



# CRITICAL CHANGE LAB

**Deliverable D4.2**

Policy Brief 1



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Authors	Nikola Baketa, Boris Jokić, Zrinka Ristić Dedić, Jelena Matić Bojić, Iva Odak, Jana Šimon (ISRZ)
Contributors	
Acknowledgments	None
Reviewers	Aris Papadopoulos (LATRA), Marianne Kinnula (UOULU)





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Glossary

Critical ChangeLab	Democracy meets arts: Critical change labs for building democratic cultures through creative and narrative practices
D	Deliverable
DHQ	Democracy Health Questionnaire
EDI	Equality, diversity and inclusion
T	Task
WP	Work Package





## Executive Summary

Critical ChangeLab (Democracy Meets Arts: Critical Change Labs for Building Democratic Cultures through Creative and Narrative Practices) is a Horizon Europe research and innovation project addressing democratic recession trends by strengthening youth participation in society. The project is carried out by 10 partner institutions and examines the current state of democracy in learning environments across Europe, generating a robust evidence base for the design of a participatory democratic curriculum. Critical ChangeLab develops a model of democratic pedagogy using creative and narrative practices to foster youth's active democratic citizenship at a time when polarisation and dwindling trust in democracy are spreading across Europe. At the Critical ChangeLabs, diverse actors from formal and non-formal education and civic organisations work together with youth to rethink European democracy and envision futures that are justice oriented.

Deliverable D4.2 *Policy brief* is an output of task T4.5 *Definition of implications for policy* under the work package WP4 *Communicate, disseminate and exploit*. Deliverable D4.2. is based on the insights presented in D1.2. and D1.3. Continuing the work described in these deliverables, D4.2. offers the most important insights into values and practices in schools and institutions providing non-formal educational programmes and youth perspectives on everyday democracy in 10 countries. Furthermore, based on these insights it offers recommendations for improving their practices. Also, based on the initial overview of perspectives of young people from challenging contexts, it draws broader recommendations to improve their position.





## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 About Critical ChangeLab

Critical ChangeLab (Democracy Meets Arts: Critical Change Labs for Building Democratic Cultures through Creative and Narrative Practices) is a Horizon Europe research and innovation project addressing democratic erosion trends by strengthening youth participation in society. The project is carried out by 10 partner institutions and embraces a transdisciplinary approach combining expertise from Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, as well as Science and Technology.

Specifically, Critical ChangeLab develops a model of democratic pedagogy using creative and narrative practices to foster youth's active democratic citizenship at a time when polarisation and dwindling trust in democracy are spreading across Europe. The Critical ChangeLab Model for Democratic Pedagogy fosters learners' transformative agency and strengthens democratic processes in education through collaborations across formal and non-formal education and local actors around global/local challenges relevant for youth. The Model promotes creative and narrative practices to explore the historical roots of local and EU-wide challenges, understanding the value-systems and worldviews underlying distinct types of relations (human-human, human-nature, human-technology). At the Critical ChangeLab, young people are introduced to approaches such as theatre of the oppressed, transmedia storytelling, as well as speculative and critical design to rethink European democracy and envision democracy futures that are justice-oriented.

Throughout the project lifespan, Critical ChangeLab:

- examines the current state of democracy within educational institutions;
- identifies youth's perspectives on everyday democracy;
- designs a scalable and tailorable model of democratic pedagogy in formal and non-formal learning environments;
- co-creates and implements the model with youth and stakeholders;
- evaluates the model generating recommendations for policy and practice;
- develops strategies to sustain the model and its outcomes over time.





Critical ChangeLab combines in-depth quantitative and qualitative research on democracy and youth with participatory action research cycles to generate a robust evidence base to support democratic curriculum development using participatory, creative and critical approaches.

## 1.2 Deliverable within Work Package Communicate, Disseminate and Exploit (WP4)

Deliverable D4.2 is a part of Work Package *Communicate, Disseminate and Exploit* (WP4) which has three main goals:

- delivery of an active, inclusive, and sustainable outreach and output-uptake strategy
- identifying routes for sustaining the project outcomes beyond the project's lifespan
- giving the voice to learners, educators, and direct beneficiaries

This work package focuses on communication, dissemination, and sustainability. Through the activities, this WP seeks to:

- design and implement an inclusive communication and dissemination strategy,
- to highlight the relevance of socio-cultural dialogues and democracy building in learning as well as collaboration and creativity to enhance a mutual understanding, transparency, and respect,
- strengthen the Critical ChangeLabs outputs through targeted on- and offline promotional activities,
- provide great visibility of the planned activities, events, and methods to a wide range of stakeholders and actively engage them in the distribution of communicational measures and the projects' outreach strategy,
- ensure an extensive dissemination and open access of documented outcomes – particularly training tools and methods – through various media (such as publications, texts, video & photo documentation, interviews)

Specifically, D4.2. is linked to the following WP4 objectives – identifying routes for sustaining the project outcomes beyond the project's lifespan and giving the voice to learners, educators, and direct beneficiaries. The detected challenges and formulated recommendations are the result of inputs received from heads of institution or those in charge of educational programmes and young people. The intention is for these recommendations to be available even after the project's completion to ensure the







improvement of democratic values and practices in schools and institutions providing non-formal educational programmes.

### 1.3 Relationship of the Deliverable to Other Work Packages

D4.2. is based on the insights presented in D1.2. and D1.3. Deliverable D1.2 *Everyday democracy in formal and non-formal education institutions* is an output of task T1.1 *Assessing education institutions' democracy health* under the work package WPI *Map & Design*. D1.2 offers insights into implementation of Democracy Health Questionnaire (DHQ) in 10 countries and initial results from data collection. Deliverable D1.3 *Youth perspectives on everyday democracy* is an output of task T1.2 *Understanding and comparing youth perspectives on everyday democracies in challenging contexts* under the work package WPI *Map & Design*. Continuing the work described in previous deliverable (D1.2), D1.3 offers insights into youth perspectives on everyday democracy in 10 countries and initial results from data collection





## 2 Policy Brief

### 2.1 Introduction

Polarization and the diminishing political participation of young people represent serious challenges for democratic systems. Youth between 18 and 25 years old vote less than any other age group (European Parliament, 2014), they are not willing to take over political positions (Lavrič, Tomanović and Jusić, 2019) and they start to participate later than previous generations since the transition to adulthood is postponed (Garcia-Albacete, 2014). Deep political divisions and decreasing trust in democratic institutions and democracy itself necessarily raise questions about the quality of civic education and the preparation of young people for active engagement. One important aspect is the openness of both educational institutions as places of political socialization and educational programmes to everyday practice of democratic values in shaping and implementing their educational activities. This policy brief is based on insights gathered from research activities within the Critical ChangeLab project, which involves partners from 10 European countries (Austria, France, Croatia, Slovenia, Ireland, Greece, Germany, Spain, Finland, and the Netherlands). The overall goal of Critical ChangeLab is to strengthen democracy in Europe by creating and implementing a flexible model of democratic pedagogy using a bottom-up approach that empowers young people to 'own' everyday democracy and engage in direct action towards justice-oriented transformations.

The aim of this policy brief is to provide insights into research findings on democratic values and practices in schools and institutions offering non-formal educational programs, as well as to offer recommendations for improving their practices. Respondents to the questionnaire in quantitative research were heads of institutions or those in charge of educational programmes. These recommendations are directed toward them and their associates within the institution. The questionnaire encompassed four democratic values (participation; accountability and transparency; equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI); eco-social responsibility) within four domains (development, access, delivery, and outcomes and impact of an educational programme) that represent cycle of educational programme within an institution. Additionally, qualitative research was conducted with young people regarding their everyday democracy experiences. Based on the perspectives of young people from various challenging contexts in ten project countries, it is possible to draw





broader lessons about the challenges they face related to participation and get insight regarding their needs in this area.

## 2.2 Democratic values and practices in schools – research data insights and recommendations

The results regarding democratic values in schools show that all democratic values were considered as very important. Accountability and transparency, as well as the value of EDI, seem to be more present than the values of Eco-social responsibility and Participation.

**Context & Challenge:** Regarding democratic practices, collaborative decision-making was revealed as the democratic practice of the highest importance in the process of school's educational programme development. In the assessment of the current state of democratic practices implementation within the domain of schools' educational programme development, all practices were assessed as fairly present. Again, collaborative decision-making holds the highest current state average. This points out the predominantly democratic orientation in schools' educational programme development, but also outlines some areas for improvement regarding addressing the needs of diverse groups within the wider community and considering variety of viewpoints in the processes of development of the school's educational programme.

### Recommendations:

When planning activities and content over which the school has autonomy, it is necessary to consider the needs of the broader community and the needs of diverse groups.

Implement collaborative decision-making processes that actively involve stakeholders from diverse backgrounds in the development of these activities and content. Encourage open dialogue, consultation, and consensus building to ensure that the needs and interests of all community members are considered.

Offer professional development opportunities for school staff to enhance their cultural competency, sensitivity to diversity issues, and skills in facilitating inclusive learning environments.

Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives in educational program development. Regularly assess the





representation of diverse viewpoints, the responsiveness to community needs, and the effectiveness of strategies in promoting inclusivity.

**Context & Challenge:** Equality of opportunities for access to school educational programmes for individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds emerged as the most important democratic practice in domain of access. When it comes to the current state of the democratic practices in the realm of access to the school's educational programme, all practices were, on average, reported to be fairly present. However, the practice of ensuring that access for students from diverse groups within the community is embedded in institutional policies and procedures was rated slightly lower than the other two practices.

### Recommendations:

Engage with diverse community groups and stakeholders to identify barriers to access and develop strategies to address them.

Establish partnerships with community organizations, cultural institutions, and local leaders to support outreach efforts and promote collaboration in promoting educational equity and inclusion.

Incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices and diverse perspectives into the curriculum to reflect the experiences and identities of all students.

Commit to ongoing review and evaluation of institutional policies and procedures to ensure they are responsive to the evolving needs of diverse student populations.

**Context & Challenge:** There is a considerable diversity in the importance ratings recorded for the items regarding delivery of the educational programme. Ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to complete their education emerged as the most important democratic practice, followed by the practice of encouraging respect for diversity in learning groups. The least important practices were related to the students' influence on the choice of teaching and learning methods, and learning content, indicating less focus on students' participation in the delivery of the school curriculum. There is a great variety in





current state ratings for the specific democratic practices. The lowest average score was assigned to the practice of students' influence on the choice of learning and teaching methods, evidencing a lack of students' voices in the shaping of the learning process.

### Recommendations:

Implement regular surveys and feedback mechanisms to gather input from students regarding their preferences, experiences, and suggestions for improving the learning process. Encourage teachers to solicit feedback from students on their teaching methods and incorporate student input into instructional practices.

Encourage teachers to collaborate with students in co-creating individualized learning plans that align with students' interests, strengths, and learning styles. Provide training and support for teachers to adopt flexible and responsive teaching strategies that accommodate student preferences and needs.

Support student-led initiatives and projects that allow students to take ownership of their learning experiences. Encourage students to propose and implement innovative learning activities, projects, and events that reflect their interests and promote active engagement in the learning process.

Provide professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their capacity to involve students in decision-making and incorporate student voice into teaching practices.

**Context & Challenge:** Within outcomes and impact domain, the development of students' competencies for active citizenship is considered as the most important democratic practice. Sharing and discussing the outcomes with the wider community, as well as the evaluation of the impact of the school's educational programme on the wider community were considered as the least important practices. Also, these two democratic practices are reported as the least present. This shed light on the prevailing lack of school-community cooperation in the area of outcomes and impact dissemination/evaluation. Public disclosure of the sources of funding has the highest-ranking current state average, which





can be attributed to the national and EU wide regulations on transparency in formal educational institutions.

### **Recommendations:**

Establish regular communication channels to share educational outcomes and updates with the wider community.

Conduct regular consultations with community members, parents, local organizations, and other stakeholders to gather input on educational priorities, concerns, and aspirations.

Implement mechanisms to evaluate the impact of the school's educational programs on the wider community. This may involve conducting surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other data collection methods.

Provide training and resources to educators, school administrators, and community leaders to enhance their capacity for effective community engagement and impact evaluation.

### **2.3 Democratic values and practices in institutions providing non-formal educational programmes - research data insights and recommendations**

The results regarding democratic values in institutions providing non-formal educational programmes show that all democratic values were considered fairly important, and the most important democratic value was Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The importance hierarchy of the democratic values in institutions providing non-formal educational programmes replicated the one obtained for schools. Regarding the current state of democratic values results suggest predominantly democratic value orientation.

Regarding the importance of democratic practices in the domain of non-formal educational programme development, all practices were estimated as very important. Considering a variety of approaches and/or viewpoints was revealed as the democratic practice of the highest importance in the process of non-formal educational programme development. On the other hand, collaborative decision-making was deemed the least





important in this context. In the assessment of the current state of democratic practices related to non-formal educational programme development, all practices were assessed as quite present.

**Context & Challenge:** Within the access domain, all practices were evaluated as highly important and as for the current state of democratic practices, all practices were on average estimated as considerably present. The practice of ensuring that access for participants from diverse groups within the community is embedded in institutional policies and procedures was reported to be slightly less present than the other practices. Overall, the access to the educational programmes seems to be more aligned with the democratic practices in schools (rather than in non-formal programmes) sample. This could, at least partly, be attributed to the different nature of the formal and non-formal educational programmes, with the former being obligatory for all until lower or upper secondary level in most of the countries which participated in the data collection.

#### **Recommendations:**

Implement targeted outreach and recruitment strategies to engage with underrepresented and marginalized communities and encourage their participation in non-formal educational programs.

Provide financial assistance and support services to reduce financial barriers to participation for individuals from low-income or marginalized backgrounds.

Develop and offer culturally responsive programming that reflects the needs, interests, and preferences of diverse participant groups within the community.

**Context & Challenge:** Regarding delivery of the educational programme, the most important democratic practice in the institutions providing non-formal educational programmes is resolving the conflicts that arise during the course of the programme delivery in a constructive and inclusive manner. The least important practices are related to the participants' influence on the choice of teaching and learning methods, and learning content. The current state of democratic practices in this domain resembles the distribution of their importance.





## Recommendations:

Establish mechanisms for soliciting participant feedback on teaching and learning methods, as well as learning content, to ensure that their voices are heard and their preferences are considered in program delivery.

Encourage flexibility and adaptability in program delivery to accommodate diverse learning styles, preferences, and needs of participants.

Commit to continuous improvement in program delivery practices by regularly assessing participant satisfaction, engagement levels, and learning outcomes.

**Context & Challenge:** In institutions providing non-formal educational programmes, the democratic practice of using participants' evaluations and feedback to improve educational programmes emerged as the most important practices in outcomes and impact domain. On the other hand, the least important practices are related to sharing and discussing outcomes of educational programmes as well as their evaluation with the wider community. As these two practices are the least present at the current moment. Thus, there is room for improvement in the cooperation between institutions providing non-formal educational programmes and the community, at least when it comes to the area of educational programmes' outcomes and impact assessment.

## Recommendations:

Implement transparent communication channels to share information about educational program outcomes, activities, and impact assessments with the wider community.

Establish regular consultation forums comprised of representatives from diverse community groups, including local residents, community leaders, businesses, and local public/government institutions.

Commit to continuous learning and improvement in community collaboration and impact assessment practices.







## 2.4. Youth perspectives on everyday democracy – research data insights and recommendations

The qualitative research segment of Critical ChangeLab was aimed at advancing knowledge on how young people across Europe perceive their lives, context they currently live in and democracy at different levels. In order to achieve this aim, case studies on groups of young people (Target community group) living in challenging contexts (Target community location) for the development and practice of democracy were conducted. Comparative case study approach included participation of partners from 10 European countries.

In each of the ten countries an in-depth case study consisted of:

- focus groups with members of the target community group;
- semi-structured interviews with individuals working with/for the target community group;
- a mini-ethnography consisting of analysis of secondary sources, reflective journals and visual data collected by researchers.

Table 1 presents the selected cases in each national context.

Country	Target community group	Target community location
Austria	Female teenage STEM students	Leonding, Austria
Croatia	Youth at the borders of European Union	Ilok, Croatia
Finland	Youth living in substitute care (children's home)	Oulu, Finland
France	Youth in Parisian suburb	Villeneuve-la-Garenne, France
Germany	Turkish Youth in Germany	Cologne, Germany
Greece	Youth in geographically-remote and rural EU borders	Mytilene, Lesvos, Greece
Ireland	Youth in rural settings involved in the crime prevention project	Kildare, Ireland
Netherlands	Youth who have been in contact with the law with a risk of recurrence	Rotterdam, Netherlands
Slovenia	LGBTQ youth	Ljubljana, Slovenia
Spain	Youth enrolled in Public training and placement program (secondary education)	Barcelona, Spain





Selection of cases indicates a substantial variation with regards to various facets of young persons' identities while differences in location range from the southern and eastern borders of European Union, rural settings, small towns, national capitals to European metropolises like Paris, Berlin, and Barcelona. Selected cases also cover diversity of young persons' life circumstances indicating in some cases hardship some of them are presently facing. Research focused on following topics:

- Being young today
- Community identity
- Democracy
- Participation
- Future perspectives

#### **Initial Recommendations:**

Amplify the youth voice.

Make meaningful interactions between schools and community.

Initiate communal eco-systems fostering everyday democracy.





## References

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