexible implementation.

A third disconnection involved **regulation versus freedom**. This was most visible in discussions of social media, AI and disinformation, but also appeared in education and tourism. Participants wanted protection from manipulation, discrimination and environmental damage while remaining concerned about censorship, surveillance, excessive standardisation and the suppression of legitimate difference.

A fourth disconnection concerned the role of **markets and public provision**. Climate transition, AI, culture and tourism generated contrasting views about public ownership, private innovation, taxation and subsidies. Some groups trusted regulation and incentives to redirect markets; others argued that ownership or funding structures themselves had to change.

A fifth disconnection concerned **universalism and difference**. Groups sought equal rights and common access while also recognising different needs, identities and local contexts. Inclusive learning required personalised support but common standards. Integration involved equal citizenship but also the preservation of cultural identities. Sustainable mobility required general environmental objectives but exceptions for rural and disabled citizens.

These disconnections should not be interpreted as weaknesses. They demonstrate that students encountered genuine trade-offs and that the discussions did not simply generate consensual lists of desirable values. The Padlets show participants negotiating tensions between equality and flexibility, participation and efficiency, openness and regulation, and European coordination and local control.

Overall implementation assessment

The implementation evidence indicates that the common methodological structure was successfully applied across a very diverse set of subjects. The Critique phase generally produced the richest and most detailed material, reflecting students' ability to identify problems from personal experience. The Utopia phase encouraged more ambitious and sometimes unconventional proposals, while the Realisation phase usually narrowed these ideas into education, regulation, funding, institutional reform or local pilot projects.

The Utopia phase was the most challenging stage for several groups. Staff observations and student feedback, particularly from participants in Göttingen, indicated that students were generally more comfortable identifying existing problems than imagining alternatives without immediately considering feasibility. Some groups moved too quickly from criticism to practical solutions, limiting the space for more ambitious thinking. In later sessions, the plenary instructions explained the purpose of the Utopia phase more explicitly and encouraged participants to postpone questions of feasibility until the Realisation stage.

The quality of documentation varied across groups. Some Padlets contain carefully organised collective outputs, while others reproduce short notes or individual contributions. However, uneven documentation does not diminish the breadth of the recorded discussion. Across the ten sessions, participants connected European policy

questions to their universities, cities, educational experiences and everyday use of technology.

The transnational composition of the groups added comparative value. Students referred to differences between Germany, Italy, Estonia and other national contexts, while local examples from Siena, Tartu and Göttingen informed discussions of transport, education and participation. In several cases, participants explicitly recognised that an arrangement already existed in one country but not another. The discussions therefore moved beyond abstract comparison and treated institutional differences as resources for imagining reform.

The principal achievement of implementation was the creation of a repeated structure through which students could move from criticism to collective problem solving. The debates did not produce a single agreed EuroConnect position on each issue, nor were they intended to do so. Their value lay in identifying shared concerns, exposing different assumptions and requiring participants to translate broad aspirations into possible action. The Padlet archive preserves this process and provides the substantive basis for the project's later evaluation, recommendations and methodological toolkit.

8. Participation monitoring

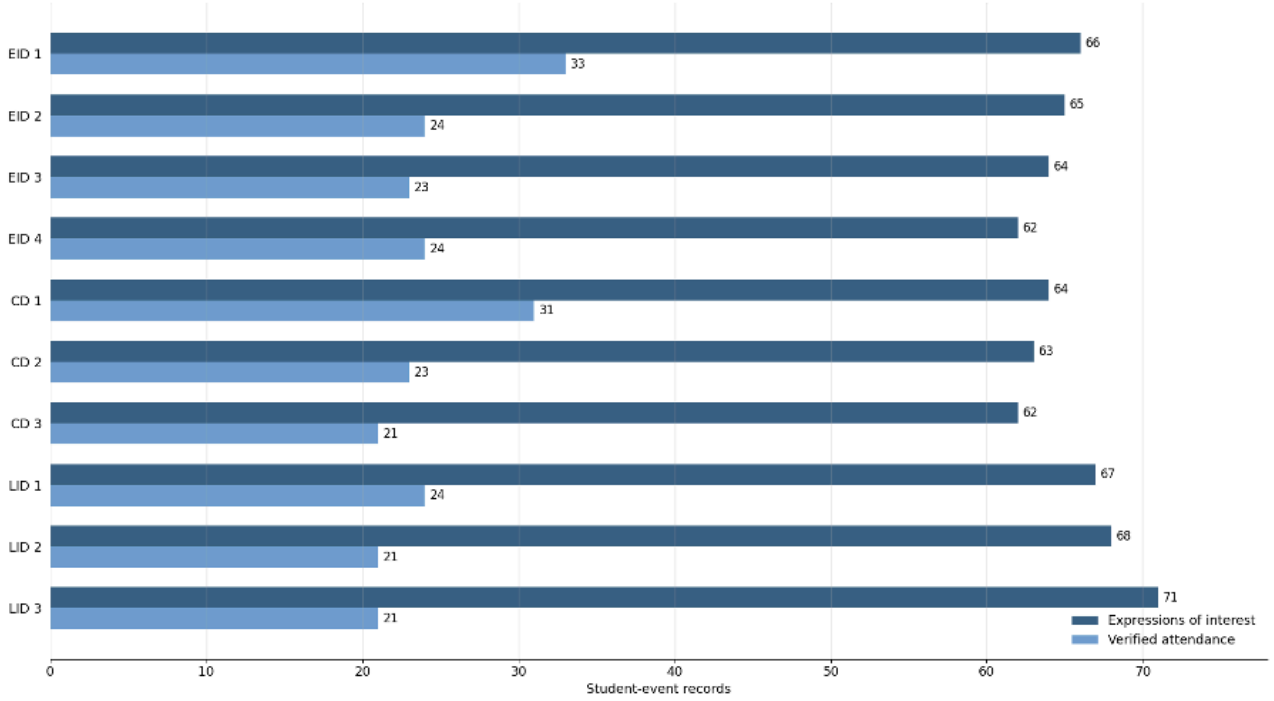
Attendance was recorded for each online discussion by combining Zoom participation logs with a shared staff attendance record. The resulting data were reconciled at institutional level and used to calculate aggregate participation, repeat attendance and the transnational composition of breakout groups. Only aggregate and anonymised results are presented here.

Overall participation

The final registration file records 123 registered students, meaning students entered in the shared registration and planning record whether they subsequently attended. Seventy-seven students attended at least once, and the ten events generated 245 verified student-event attendances. Every session exceeded the minimum target of 15 participants; attendance ranged from 18 to 33, with an average of 24.5 students per event.

Students recorded 652 event-level expressions of interest during registration, compared with 245 verified attendances. These are planning indications rather than confirmed bookings, so the difference should not be interpreted as a conventional completion rate. It nevertheless demonstrates the value of event-specific confirmation and flexible group allocation.

Figure 8.1. Expressions of interest and verified attendance by event

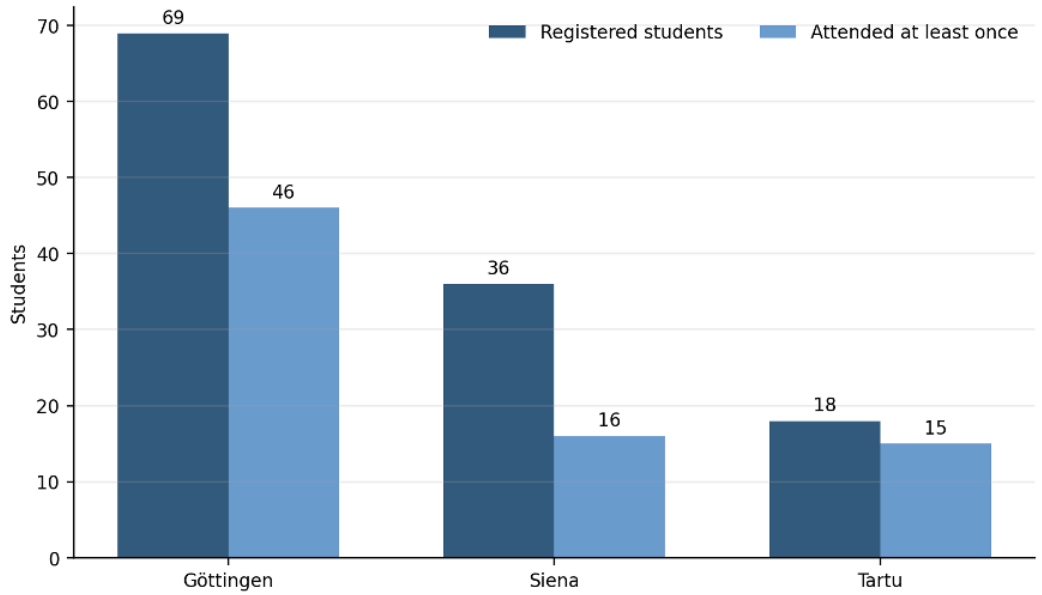


Source: calculations from the final student participation tracker.

As seen in Figure 8.1, the debate series did not display a simple pattern of declining attendance. Differences between events appear to have reflected the specific topic, timing, integration into university courses and students' changing availability rather than a straightforward loss of interest over time.

Participation by university

Figure 8.2. Registered and active students by university



Source: calculations from the final student participation tracker.

Göttingen contributed the largest recruitment pool and the greatest number of cumulative attendances. Its 46 active students accounted for 108 event participations, approximately 44 per cent of the total. Siena recorded 16 active students among 36 registered students and 72 attendances, while Tartu recorded 15 active students among 18 registered students and 65 attendances. The proportions attending at least once were 66.7% for Göttingen, 44.4% for Siena and 83.3% for Tartu.

Repeat attendance and continuity

The distribution of repeat participation confirms that the series reached both occasional participants and a substantial core of students who returned regularly. Overall, 47 students attended at least two sessions, 41 attended at least three, and 38 participated in four or more.

Participation can also be examined across the three thematic blocks. The four European Issue Debates generated 104 attendances and involved 62 unique students. The three Curriculum Discussions generated 75 attendances and involved 48 unique students. The three Local Issue Discussions generated 66 attendances and involved 38 unique students. Average attendance was therefore 26 students for the European Issue Debates, 25 for the Curriculum Discussions and 22 for the Local Issue Discussions.

The continuation of a recognisable core across the programme also supported discussion quality. Repeat participants were already familiar with the Future Workshop sequence, the use of Padlet, the expectations of respectful discussion and the practical procedures for entering breakout rooms. Their experience could help stabilise groups that also included newcomers. At the same time, the continued arrival of students attending for the first time prevented the discussions from becoming closed or repetitive.

Transnational composition of the groups

The transnational objective was realised at group level. Of 61 event–group–subtopic allocation records, 60 include students from at least two universities and 47 include students from all three. Approximately 98% of recorded allocations were therefore transnational and 77% included all three institutions. These

totals refer to the allocation labels as recorded, not to 61 independently verified room identities: Curriculum Discussion 1 contains two entries labelled Group 3 with different subtopics, one of which belongs to Curriculum Discussion 2.

This result is important because the educational objective of the programme was not achieved merely by placing students from three universities in the same plenary Zoom call. Meaningful transnational exchange required them to speak directly to peers from other national and institutional contexts, compare experiences and negotiate a shared group output. The breakout-room data show that this occurred in almost every working group.

Institutional balance could not always be mathematically perfect. Göttingen had a considerably larger pool, and absence patterns were not known until students actually entered the meeting. The organisers therefore prioritised the presence of at least two universities in each room rather than requiring identical numbers from all three. The monitoring evidence indicates that this pragmatic strategy was successful.

9. Survey results and feedback

Analytical approach and valid responses

The sample construction, consent criteria and missing-response rules are set out in Section 5. Table 9.1 summarises the analytical samples used below. Item-level percentages and means are based on valid substantive answers, so denominators vary by question.

Because the anonymous survey waves cannot be linked at respondent level, comparisons describe differences between the responding samples rather than

individual-level change or causal effects. This limitation is particularly important for the delayed follow-up, where item-level valid response counts were often small.

Table 9.1. Analytical survey samples

Survey wave	Consenting analytical sample
Pre-event survey	73
Post-event Survey 1	45
Post-event Survey 2	25

Note: "Don't know", refusal/prefer-not-to-answer and no-response categories are excluded from the main analysis.

Profile of pre-event survey respondents

The pre-event survey provides the most complete description of the students who entered the participatory pathway. Among the 72 respondents who provided a valid gender response, 51.4% were women and 48.6% were men. The resulting distribution was therefore almost evenly balanced.

The respondents were internationally diverse, although German students constituted the largest group. Among 67 valid responses, 55.2% reported German nationality. Italian students represented 9.0%, Estonian students 6.0% and Georgian students 4.5%. The remaining 25.4% consisted of students from 13 other national backgrounds. The sample therefore combined a substantial national concentration with a wider group of students from different countries.

Among respondents who identified their university, 61.8% were enrolled at the University of Göttingen, 29.4% at the University of Siena and 8.8% at the University of Tartu (Valid N = 68). Most respondents were undergraduate students. Among 65 valid responses, 67.7% were enrolled in a bachelor's degree, 29.2% in a master's degree and 3.1% identified their study status as Erasmus+. Open-ended programme

descriptions are not discussed because they were highly heterogeneous and do not contribute materially to the interpretation of the main results.

Table 9.2a. Gender

Category	Valid N	Valid %
Women	37	51.4
Men	35	48.6
Total	**72**	**100.0**

Table 9.2b. Nationality

Category	Valid N	Valid %
German	37	55.2
Italian	6	9.0
Estonian	4	6.0
Georgian	3	4.5
Other nationalities	17	25.4
Total	**67**	**100.0**

Table 9.2c. University

Category	Valid N	Valid %
University of Göttingen	42	61.8
University of Siena	20	29.4
University of Tartu	6	8.8
Total	**68**	**100.0**

Table 9.2d. Degree level

Category	Valid N	Valid %
Bachelor's degree	44	67.7
Master's degree	19	29.2
Erasmus+	2	3.1
Total	**65**	**100.0**

Note: Valid denominators differ by characteristic: gender N = 72; nationality N = 67; university N = 68; degree level N = 65. Percentages may not sum exactly to 100 because of rounding.

Political engagement and issue priorities at baseline

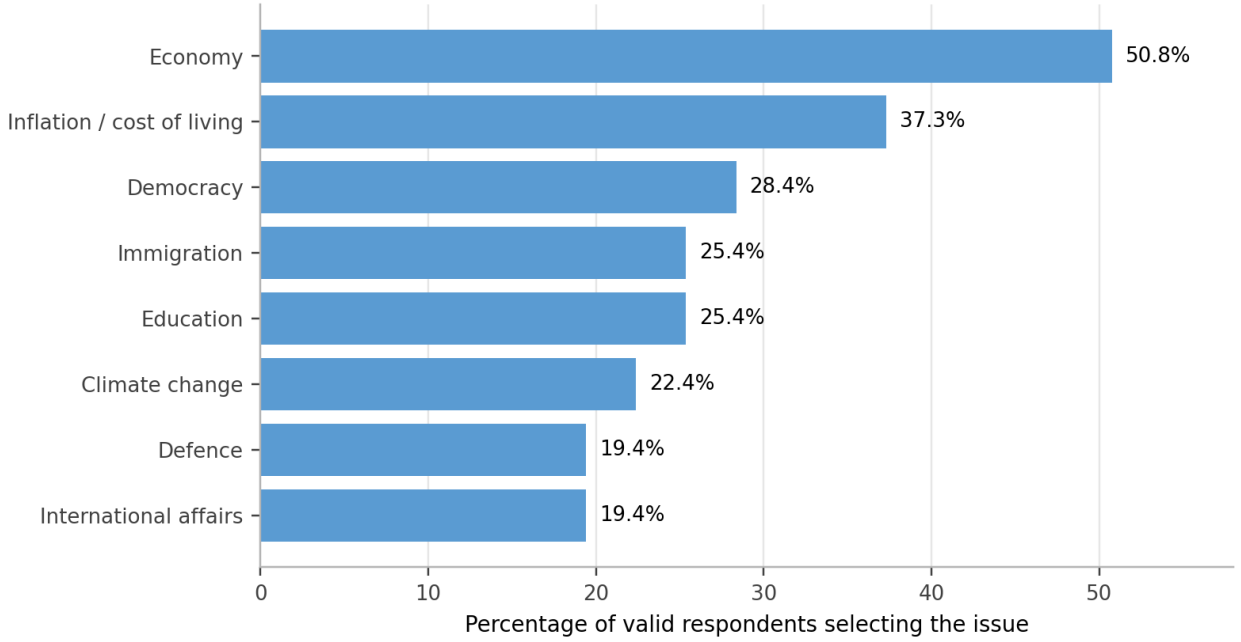
The students entering the activities generally displayed a relatively high level of political interest. On the scale from 1 to 4, the mean political-interest score was 3.68 (Valid N = 68). Almost three quarters of valid respondents (72.1%) selected 'Very interested', the highest response category.

Political and social issues also formed part of respondents' everyday conversations. Discussion was more frequent with friends than with family members. The mean frequency was 3.91 for discussions with friends (Valid N = 68) and 3.23 for discussions with family members (Valid N = 69). Approximately 70.6% reported discussing political or socially important issues with friends several times a week or every day. The corresponding proportion for discussions with family members was 34.8%. The responses therefore describe a sample that was already politically attentive before the debates.

When respondents were asked to identify the three most important issues facing their country, economic and institutional concerns were particularly prominent. The economy was selected by 34 respondents, corresponding to 50.7% of those providing a valid response. Inflation and the cost of living were selected by 25 respondents

(37.3%), while 19 respondents identified democracy (28.4%). Immigration and education were each selected by 17 respondents (25.4%), followed by climate change with 15 selections (22.4%). Defence and international affairs were each selected by 13 respondents (19.4%).

Figure 9.1. Most important issues facing respondents' countries



Note: Multiple-response item: respondents could select up to three issues. Percentages therefore do not sum to 100. Valid N = 67.

Democracy, European integration and social trust

Baseline attitudes towards the functioning of democracy were moderately positive, but not uniformly so. Satisfaction with democracy produced a mean of 5.70 on the 0–10 scale (Valid N = 66), and 48.5% selected a value between 7 and 10. The remaining responses were concentrated around the middle of the scale or expressed dissatisfaction, indicating that positive evaluations coexisted with a considerable degree of reservation.

Attitudes towards European integration were more favourable. The mean score was 6.91 (Valid N = 64), and 54.7% selected a value between 7 and 10. Overall, 92.2% placed themselves at or above the midpoint of the scale. Generalised social trust was more moderate: the mean was 5.39 (Valid N = 62), with 56.5% selecting a value between 6 and 10. Taken together, these measures identify a sample that was generally supportive of European integration and moderately trusting, while retaining more mixed assessments of how democracy currently works.

Table 9.3. Baseline democratic and social attitudes

Measure	Valid N	Mean	Higher-score summary
Satisfaction with democracy (0–10)	66	5.70	48.5% scored 7–10
Support for European integration (0–10)	64	6.91	54.7% scored 7–10
Generalised social trust (0–10)	62	5.39	56.5% scored 6–10

Note: Percentages are calculated from valid substantive responses.

Open-mindedness and engagement with opposing views

The baseline questionnaire included five statements addressing respondents' willingness to engage with disagreement, consider counterevidence and revise their views. The strongest indication of openness concerned the proposition that people on opposing political sides can learn from one another. The mean was 4.29 (Valid N = 63), and 95.2% agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, the statement that people should take evidence that goes against their beliefs into consideration received a mean of 4.49 (Valid N = 59); 91.5% agreed or strongly agreed.

Respondents generally rejected statements expressing ideological closure. The assertion that discussing political perspectives with people on the other side is useless received a mean of 1.92 (Valid N = 63), with 82.5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The statement that everyone would hold the same opinions if they thought carefully enough produced a mean of 2.33 (Valid N = 61), while the proposition that loyalty to one's ideals is more important than open-mindedness received a mean of 1.95 (Valid N = 61). The baseline results therefore depict a group already strongly predisposed towards considering evidence and recognising the possible value of dialogue across political divisions.

Political emotions

Respondents were asked how strongly they experienced ten emotions when thinking about politics. Negative emotions were considerably more prominent than positive ones. Worry was the most strongly reported emotion, with a mean of 7.19 on the 0–10 scale. It was followed by disgust (6.51), anger (6.45), fear (6.42), irritation (6.25), outrage (6.10) and anxiety (5.83). The positive emotions received substantially lower scores: hope had a mean of 4.30, enthusiasm 3.78 and pride 3.56.

Political interest and political confidence should consequently not be interpreted as emotional satisfaction with politics. Respondents were politically engaged, but their engagement was accompanied by substantial concern, frustration and unease.

9.7 Place attachment

Respondents generally expressed attachment to multiple territorial levels. Mean attachment was 2.97 for the city or town in which they lived (Valid N = 58), 2.80 for their region (N = 59), 3.05 for their country (N = 58) and 3.21 for Europe (N = 57), using the four-point scale. The percentage selecting one of the two higher attachment

categories was 75.9% for the city or town, 64.4% for the region, 69.0% for the country and 78.9% for Europe. European attachment was therefore not expressed at the expense of local or national belonging. Instead, most respondents appeared to hold overlapping territorial attachments.

Previous participation before the activities

Before the activities, experience with participatory instruments varied considerably. Opinion surveys were by far the most common form: 78.0% of valid respondents reported previous participation. Experience was less frequent for citizen-initiated referenda (31.0%), mini-publics such as citizen assemblies or juries (29.3%), assemblies organised by political parties (27.6%), participatory budgeting (13.8%) and advisory councils (12.1%).

Table 9.4. Previous participation in participatory instruments before the activities

Participatory instrument	Previously participated
Advisory councils	12.1%
Mini-publics	29.3%
Participatory budgeting	13.8%
Citizen-initiated referenda	31.0%
Opinion surveys	78.0%
Assemblies of political parties	27.6%

Note: Percentages refer to valid substantive responses; denominators vary by item.

Perceived objectives of participatory processes

Before participating, respondents ranked six possible objectives of participatory processes. Among 58 complete rankings, lower mean ranks indicate greater importance. Increasing transparency received the highest priority, with a mean rank of 2.90, followed by addressing social injustice (3.41), reducing political disaffection (3.52), improving the effectiveness of decision-making (3.55), empowering citizens (3.64) and informing political elites (3.98). The ordering places particular emphasis on transparency and social justice rather than viewing participatory processes only as instruments for transmitting information to political decision-makers.

Table 9.5. Ranked objectives of participatory processes before participation

Ranked baseline objective	Mean rank
Increase transparency	2.90
Address social injustice	3.41
Reduce political disaffection	3.52
Improve decision-making effectiveness	3.55
Empower citizens	3.64
Inform political elites	3.98

Note: A lower mean rank indicates greater perceived importance. Valid N = 58 complete rankings; 15 consenting respondents had no usable ranking block.

Expectations before participation

Expectations of the activities were generally positive. On the 0–10 expectations scale, the mean was 5.81 and the median was 6 (Valid N = 57). Approximately 42.1% selected

a value between 7 and 10. The most frequently selected learning priority was understanding how political issues can be discussed across national borders, chosen by 48.3% of valid respondents. Learning how local issues are connected to the European level was selected by 45.6%, while 42.4% prioritised developing the ability to express their views and contribute to discussion. Students were therefore looking not only for additional factual knowledge, but also for opportunities to connect different political levels and strengthen practical discussion skills.

Civic competences before participation

The baseline questionnaire asked respondents how confident they felt in exercising ten civic competences. The highest baseline confidence concerned respectful engagement with people from different cultural or social backgrounds, with a mean of 4.25; 84.2% selected one of the two highest response categories. Confidence was also relatively high for critically evaluating political information and competing arguments, with a mean of 3.77 and 70.2% in the two highest categories.

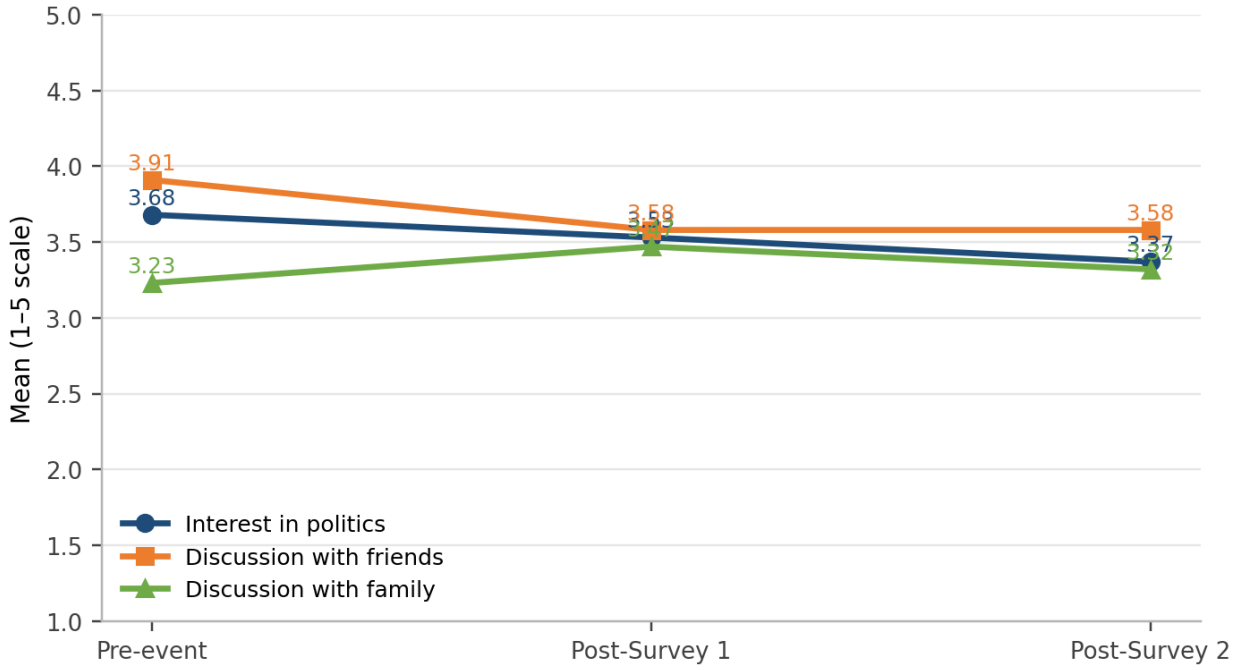
Respondents were moderately confident in working collaboratively on public issues (mean 3.64), reflecting on ethical aspects of political issues (3.64), expressing ideas clearly (3.47), recognising citizens' social responsibility (3.46), using digital tools responsibly (3.43), participating in democratic and civic life (3.38), and understanding political and civic institutions (3.37). The weakest baseline competence was taking action and mobilising diverse resources to address civic issues. This item received a mean of 3.09, and only 31.0% selected one of the two highest response categories.

Political engagement across the three surveys

Political interest and the frequency of political discussion were measured in all three questionnaires. Political interest was slightly lower in the two post-event surveys,

while discussion with family was marginally more frequent in Post-event Survey 1. Discussion with friends remained comparatively frequent in both follow-up surveys.

Figure 9.2. Political engagement across the three survey waves



Note: Valid Ns: political interest 68/32/19; discussion with friends 68/33/19; discussion with family 69/32/19 for the pre-event survey, Post-event Survey 1 and Post-event Survey 2 respectively.

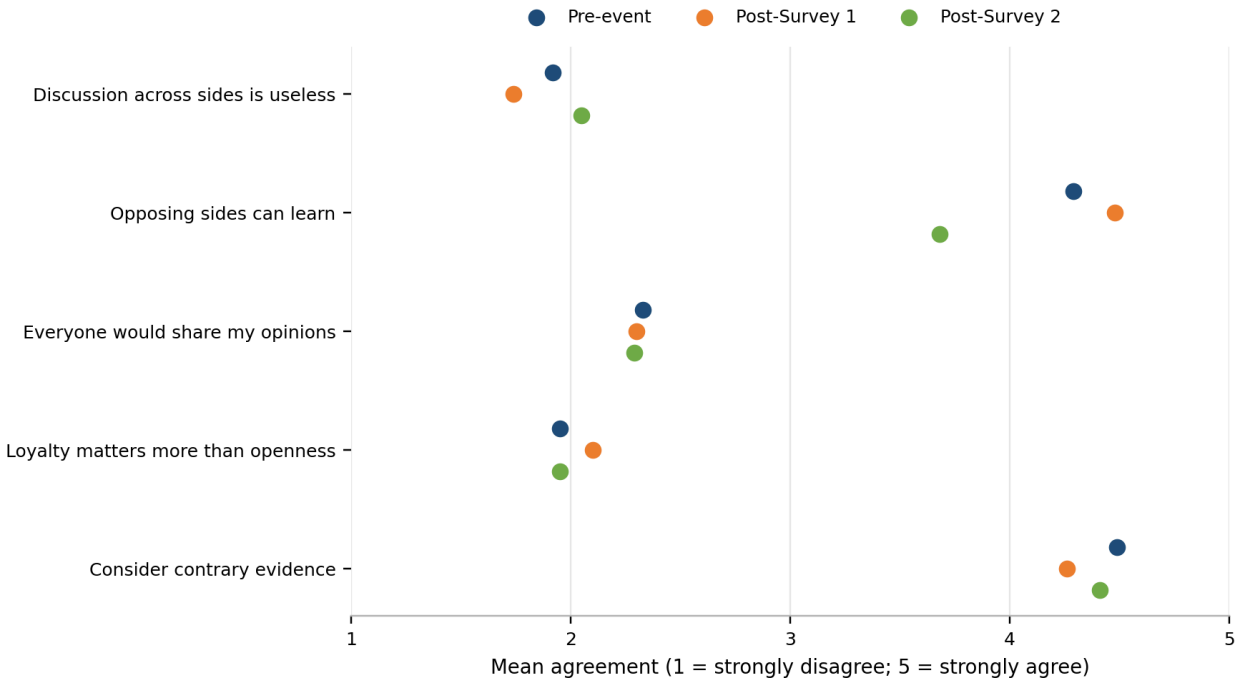
None of these differences was statistically clear in comparisons of the independent survey samples. The results therefore provide no evidence of a substantial overall shift in general political interest or discussion frequency. Given the relatively high baseline levels, the most defensible interpretation is that political engagement remained broadly stable among those who responded to the later surveys.

Open-mindedness across the three surveys

Four of the five open-mindedness items remained highly stable across the three surveys. Respondents consistently rejected the proposition that discussing politics with people holding opposing views is useless. The means were 1.92 before the

activities, 1.74 in Post-event Survey 1 and 2.05 in Post-event Survey 2. The belief that everyone would hold the same opinions if they thought carefully enough produced means of 2.33, 2.30 and 2.29 respectively. The proposition that loyalty to one's ideals is more important than open-mindedness produced means of 1.95, 2.10 and 1.95. Agreement that people should consider evidence contradicting their beliefs also remained high, with means of 4.49, 4.26 and 4.41.

Figure 9.3. Open-mindedness across the three survey waves



Note: Higher scores indicate stronger agreement with each statement. The direction of interpretation therefore differs between positively and negatively worded items. Valid Ns vary by item and wave.

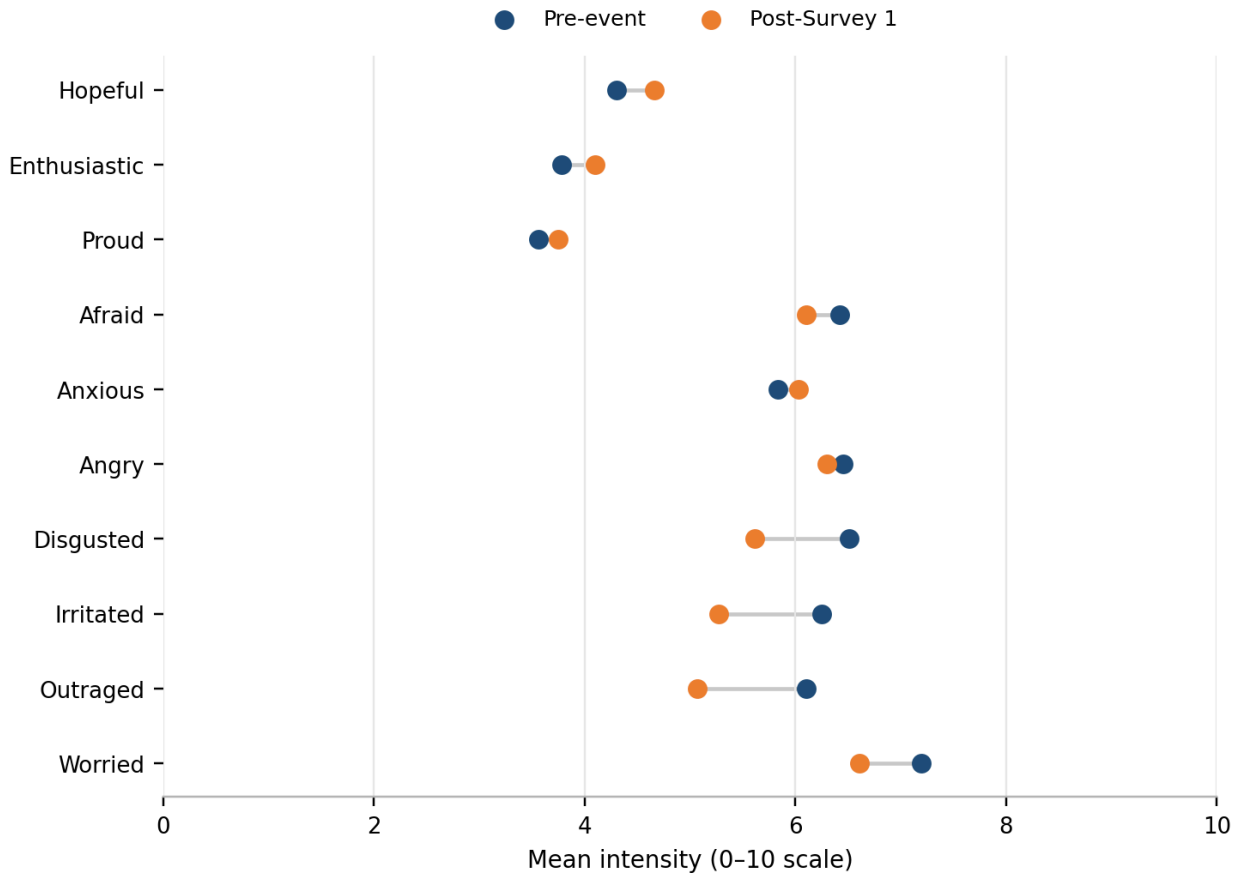
The principal departure concerned the statement that people on opposing political sides can learn from one another. Agreement increased from a mean of 4.29 at baseline to 4.48 in Post-event Survey 1, before falling to 3.68 in Post-event Survey 2. The difference between the two post-event samples was statistically visible in an unadjusted comparison. However, the Post-event Survey 2 estimate was based on only 19 valid responses, the respondents were not matched across waves and several

comparisons were conducted. It should therefore be treated as a tentative indication rather than firm evidence of declining openness. Overall, the findings suggest substantial continuity in respondents' commitment to evidence and dialogue.

Political emotions before and immediately after the activities

Political emotions were measured in the pre-event survey and Post-event Survey 1, but not in Post-event Survey 2. The descriptive pattern is moderately positive. Hope, enthusiasm and pride were slightly higher in Post-event Survey 1, while fear, anger, disgust, irritation, outrage and worry were lower. The largest reductions concerned outrage, irritation and disgust. Anxiety was the only negative emotion to show a small increase.

Figure 9.4. Political emotions before and immediately after the activities



Note: Mean intensity on a 0–10 scale. The pre-event and Post-event Survey 1 samples are independent rather than respondent-matched.

None of the differences provided statistically clear evidence of change between the independent samples. Nevertheless, the direction of most differences suggests that immediate post-event respondents described politics in somewhat less intensely negative emotional terms. These respondents also reported higher confidence in collaboration and civic participation (Figure 9.6). Structured debates may give students practice in constructive political discussion. In classroom studies, students reported a better understanding of the issues discussed (Archibugi et al., 2021) and stronger intentions to engage in civic life (Latimer & Hempson, 2012) after deliberation.

Evaluation of the participatory pathway

Post-event Survey 1 contained the most detailed assessment of the overall pathway. Satisfaction was high: on the 0–10 scale, the mean was 6.74 and the median was 7 (Valid N = 31). Approximately 65.5% of valid respondents considered debates a quite or very useful method of learning (N = 29). The purpose of the activities also appeared to have been communicated successfully: among 27 valid respondents, 96.3% agreed that the purpose of the event had been clearly explained.

Responses concerning deliberative quality were positive in several respects. Approximately 82.8% agreed that participants had been able to express their views, and 93.1% agreed that participants had treated one another with respect. However, 57.1% felt that many participants had already made up their minds before the discussion. Only 32.1% agreed that everyone had participated equally, indicating that the distribution of speaking and participation opportunities remained an area for improvement. At the same time, 46.4% disagreed with the statement that they had kept their thoughts to themselves.

Table 9.6. Immediate evaluation of the participatory pathway

Indicator	Valid N	Result
Overall satisfaction (0–10)	31	Mean 6.74; median 7
Debates quite/very useful for learning	29	65.5%
Purpose clearly explained	27	96.3%
Participants could express their views	29	82.8% agree
Participants had already made up their minds	28	57.1% agree
Everyone participated equally	28	32.1% agree

Indicator	Valid N	Result
Participants treated one another with respect	29	93.1% agree
Kept thoughts private	28	46.4% disagree

Note: Percentages refer to valid substantive responses. Agreement combines "agree" and "strongly agree", where applicable.

Equal participation was closely associated with respondents' broader evaluations: those who felt that participation had been more equal also tended to report greater satisfaction and a stronger benefit in understanding people with different perspectives. While these associations do not establish causality, they underline the importance of an inclusive discussion structure and balanced participation.

Understanding different perspectives, future attendance and recommendation

Three evaluation questions were available in both post-event surveys. Willingness to attend another event remained very high and almost unchanged. Recommendation also remained positive in Post-event Survey 2, although the proportion was lower than in the immediate post-event survey.

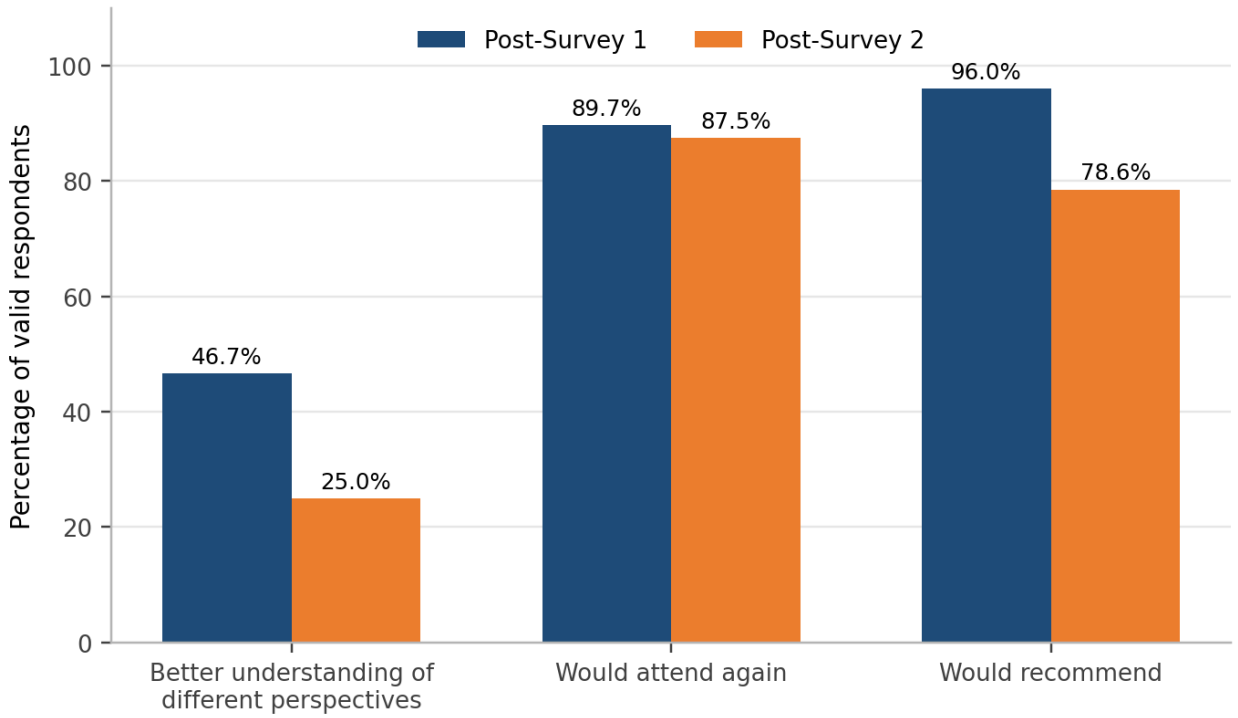
Table 9.7. Evaluation indicators common to the two post-event surveys

Measure	Post-event Survey 1	Post-event Survey 2
Better understanding of people who think differently: mean	3.47 (N = 30)	2.69 (N = 16)
Better understanding: percentage (4 or 5)	46.7%	25.0%
Would attend a similar event again	89.7% (N = 29)	87.5% (N = 16)

Measure	Post-event Survey 1	Post-event Survey 2
Would recommend the event	96.0% (N = 25)	78.6% (N = 14)

Note: Percentages are calculated from valid substantive responses. The response scales for attendance and recommendation distinguish positive from non-positive answers.

Figure 9.5. Evaluation indicators common to Post-event Survey 1 and Post-event Survey 2



Note: For better understanding, the bars show the percentage selecting 4 or 5 on the five-point scale. Valid Ns differ across indicators.

Perceived benefit of participation. The direct benefit item asked how much participation helped respondents understand people who think differently. In Post-event Survey 1, the mean was 3.47 (Valid N = 30), and 46.7% selected 4 or 5 on the five-point scale. In Post-event Survey 2, the mean was 2.69 (Valid N = 16), and 25.0% selected 4 or 5. The lower delayed-follow-up result approached, but did not reach, the conventional threshold for statistical significance. Because the samples

were small and could not be matched, it should be interpreted as a descriptive difference rather than evidence of declining perspective-taking.

Suggestions for improvement. Post-event Survey 1 asked which elements could improve the debate activities. Additional background information was selected most frequently, by 15 of the 31 respondents providing a substantive answer to the block (48.4%). Greater interaction between students from the participating universities was selected by nine respondents (29.0%). More time for discussion and more opportunities to express personal views were each selected by six respondents (19.4%). Five respondents requested more preparation time (16.1%), four preferred smaller discussion groups (12.9%) and two indicated that nothing had been missing (6.5%).

Table 9.8. Elements suggested for improving the debate activities

Suggested improvement	n	Valid %
More background information before the debate	15	48.4
More interaction between students from different universities	9	29.0
More time for discussion	6	19.4
More opportunities to express personal views	6	19.4
More preparation time	5	16.1
Smaller discussion groups	4	12.9
Nothing was missing	2	6.5

Note: Multiple-response item; percentages use the 31 respondents who answered the block substantively after excluding one "I prefer not to answer" response. Percentages therefore do not sum to 100.

Post-event willingness to participate and means of reconnecting citizens

The two post-event surveys asked whether respondents would consider participating in six forms of democratic participation after the experience. These prospective measures are distinct from the baseline question about previous behaviour and are therefore presented separately.

Table 9.9. Post-event willingness to participate in participatory instruments

Participatory instrument	Post-event Survey 1	Post-event Survey 2
Advisory councils	69.2% / 7.7% (N = 26)	68.8% / 12.5% (N = 16)
Mini-publics	67.9% / 17.9% (N = 28)	73.3% / 6.7% (N = 15)
Participatory budgeting	47.8% / 8.7% (N = 23)	50.0% / 14.3% (N = 14)
Citizen-initiated referenda	80.0% / 12.0% (N = 25)	68.8% / 6.2% (N = 16)
Opinion surveys	69.2% / 30.8% (N = 26)	87.5% / 12.5% (N = 16)
Assemblies of political parties	66.7% / 12.5% (N = 24)	52.9% / 5.9% (N = 17)

Note: Each cell reports the percentage who would participate followed by the percentage reporting that they had already participated; Valid Ns are shown in parentheses and differ by item.

Willingness was particularly high for citizen-initiated referenda, opinion surveys, mini-publics and advisory councils. Participatory budgeting received more moderate support, although approximately half of valid respondents in both post-event surveys would consider participating. Given the small and changing valid samples, these results indicate broad openness rather than change from baseline.

Post-event Survey 1 also asked respondents to rank possible means of reconnecting, informing and engaging citizens. Among 29 valid complete rankings, local public

meetings received the highest mean rank (3.41), followed by courses explaining political institutions (3.28) and online voter-preference tools (3.10). Monitoring representatives received a mean rank of 2.83, while quotas received the lowest mean rank, 2.38. The pattern favours accessible opportunities for direct discussion and political learning.

Table 9.10. Post-event rankings of means of reconnecting citizens

Reconnection mechanism	Mean rank
Local public meetings	3.41
Courses on political institutions	3.28
Online voter-preference tools	3.10
Monitoring representatives	2.83
Quotas	2.38

Note: Mechanisms were ranked from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important), with each rank used once. Means use 29 complete rankings; 15 absent ranking blocks and one record with a duplicated strategy are excluded.

Perceived learning and competence development

Post-event Survey 1 asked respondents to assess the extent to which the activities met their expectations in relation to learning, understanding and skill development. For learning outcomes, the mean was 3.24 for learning about European and student-related political issues, 3.44 for learning how local issues connect to the European level and 3.31 for learning about civic competences. Between 37.9% and 44.4% selected one of the two highest response categories.

The results were somewhat stronger for understanding. The mean was 3.41 for understanding how political issues can be discussed across national borders, 3.41 for

comparing different perspectives and 3.46 for understanding local issues in a wider European context. The strongest percentage result in this group concerned comparing different perspectives, for which 55.6% selected one of the two highest categories.

Regarding skill development, listening to others received the most positive evaluation, with a mean of 3.72 and 65.5% selecting one of the two highest categories. Expressing ideas clearly received a mean of 3.43, with 50.0% reporting a high level of development. Critical thinking received a mean of 3.30, with 40.7% selecting one of the two highest categories.

Table 9.11. Extent to which the activities met learning and development expectations

Dimension	Outcome	Valid N	Mean	High response (%)
Learning	European and student-related political issues	29	3.24	37.9
Learning	Connections between local issues and the EU level	27	3.44	44.4
Learning	Civic competences	26	3.31	38.5
Understanding	Transnational political discussion	29	3.41	41.4
Understanding	Comparison of different perspectives	27	3.41	55.6
Understanding	Local issues in a wider European context	28	3.46	39.3
Developing	Expressing ideas clearly	28	3.43	50.0
Developing	Listening to others	29	3.72	65.5

Dimension	Outcome	Valid N	Mean	High response (%)
Developing	Critical thinking	27	3.30	40.7

Note: High response combines categories 4 and 5 on the five-point scale.

The overall pattern is consistent with the dialogical format of the activities. Respondents reported the strongest benefits in listening and comparing perspectives, while perceived gains in factual learning and critical thinking were more moderate. These evaluations broadly correspond to the expectations expressed before the activities, particularly the desire to connect political levels and develop discussion skills.

Civic confidence and perceived improvement

The three surveys addressed civic competences in different ways. The pre-event survey measured respondents' confidence in exercising ten competences. Post-event Survey 1 repeated confidence ratings for nine of these competences, while Post-event Survey 2 asked respondents to select the competences they believed they had improved most during the preceding months. The Post-event Survey 2 percentages are therefore not equivalent to the confidence means and should not be interpreted as a third point on the same scale.

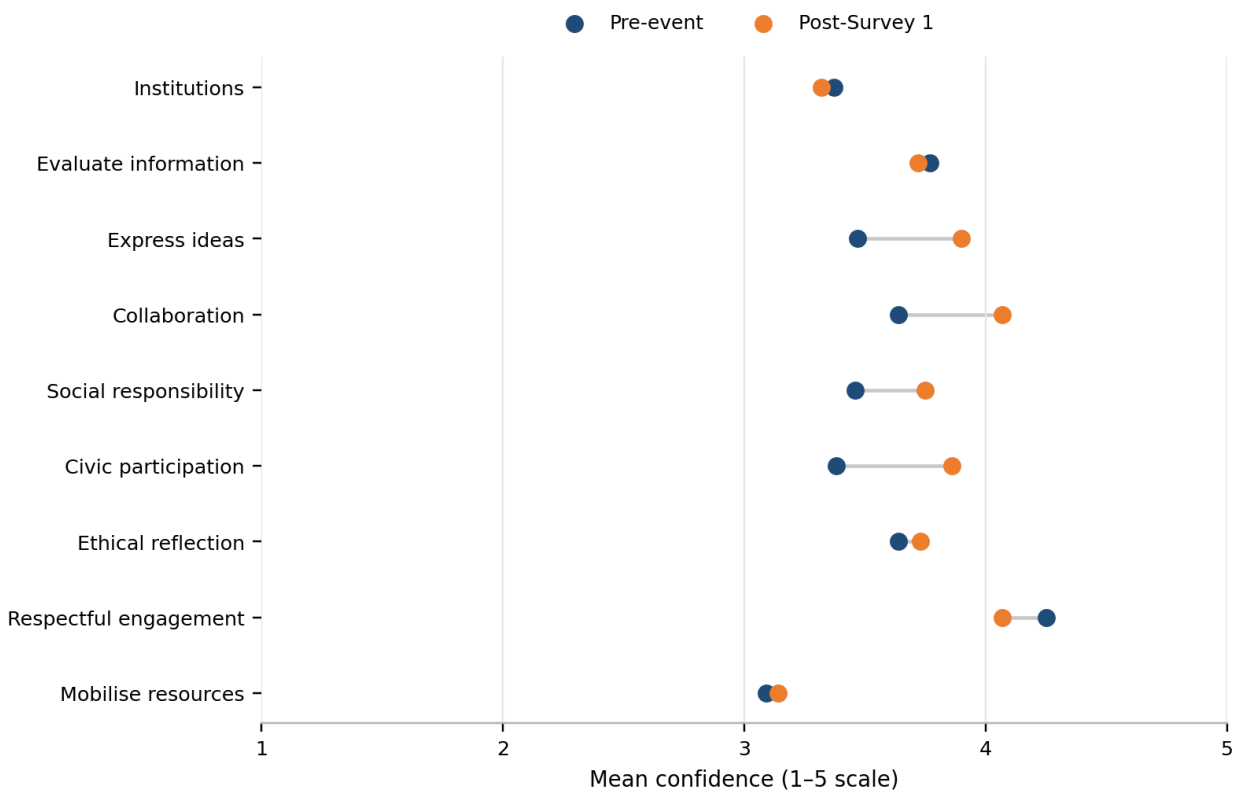
Table 9.12. Civic competence confidence and perceived improvement

Civic competence	Pre-event Survey confidence mean	Post-event Survey 1 confidence mean	Selected as improved in Post-event Survey 2
Understanding political and civic institutions	3.37	3.32	64.7%

Civic competence	Pre-event Survey confidence mean	Post-event Survey 1 confidence mean	Selected as improved in Post-event Survey 2
Evaluating political information and arguments	3.77	3.72	35.3%
Expressing ideas clearly	3.47	3.90	41.2%
Working collaboratively	3.64	4.07	58.8%
Recognising citizens' social responsibility	3.46	3.75	41.2%
Taking part in democratic and civic life	3.38	3.86	47.1%
Reflecting on ethical aspects of public issues	3.64	3.73	29.4%
Engaging respectfully across differences	4.25	4.07	41.2%
Mobilising resources to address civic issues	3.09	3.14	5.9%
Using digital tools responsibly	3.43	Not asked	29.4%

Note: Pre-event and Post-event Survey 1 values are confidence means on a five-point scale. Post-event Survey 2 is a multiple-response checklist; percentages use the 17 respondents who answered the checklist.

Figure 9.6. Civic competence confidence before and immediately after the activities



Note: The figure presents the nine confidence items asked in both the pre-event survey and Post-event Survey 1. The samples are independent rather than respondent-matched. Responsible use of digital tools was not asked in Post-event Survey 1.

Confidence was descriptively higher after the activities for expressing ideas, collaborating with others, recognising social responsibility, participating in civic life and reflecting on ethical questions. The largest descriptive increases concerned collaboration and participation in democratic and civic life. Confidence in understanding institutions and evaluating information was broadly stable. Respectful engagement remained highly rated, although its mean was slightly lower in Post-event Survey 1 than at baseline.

In Post-event Survey 2, understanding political and civic institutions was the most frequently selected area of improvement, chosen by 64.7% of the 17 respondents who answered the checklist. It was followed by working collaboratively (58.8%) and taking

part in democratic and civic life (47.1%). Only one respondent (5.9%) selected taking action and mobilising resources. This competence had also received the lowest baseline confidence score. The consistency between the two findings suggests that translating reflection and discussion into concrete civic mobilisation remains the least developed area and represents a potential priority for future activities.

Continued discussion beyond the organised events

Post-event Survey 2 asked respondents whether they had discussed the debate topics outside the scheduled sessions—for example, with friends, relatives, classmates or colleagues, or in online settings. Table 9.13 summarises substantive discussion-frequency responses, including "Never", and excludes "I did not participate", refusals and missing responses. These item-specific responding samples are not restricted by the separate attendance checklist and therefore must not be interpreted as verified samples of attendees.

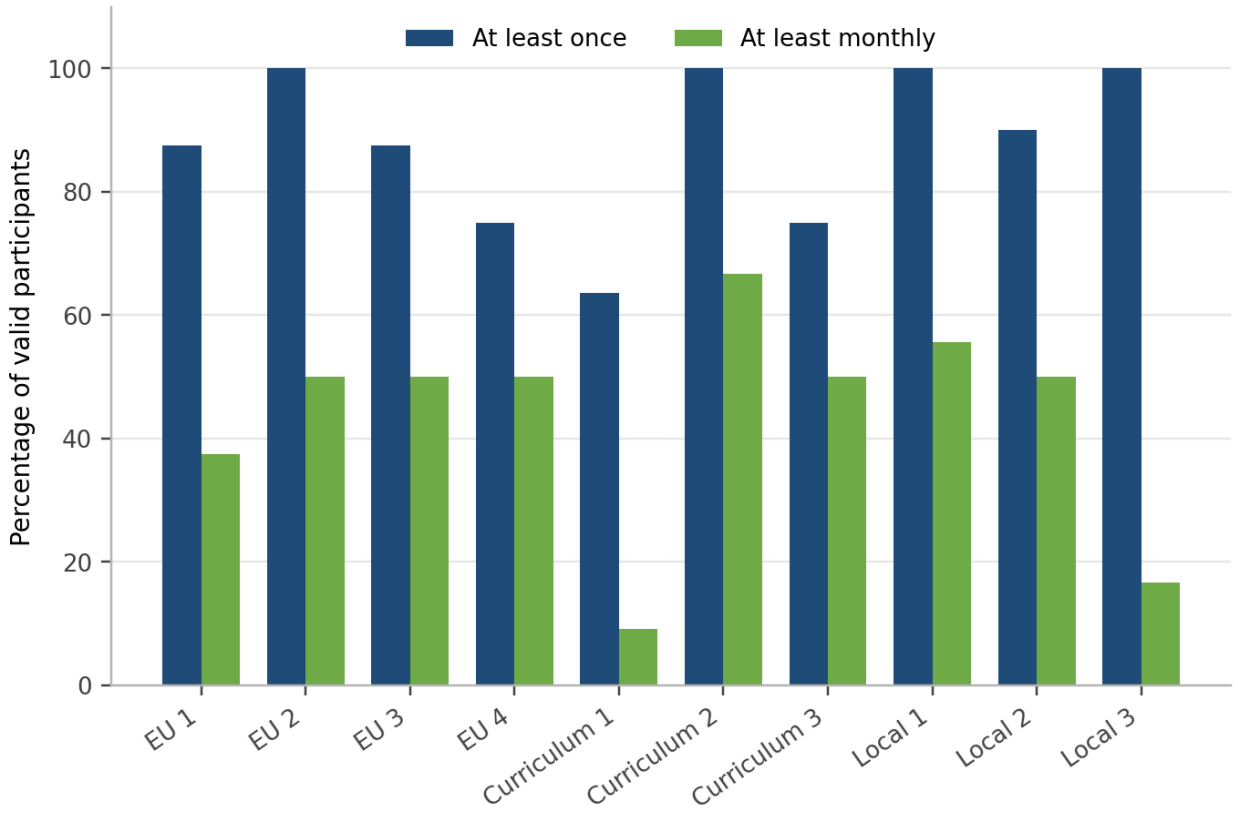
Table 9.13. Discussion of debate topics outside the organised events

Debate	Valid N	Discussed at least once	Discussed at least monthly
European Issue Debate 1: Youth and Representation	8	87.5%	37.5%
European Issue Debate 2: Democratic backsliding, illiberalism and polarisation	10	100.0%	50.0%
European Issue Debate 3: Sustainability	8	87.5%	50.0%
European Issue Debate 4: Youth and Digital Citizenship	8	75.0%	50.0%
Curriculum Discussion 1: Civic competences and the European dimension	11	63.6%	9.1%

Debate	Valid N	Discussed at least once	Discussed at least monthly
Curriculum Discussion 2: Interdisciplinarity	6	100.0%	66.7%
Curriculum Discussion 3: Rethinking learning practices	8	75.0%	50.0%
Local Issue Discussion 1: Digitalisation and local public services	9	100.0%	55.6%
Local Issue Discussion 2: Community Regeneration	10	90.0%	50.0%
Local Issue Discussion 3: Sustainability	6	100.0%	16.7%

Note: Percentages use substantive discussion-frequency answers (codes 1–5), including "Never"; "I did not participate", refusals and missing responses are excluded. No additional filter is imposed using the separate attendance checklist. Attendance and discussion answers are inconsistent for some respondents, so these are item-response summaries rather than estimates restricted to verified attendees.

Figure 9.7. Discussion of debate topics outside the organised events



Note: EU = European Issue Debate. Percentages use substantive discussion-frequency answers, including "Never", after excluding nonparticipation, refusal and missing categories. No separate attendance-checklist filter is applied; Valid Ns range from 6 to 11.

For every topic, most valid respondents reported at least one discussion outside the organised event. In several cases, all respondents who answered the question had discussed the subject elsewhere. Monthly or more frequent discussion was particularly common for interdisciplinarity, digitalisation and local public services, and several of the European issue debates. The small denominators mean that these percentages should be read as indications of continued engagement rather than estimates applicable to all participants.

10. Challenges and adaptations

The implementation of the EuroConnect debates required the consortium to reconcile a common transnational methodology with differences in university calendars, recruitment systems, credit arrangements, student availability and levels of engagement. Several challenges became visible during implementation and were addressed through practical adaptations, particularly after the opening event. Others emerged more clearly from the participation records, lead observations and student feedback and should inform future applications of the format.

The challenges discussed below qualify rather than reverse the overall positive assessment of the activities. They identify the conditions under which the format worked most effectively and the aspects requiring additional attention.

Converting initial interest into actual participation

The participation evidence shows a substantial gap between advance expressions of interest and verified attendance (Section 8). Because event selections were planning indications rather than confirmed bookings, they could not be used as a reliable basis for final room composition.

The gap partly reflected a deliberate recruitment strategy: students could express interest in several activities before their schedules were settled, and the registration pool was intentionally larger than the expected attendance. This reserve nevertheless helped every event remain above the planned minimum.

Nevertheless, the experience demonstrates that an expression of interest should not be treated as a confirmed registration. Future implementations should introduce a short confirmation stage approximately 48–72 hours before each event. Calendar

invitations, automatic reminders and a simple confirmation or withdrawal link would give organisers a more accurate estimate of attendance while allowing unused places to be reassigned. The larger reserve pool should be maintained, but it should be combined with event-specific confirmation.

Recruitment should also continue to use several complementary channels. The experience of the partner universities showed that formal course pages or general promotional communications were not always sufficient. Direct explanations by lecturers, targeted messages through existing student networks, institutional recognition and reminders from familiar university contacts were important in converting general interest into participation.

Coordinating different academic and institutional contexts

The debate series brought together universities with different semester calendars, course structures, assessment procedures and systems for recognising student participation. The final programme concentrated ten events into nine weeks between May and June 2026. This represented an adaptation of the original schedule, accommodating the later beginning of the teaching period in Göttingen while avoiding the summer-holiday period.

The condensed schedule made it possible to complete the pathway within the available academic window, but it also increased the demands placed on students and organisers. Attendance varied between events, reflecting not only interest in the topic but also teaching obligations, examinations and changing availability. Participation did not decline uniformly over time, demonstrating that the subject of an event and its integration into local courses could partly compensate for scheduling pressures.

Future editions would benefit from fixing the common calendar earlier and explicitly identifying periods of examination, public holidays and semester transitions at each institution. Where possible, activities should be distributed over a slightly longer period or organised in shorter thematic cycles. Alternating the day or time of the events could also prevent the same group of students from being repeatedly excluded by recurring timetable conflicts.

The differences in institutional recognition should remain locally adaptable. Siena, Tartu and Göttingen used different combinations of credits, badges, certificates and course-related recognition. A single recognition system would not have been appropriate. However, the requirements attached to each local pathway should be communicated from the beginning through a common overview so that students understand both the transnational programme and the specific conditions applied by their university.

Managing late arrivals, absences and breakout-room composition

The opening event showed that breakout groups could not be finalised solely on the basis of advance registration. Absences and late arrivals sometimes left groups smaller or less institutionally diverse than planned. Permanently inserting participants' names into Padlet boards before the event also risked directing students towards groups that no longer existed in the intended form.

Several adaptations were consequently introduced. Subsequent Padlets used generic group numbers and subtopics rather than fixed lists of names. Students added the names of those who had actually participated. A member of the organisational team remained in the plenary room to receive late arrivals and assign them without interrupting the discussions already in progress. Institutional initials were added to

Zoom display names, making it easier to maintain cross-university composition. A waiting room, clearer punctuality reminders and central time notifications were also introduced.

The revised procedures produced consistently transnational breakout rooms after the opening event (Section 8, “Transnational composition of the groups”). Their success shows that flexible allocation was more effective than fixed room lists when attendance remained uncertain.

Future implementation should therefore retain pre-arranged groups as a provisional starting point, while making final allocation a real-time organisational task. Each event should have a designated technical coordinator with authority to merge undersized rooms, reassign late arrivals and preserve institutional diversity. Priority should be given to including at least two institutions in every room rather than trying to produce mathematically identical representation from each university.

Ensuring equal and active participation

Visual presence and interpersonal engagement. Attendance and assignment to a breakout room did not necessarily guarantee meaningful interaction. Staff observations indicated that discussions were generally more personal and responsive when participants used their cameras, particularly while speaking. When most cameras remained closed, some exchanges felt like “voices talking to voices”: participants had fewer non-verbal cues, turn-taking became more hesitant, and it was harder to build the sense of a shared group conversation. Camera use cannot always be required because of privacy, accessibility, bandwidth or personal circumstances. Future sessions should nevertheless establish a clear but flexible expectation that cameras be used where feasible, especially during introductions, when speaking and

during final reflection. Virtual backgrounds and camera-optional alternatives should remain available.

The survey results reinforce this concern. Respondents generally regarded the interaction as respectful and felt able to express their views, but assessments of equal participation were much weaker. Broader evaluations were also more positive among respondents who perceived participation as balanced (Section 9.15).

Participation balance and self-moderation. The student-led small-group format lowered some barriers to participation, but group size alone did not ensure a balanced exchange. A small number of confident participants sometimes spoke considerably more than others, shaped the direction of discussion or assumed informal control of the task. Quieter students could consequently remain peripheral even in relatively small rooms. This helps explain why respondents asked for more equal opportunities to contribute and, in some cases, smaller groups.

Active facilitation as a future option. The implemented model deliberately left breakout rooms student-led, with staff acting as observers after the plenary opening. Future sessions could retain that principle while providing more support where groups struggle to regulate participation. Where staffing permits, an active facilitator could be introduced; otherwise, one student could serve as a rotating discussion chair using a short guide. Opening rounds, visible speaking queues, rotating roles, non-pressuring invitations to quieter students and brief checks between phases could improve balance without displacing student ownership.

Shared working language. In some student-led rooms, participants temporarily reverted to a language shared by only part of the group. Although this could help overcome uncertainty, it weakened the transnational character of the activity and risked excluding others. Opening instructions should identify English as the shared working language while making clear that fluency is not assessed. If language

switching excludes participants, an observer should remind the group of the shared rule; chat and Padlet contributions should remain available to students who are less confident speaking.

Time, topic complexity and the structure of discussion

Uneven pacing across groups. Time pressures worked in both directions. Survey and open feedback asked for more time on complex topics, while organiser observations showed that some groups with fewer than five participants completed a phase early. The latter did not necessarily need less time; they often needed additional prompts, examples or structure to deepen the exchange.

The common 90-minute structure provided consistency and made participation manageable. It nevertheless required groups to complete the Critique, Utopia and Realisation phases, record their ideas and report to the plenary within a relatively limited period. This structure worked well for focused questions but could compress discussion of topics containing several contested concepts or requiring substantial contextual knowledge.

Flexible timing and prompt banks. Future editions could distinguish between standard and extended formats. Focused questions could retain the 90-minute structure, while especially complex themes could be divided into two connected sessions. Each lead should also prepare a short prompt bank containing follow-up questions, contrasting examples and optional extension tasks. Facilitators could use these materials when a small group reaches an early conclusion, encouraging participants to test their initial agreement, compare national experiences or examine practical consequences rather than simply ending the phase. Conversely, groups engaged in a productive discussion could be given a limited degree of flexibility before moving to the next stage.

One respondent proposed a more classical structure in which participants are assigned contrasting positions before seeking common ground. This approach differs from the collaborative Future Workshop methodology, which did not require students to defend predetermined positions. It could nevertheless be tested as an optional exercise for selected topics. A structured controversy phase could encourage students to examine arguments they would not otherwise consider, provided that it is followed by reflection and collaborative problem-solving rather than competitive judgement.

Balancing the quantity and accessibility of pre-debate preparatory materials

Preparing the materials involved a tension between providing sufficient information and avoiding an excessive preparatory burden. Requests for additional background information were the most common suggested improvement, while one delayed follow-up respondent considered some materials overly detailed (Section 9.16).

These findings are not necessarily contradictory. Students may have wanted clearer or more directly relevant information rather than simply longer documents. The pre-debate preparatory materials differed in length, visual presentation and disciplinary emphasis because each university prepared them for the sessions it moderated. Although this decentralised model allowed the partners to use their expertise, it also produced some variation in accessibility.

A more standardised format would improve consistency. Each event could provide a short core briefing of approximately two pages or a limited number of slides containing:

- a concise definition of the central concepts;
- the essential factual or institutional background;

- two or three contrasting perspectives;
- a small number of national or local examples;
- the questions to be discussed;
- links to optional readings for students seeking further detail.

This would distinguish information required for participation from optional background materials. The core pre-debate briefing should be circulated at least one week in advance, accompanied by a short reminder explaining what students are expected to read.

One respondent expressed reservations about the use of artificial-intelligence tools in the pre-debate materials. This individual comment does not establish the extent of AI use and should not be generalised to the wider sample. It nevertheless offers a useful reminder of the value of transparency and academic oversight in preparing these materials. Preparatory content should be reviewed by the responsible academic lead and draw on identifiable, verifiable sources. Where AI tools are used, including for data visualisation, their outputs should be checked for accuracy and clarity, with responsibility for the final content remaining with the academic team.

Strengthening diversity and sustained transnational exchange

The programme successfully created transnational breakout groups, yet some respondents still requested more interaction between students from the participating universities. This suggests that institutional mixing alone does not necessarily produce sustained exchange.

Participants may have wanted more time to learn about their peers' experiences, more continuity within groups or additional opportunities to interact outside the

formal sessions. Future editions could retain some stable groups across connected activities while reshuffling membership at other points to expose students to a wider range of perspectives. Informal opening or closing sessions could also allow interaction not tied to completing a specific discussion task.

A follow-up comment also suggested that the participants were too similar in terms of disciplinary background and political orientation. Many students already had a strong interest in politics, and recruitment through political-science courses may have reinforced this concentration. The high baseline levels of political interest and open-mindedness confirm that the activities reached a relatively engaged group.

Future recruitment should therefore extend more deliberately to students outside political science and European studies. Faculties concerned with economics, law, education, environmental studies, digital technologies, health, engineering and the humanities could contribute perspectives directly relevant to the topics discussed. International students, student associations and participants with practical civic or community experience could also broaden the range of viewpoints. Diversification should complement, rather than replace, the core group of politically engaged students who provided continuity across the programme.

Digital tools, monitoring and administrative coordination

The online format made transnational participation possible without travel, while requiring coordination across Zoom, Padlet, registration forms, topic voting, local mailing lists and the shared attendance tracker. Information from these sources was cross-checked manually to distinguish expressions of interest, verified attendance, breakout-room participation and eligibility for credits or certificates.

Screenshots, Zoom information, Padlet records and observations from event leads provided an effective basis for monitoring participation. Although this involved administrative work, the arrangements served the project's purposes and accommodated the different procedures of the participating institutions. Some entries required contextual interpretation: the general credits field, for example, did not necessarily confirm that a student had fulfilled all requirements for institutional recognition.

Future editions could retain these monitoring arrangements, with limited refinements where needed. Brief guidance on the meaning of fields relating to credits and certificates could help avoid ambiguity, while leaving verification of institutional requirements and the award of recognition with the relevant institution.

Plenary moderation and technical coordination should remain separate during events. One person should lead the opening instructions and closing discussion, while another manages the video-conferencing platform, late arrivals, chat messages, Padlet access and timing. Breakout rooms should remain student-led unless a future edition deliberately introduces dedicated facilitators.

Maintaining participation in the evaluation

The evaluation itself presented an additional challenge. Participation and item-level valid response counts declined across the three waves, and the surveys did not constitute a matched respondent-level panel (Sections 5 and 9.1). This limits the extent to which aggregate differences can be interpreted as change.

Future editions should use a consistent anonymous identifier across survey waves, allowing responses to be linked without collecting directly identifying information. A limited group of core measures should use the same wording and response scales in

all waves. Questions specific to the immediate experience or delayed follow-up can then be added without compromising longitudinal comparability.

The immediate post-event questionnaire should be completed during the final minutes of the last scheduled activity, rather than relying entirely on later participation. The delayed follow-up should remain short and be accompanied by one or two targeted reminders. Respondents should also be informed from the beginning that participation involves a sequence of surveys, helping them understand why continued response is important.

These measures would not eliminate attrition, but they would strengthen the capacity to distinguish changes over time from differences in the composition of the responding samples.

Connecting discussion to concrete civic action

The debates produced their clearest perceived benefits in listening, collaboration, discussion and understanding political institutions. Action and the mobilisation of resources remained the least developed competence across the baseline and delayed follow-up evidence (Section 9.19).

This result reflects the principal orientation of the activities. The Future Workshop method included a Realisation phase, but the sessions remained primarily deliberative and educational. Students identified possible actions without necessarily implementing them or engaging directly with relevant institutions and stakeholders.

Future iterations could strengthen the transition from deliberation to action through a limited number of optional follow-up activities. Groups might convert their proposals into a short policy brief, presentation, letter to a relevant institution, digital information product or small university-community initiative. Participants could also

identify the actors, resources, alliances and practical steps required to implement one selected proposal.

Such activities should remain proportionate to the educational scope of the programme. Their purpose would not be to require every discussion to produce an immediate policy intervention, but to help students experience the connection between analysing a civic problem, formulating a collective proposal and identifying feasible routes towards implementation.

Summary of challenges, adaptations and recommendations

Table 10.1. Challenges, adaptations and recommendations for future implementation

Challenge	Evidence from implementation or feedback	Adaptation already introduced	Recommendation for future implementation
Difference between initial interest and attendance	Substantial gap between advance expressions of interest and verified attendance	Recruitment of a reserve pool and repeated reminders	Introduce confirmation 48–72 hours before each event and allow easy withdrawal or reassignment
Different university calendars and recognition systems	Attendance varied by event and institution	Calendar compressed into a common nine-week period; recognition managed locally	Agree dates earlier, avoid examination periods and provide a common overview of local recognition requirements

Challenge	Evidence from implementation or feedback	Adaptation already introduced	Recommendation for future implementation
Late arrivals and unpredictable absences	Preliminary breakout-room lists did not always reflect actual attendance	Generic Padlet groups, waiting room, institutional initials and real-time reassignment	Retain flexible room allocation and designate a technical coordinator for every event
Unequal participation, limited visual presence and language switching	Respectful interaction coexisted with unequal speaking opportunities, limited visual cues and occasional language switching	Small groups, staff circulation, chat and Padlet contributions	Assign a facilitator or rotating student chair, use structured speaking turns, encourage camera use where feasible and reaffirm English as the shared working language
Uneven pacing and insufficient time for complex topics	Some groups needed more time for complex topics, while smaller groups sometimes finished phases early	Common 90-minute format with timed phases	Use extended formats for complex topics and provide facilitators with follow-up prompts and optional extension tasks for smaller groups
Uneven quantity and accessibility of background information	Requests for clearer background information coexisted with one comment that some materials were overly detailed	Pre-debate preparatory materials circulated approximately one week in advance	Introduce a standard concise briefing with optional supplementary readings and transparent source verification
Limited diversity of perspectives	Institutionally mixed groups did not always produce sustained interaction across universities	Cross-university breakout-room allocation	Recruit across additional disciplines and student networks and combine stable with rotating groups

Challenge	Evidence from implementation or feedback	Adaptation already introduced	Recommendation for future implementation
Participation monitoring across platforms and institutions	Registration, attendance and credit information required manual cross-checking.	A shared participation tracker and supporting attendance records met the project's monitoring needs within the available timeframe and institutional procedures.	Retain the existing approach, with brief clarification of credit-related fields where needed.
Declining survey participation	Survey participation and valid item responses declined across waves	Three-stage survey design and reminder communications	Use consistent identifiers and measures, administer the immediate survey during the activity and shorten the follow-up
Weak translation of discussion into action	Action and resource mobilisation remained the least developed competence	Realisation phase of the Future Workshop	Add optional policy briefs, stakeholder engagement or small civic-action projects

Note: The recommendations combine implementation records, lead observations and student feedback. Individual open-ended comments are treated as suggestions rather than representative findings.

Overall, the implementation experience demonstrates that a transnational online debate pathway can operate successfully across different institutional contexts, but only if its procedures remain adaptable. The most effective adaptations were those introduced in response to direct operational evidence: flexible breakout-room allocation, dedicated technical support, clearer timing instructions and the separation of registration from verified attendance.

The student feedback adds a complementary perspective. It indicates that future editions should not merely provide more content or increase the number of activities. The priority should be to improve the quality of interaction: clearer and more

accessible preparation, sufficient time for complex questions, a more diverse participant group, more equal opportunities to contribute and stronger connections between discussion and concrete civic action.

11. Conclusions

WP2 demonstrated that structured online discussions can provide a workable setting in which university students from different national and institutional contexts practise civic competences together. Across ten European Issue Debates, Curriculum Discussions and Local Issue Discussions, EuroConnect combined democratic topic selection, pre-debate preparatory materials, moderated plenary openings, student-led transnational breakout groups and the Critique, Utopia and Realisation sequence of the Future Workshop method. This created a coherent pathway linking European political challenges, questions about university education and locally grounded civic problems.

The activities met the three principal objectives of WP2. They created a transnational forum for discussing democratic and civic issues, generated systematic evidence about participants and their experiences, and produced practical lessons for EuroConnect's future course, toolkit and other WP4 outputs. Student voting gave participants a meaningful role in determining the agenda, while the common method supported comparison across diverse topics and institutions without requiring groups to adopt a single position or identify a winning argument.

Across the ten sessions, students repeatedly connected democratic participation with civic education, critical media literacy, material equality, transparency and meaningful institutional influence. Human contact and spaces for deliberation were valued alongside digital opportunities, and European, national, university and local

institutions were usually understood as complementary levels of action. Technological innovation was accepted conditionally, with inclusion, privacy, accountability and human oversight treated as essential safeguards. The discussions also preserved genuine disagreements over radical and incremental reform, European coordination and local autonomy, regulation and individual freedom, and public provision and market-based solutions. These tensions show that participants confronted substantive political trade-offs rather than producing only consensual lists of desirable values.

The transnational dimension was realised in practice. At least 77 students took part in one or more activities, producing 245 verified student-event attendances, and almost every recorded breakout group included students from more than one university. Repeat participation created continuity across the European, curricular and local components, even as additional students joined individual sessions. The comparative value therefore came not only from the presence of three partner institutions but from direct interaction around shared tasks and collective Padlet outputs.

Survey respondents entered the pathway with relatively high political interest, frequent political discussion, favourable attitudes towards European integration and strong support for engaging with opposing views. These high baselines limited the scope for large observable shifts, and the repeated measures remained broadly stable across the responding samples. The immediate evaluation was nevertheless positive: respondents valued respectful interaction, listening, collaboration and comparison of perspectives, while willingness to attend or recommend similar activities remained high. Delayed follow-up responses also indicated continued discussion of debate topics beyond the organised sessions and perceived development in institutional understanding, collaboration and participation in civic life. By contrast, mobilising resources and translating reflection into action remained less developed.

These findings remain descriptive. The survey waves were anonymous and could not be matched at respondent level; response counts declined over time; item-level denominators varied; and participants were self-selected and relatively politically engaged. Aggregate differences therefore cannot be treated as individual change, attributed causally to the activities or generalised to the wider student population. The combined use of survey data, attendance records, Padlet outputs, observations and open comments nevertheless provides a credible account of implementation and participants' reported experiences.

Implementation evidence identifies several priorities for refinement. Advance expressions of interest should be followed by event-specific confirmation, and final breakout-room allocation should respond to actual attendance. Technical coordination should remain separate from plenary moderation. The student-led character of breakout rooms should be explicit from the outset and supported by clear role rotation, speaking procedures and a shared-language rule. Where participation becomes uneven or groups finish early, a rotating student chair, prepared prompt bank or deliberately introduced facilitator could provide additional structure. More complex topics may require longer or connected sessions, while concise core materials and optional background readings can balance accessibility with depth.

Future editions should also recruit beyond the disciplines and networks already strongly represented, while creating more sustained opportunities for interaction across universities. The existing monitoring arrangements could be retained, with clearer guidance on fields relating to credits and certificates, while allowing each institution to apply its own recognition procedures. Optional follow-up outputs—such as policy briefs, stakeholder communications, presentations or small civic initiatives—could strengthen the link between deliberation and action without turning

every discussion into a compulsory intervention. These refinements would preserve the flexibility of the model while addressing the practical limits identified through monitoring and feedback.

The strongest elements should therefore be treated as design principles for WP4: democratic selection of subtopics, a transparent three-phase sequence, small transnational groups, distributed student responsibility, a written collective record and a final plenary in which groups compare conclusions. These features gave participants enough structure to sustain purposeful work while retaining ownership of the discussion. They also made it possible to identify recurring themes without erasing disagreement. Future guidance should state clearly that organisers moderate the plenary framework but normally observe rather than direct the substantive breakout-room exchange. The toolkit should distinguish essential procedures from optional enhancements, such as dedicated facilitation, extended sessions or action-oriented follow-up. Evaluation should also be planned as part of the pathway, using a small core of comparable measures and a privacy-preserving way to follow responses across waves. This would allow institutions with different staffing, calendars and recognition systems to reproduce the core approach while adapting the level of support to local conditions.

Overall, WP2 shows the value of giving students repeated opportunities to practise democratic interaction rather than treating civic competence only as a body of knowledge. Its principal contribution is a documented and adaptable educational model in which students compare experiences, articulate and reconsider positions, cooperate across institutional boundaries and confront genuine political trade-offs. The evidence and lessons generated through this pathway provide a direct foundation for the next stage of EuroConnect’s educational work.

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