



# Unlocking Youth Civic Engagement for a Sustainable Future - GreenSpace

**Project No: 2023-2-CZ01-KA220-YOU-000185329**

## GreenScape Focus Group Report

**Date:** 12-13/12/2024

**Location:** Thessaloniki, Greece

**Number of Participants:** 25

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Welcome and Purpose

The focus group session commenced with a warm and inclusive welcome, setting a positive tone for the discussions. Facilitators emphasized the critical role participants' insights would play in shaping the GreenScape project's strategies. This project aims to enhance environmental engagement among youth by understanding their perspectives, experiences, and challenges. Participants were encouraged to share their honest views, knowing that their contributions would help develop impactful and meaningful initiatives.

## 1.2 Overview of the GreenScape Project

The participants were provided with a detailed introduction to the GreenScape project. The project's mission is centered on promoting active youth involvement in European Union sustainability policies while fostering local actions for environmental protection. It seeks to bridge the gap between policy and practice by equipping young individuals with the necessary tools, resources, and opportunities to contribute to environmental advocacy and sustainability efforts. The facilitators highlighted the importance of collaboration and youth-driven solutions in achieving these goals.

## 1.3 Explanation of Confidentiality and Consent

To ensure a safe and comfortable environment, the session began with an explanation of the confidentiality measures in place. Facilitators assured participants that their responses would be reported anonymously, with no identifying information disclosed. This assurance was crucial in fostering open and honest discussions. Participants were informed that the session would be recorded to accurately capture their input, but only after obtaining explicit consent. The following ground rules were established to guide the discussion:

- Respect all opinions and perspectives shared during the session.
- Allow one person to speak at a time to maintain clarity and focus.
- Encourage open sharing, reinforcing the value of diverse viewpoints.

Finally, participants were asked for their consent to record the session with the reassurance that their identities would remain anonymous. The facilitators stated: "We would like to record this session to ensure we accurately capture your responses. Your identity will remain anonymous. Do we have your consent?" This transparent approach was well-received, ensuring that all participants felt respected and valued.

## **2. DISCUSSION ON SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

### **2.1. Exploring the Meaning of Sustainability**

Participants shared diverse perspectives on the meaning of sustainability. Many described it as the ability to meet present needs without compromising the resources available for future generations. For example, one participant highlighted that sustainability is "about maintaining balance between environmental care, economic stability, and social equity." Others emphasized personal actions, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and promoting eco-friendly practices, as integral to sustainability.

When discussing its significance, participants agreed that sustainability is essential for fostering healthy communities and ensuring long-term environmental resilience. Several individuals noted that neglecting sustainability has visible consequences in their neighborhoods, such as increased pollution, reduced biodiversity, and higher incidences of climate-related disasters like flooding. These issues, they pointed out, not only harm the environment but also affect health and quality of life.

### **2.2 Identifying Local Sustainability Initiatives**

Participants highlighted various local and community-driven initiatives focused on sustainability. Examples included organized clean-up campaigns to reduce litter in public spaces, tree-planting drives to restore biodiversity, and programs encouraging waste segregation and recycling. Many participants shared their active roles in these efforts, such as volunteering at events, educating peers about environmental issues, or leading initiatives in schools and neighborhoods.

However, some participants noted challenges in sustaining these initiatives, such as limited funding, lack of public awareness, and insufficient governmental support. They emphasized the need for better collaboration between community members, local authorities, and environmental organizations to achieve long-term impact. Suggestions included introducing sustainability education in schools, providing incentives for eco-friendly practices, and increasing visibility for successful local projects to inspire broader participation.

## **3. EU POLICIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

### **3.1 Awareness of EU Environmental Policies**

Participants demonstrated varying levels of awareness regarding EU sustainability policies. Some participants expressed familiarity with overarching initiatives like the European Green Deal and its goals for achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Others admitted limited knowledge about specific measures, citing a lack of accessible information and outreach about EU directives in their local communities. Despite these gaps, several participants recognized the importance of EU policies in driving environmental protection and sustainability.

When discussing the impact of these policies on their regions, participants shared mixed opinions. Those in urban areas noted improvements such as increased

investment in renewable energy projects and stricter waste management regulations. In contrast, participants from rural communities reported feeling disconnected from EU policies, expressing that the initiatives often felt distant and lacked tangible results on the ground. This highlighted a need for more localized implementation and awareness efforts.

### **3.2 Expectations for EU Action on Sustainability**

Participants expressed high expectations for the EU to take a more active and visible role in promoting sustainability. Many emphasized the importance of increased funding for green technologies, such as renewable energy and sustainable agriculture, to address both urban and rural environmental challenges.

Another recurring theme was the desire for stricter regulations on industries contributing to pollution and deforestation. Participants felt the EU should hold corporations accountable while supporting small businesses and communities in adopting sustainable practices. Educational outreach was also a key expectation, with participants calling for programs to raise awareness about sustainability among youth and marginalized groups. They suggested initiatives like workshops, digital campaigns, and collaborations with local schools and organizations.

Several participants highlighted the importance of creating more opportunities for youth involvement in policy discussions. They hoped the EU could provide platforms for young people to share their ideas and participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that future sustainability strategies are inclusive and representative of diverse perspectives.

## **4. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND YOUTH MOTIVATION**

### **4.1 Motivations for Engaging in Environmental Advocacy**

Participants expressed a variety of motivations for their involvement in environmental advocacy. A recurring theme was the deep personal connection to nature and the desire to protect it for future generations. Many participants highlighted a sense of responsibility to address environmental challenges, stating that small actions, when combined, can lead to significant change. Others were motivated by the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded individuals and build a sense of community through shared environmental goals.

Tangible results from their efforts, such as cleaner local parks or reduced waste in their neighborhoods, also played a significant role in encouraging continued participation. Additionally, some participants mentioned that gaining knowledge and skills through workshops or volunteering opportunities inspired them to take more

proactive roles in advocacy. The emotional satisfaction of contributing to a meaningful cause further fueled their engagement.

## **4.2 Barriers to Civic Participation**

Despite their enthusiasm, participants identified several barriers to their involvement in sustainability initiatives. One of the most common challenges was a lack of time, as many juggle education, work, or other personal commitments. Limited access to resources, such as funding for community projects or educational materials about EU policies, also hindered their ability to contribute effectively.

Another significant obstacle was a sense of disconnection from larger institutions, particularly EU policy discussions, which some participants felt were too complex or inaccessible. The perception that individual efforts might not lead to meaningful change discouraged some from participating more actively. Additionally, logistical challenges, such as transportation to events or a lack of local opportunities, further limited their engagement. Participants emphasized the need for more inclusive platforms and support systems to overcome these barriers and enable broader youth participation.

# **5. FEEDBACK ON GREENSCAPE PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

## **5.1 Reactions to Proposed GreenScape Activities**

Participants responded positively to the proposed GreenScape activities, which included workshops on sustainability practices, networking events with policymakers, and hands-on community projects such as tree planting and clean-ups. Many felt these initiatives were well-aligned with their interests and provided opportunities to make a tangible impact. However, some participants suggested improvements, such as incorporating virtual sessions to ensure accessibility for those unable to attend in-person events. Additionally, several participants recommended including certification opportunities for completed activities, which they felt could enhance their resumes and incentivize participation.

## **5.2 Aligning Activities with Participants' Interests**

Participants highlighted the importance of tailoring GreenScape activities to their needs and interests. They expressed a desire for access to grants and funding opportunities to support local sustainability projects. Educational resources on EU policies and practical ways to influence them were also frequently mentioned. Furthermore, participants suggested mentorship programs pairing youth with experienced environmental leaders to provide guidance and inspiration. They believed such initiatives would not only boost their confidence but also equip them with the skills needed to engage more effectively in EU policy discussions on sustainability. By offering these tailored supports, GreenScape could significantly

enhance youth participation and make a meaningful impact on environmental advocacy.

## **6. CLOSING REMARKS**

### **6.1 Final Reflections**

As the conclusion of the focus group session was reached, participants were invited to share any final thoughts or insights regarding the GreenScape project. This was an opportunity to voice any additional ideas or perspectives that could enhance the project's impact. The feedback was encouraged in order to make GreenScape more meaningful the participants' community.

### **6.2 Thank Participants**

The participants were thanked for their insights and willingness to share their thoughts and engage in meaningful dialogue.

### **6.3 Next Steps**

The participants were reassured that their feedback and participation will be an integral part of the project, instrumental in informing the project activities and ensuring that GreenScape aligns closely with community needs. They were also encouraged to stay engaged with Greenscape throughout this process through social media and websites.