

Unlocking Youth Civic Engagement for a Sustainable Future - GreenScape

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GreenScape Focus Group Report

Date: 29-30/01/2025

Location: Prague, Czech Republic

Number of Participants: 25

Facilitators: Lisa Petitjean (IRR)

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DAY 1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Arrival and Registration

Participants arrived, registered and signed the attendance list.

1.2 Welcome and Purpose

The focus group was conducted at Gymnázium Elišky Krásnohorské the 29th and 30th of January 2025. The facilitators introduced the days' activity and outlined their objectives while underscoring the crucial role of the participants' engagement. From the outset, a welcoming and open atmosphere was created, fostering a conducive environment for discussion.

To initiate dialogue and encourage active participation from the first day, facilitators proposed a brainstorming activity to break the ice. Participants were invited to generate associative words related to the session's core themes: sustainability, European Youth Goals, active citizenship, and climate justice. Additionally, each individual introduced themselves and shared their perspectives, contributing to a dynamic and inclusive discourse.

1.3 Overview of the GreenScape Project

To contextualize the session, participants were first prompted to collaboratively define the Erasmus+ Program, with an emphasis on its foundational principles of exchange and mobility. This exercise facilitated a deeper understanding of its interconnections with diversity, education, and cooperation. Building upon this, the GreenScape Project was introduced, emphasizing its mission to promote youth engagement in European sustainability policies and foster localized advocacy for sustainability, climate justice, and active citizenship. The project seeks to bridge the gap between policy and practice by equipping young individuals with the necessary tools, resources, and opportunities to partake in environmental activism and policy engagement. Facilitators highlighted the critical role of collaboration and youth-led initiatives in achieving these aims. To further immerse participants in the project, a variety of materials, including photographs and dissemination tools, were shared, providing tangible insights into GreenScape's scope and impact. Moreover, Greenscape's online escape room was introduced not only to provide a concrete example of the project's implementation, but also for stimulating the participants.

1.4 Explanation of Confidentiality and Consent

Aligned with the framework established by project partners, the session proceeded with a thorough discussion on confidentiality and consent protocols, ensuring a secure and supportive environment. Facilitators reassured participants that all contributions would remain anonymous, with no personally identifiable information disclosed. This commitment

was instrumental in fostering an atmosphere where open and candid discussions could flourish. To maintain a respectful and constructive dialogue, a set of fundamental discussion guidelines was introduced: (1) respect for diverse perspectives and opinions, (2) structured turn-taking to ensure clarity and engagement, and (3) encouragement of open expression, valuing all viewpoints equally. Facilitators also informed participants that, upon the session's conclusion, questionnaires would be distributed via a QR code. They reiterated the complete anonymity of the responses and emphasized the importance of accuracy and full participation in capturing meaningful insights.

2. DISCUSSION ON SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

2.1. Exploring the Meaning of Sustainability and its local dimension

Participants engaged in a thought-provoking discussion on the concept of sustainability, beginning with a brainstorming session on its definition and the extent to which they think they incorporate sustainable practices into their daily lives. Many initially associated sustainability with common actions such as recycling, using public transportation, and reducing plastic consumption. However, the conversation soon evolved into a more nuanced debate on the broader systemic changes required to achieve meaningful sustainability. Several participants emphasized the necessity of regulating large-scale industrial production and holding corporations accountable through civic engagement, legislative advocacy, and stricter environmental policies. At the same time, some expressed skepticism about the efficacy of individual efforts, arguing that the real power to drive change lies at higher institutional levels rather than with personal lifestyle choices. This critical discussion played a pivotal role in deepening participants' engagement with the topic. Ultimately, sustainability was collectively defined as the capacity to meet present needs without depleting resources for future generations.

The session then transitioned to an exploration of major environmental challenges, including air pollution, plastic waste, deforestation, climate change, and water contamination. To contextualize these issues, the discussion incorporated an analysis of the environmental situation in the Czech Republic. Data and statistics highlighted alarming trends, such as the increase in average temperatures by 2.4°C since 1850, with projections indicating a further rise of 1.4–1.9°C by 2050. The anticipated consequences—including more frequent wildfires, prolonged droughts, severe flooding, and intensifying heat waves—were underscored alongside the projected 35% increase in winter precipitation. The economic burden of mitigating these environmental challenges was also examined, emphasizing the urgent need for proactive and sustainable policy measures.

Because of the collective recognition of the dangers of climate change, participants demonstrated to care very much and concurred that prioritizing sustainability is crucial for building vibrant communities and maintaining environmental stability over time. Many highlighted the tangible effects of ignoring sustainability in their local areas, including worsening pollution, declining biodiversity, and a rise in climate-related disasters such as

floods. They emphasized that these challenges not only degrade the environment but also pose risks to public health and overall well-being.

2.2 Climate Justice and EU's role

To address the pressing issue of climate change, participants were assured that they would be introduced to concrete actions, initiatives, and projects designed to address the challenges associated with this global crisis. The concept of *climate justice* was introduced, as many participants were unfamiliar with the term. It was framed as the principle of fairness in how we respond to and manage the impacts of climate change. To facilitate a deeper understanding of climate justice, the facilitators used the example of the Pacific Islands, illustrating the disproportionate effects of climate change on these vulnerable regions. This example effectively demonstrated the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of climate justice, highlighting how issues of fairness and equity must be central to discussions on climate change.

Following this, facilitators posed the question, “*What actions can the EU take to address climate justice?*” Due to their limited knowledge on the topic, participants suggested only a few potential actions. In response, facilitators provided a comprehensive list of possible EU actions, which included:

- Negotiating international climate agreements
- Enforcing binding climate targets and goals
- Investing in sustainable technologies and providing financial support
- Supporting research and facilitating local climate action
- Strengthening international cooperation and solidarity
- Launching public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives

Subsequently, the facilitators emphasized the significance of individual responsibility and local action, prompting participants with the question, “*As an individual or citizen, what do you think you can do to address climate justice?*” This led to an exploration of personal actions that can contribute to climate justice, with facilitators offering the following suggestions:

- Educating oneself on environmental issues
- Reducing personal environmental footprints
- Donating to environmental organizations and NGOs
- Participating in climate-related protests and movements
- Engaging in local sustainability initiatives
- Advocating for policy change at the local, national, and EU levels
- Voting in elections to support climate-conscious policies

This part was instrumental in encouraging participants to think critically about their role in addressing climate justice and introducing the concept of active citizenship.

3. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

3.1 Active Citizenship and engagement in EU

The focus of the discussion shifted to active citizenship, which was framed as the practice of engaging with and contributing to one's community to make it a better place. Active citizenship is rooted in the idea of caring for the well-being of both the people and the environment around us, and it involves taking proactive steps to improve the local and global surroundings. Facilitators explained that being an active citizen goes beyond passive awareness and requires concrete actions that foster positive change. To help participants grasp this concept, several examples were provided, such as:

- Volunteering at a local charity or community event to support those in need
- Speaking out about critical issues, like environmental protection or social justice
- Joining community-based groups dedicated to addressing local challenges, such as organizing a park cleanup or initiating a recycling program
- Voting in elections to influence leadership decisions and shape the future of the community

The conversation highlighted how active citizenship is an essential part of building a stronger, more resilient society, as it empowers individuals to contribute to their communities and make meaningful, lasting impacts on social, environmental, and political issues.

3.2 Recap and Reflections on Day 1

Summary of key insights, reflections and wrap-up of the first day of the focus group.

DAY 2

4. EUROPEAN YOUTH GOALS AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Arrival and morning refreshments

4.2 Recap of Day 1 and Introduction to Day 2

4.3 European Youth Goals

The second day began with the focus on the European Youth Goals, aimed at deepening participants' understanding of the youth-driven initiatives designed to shape their future and promote meaningful engagement within the EU. To spark curiosity and foster engagement, facilitators first displayed some logos of the European Youth Goals without context, inviting

participants to guess their origins and the themes they might represent. This exercise encouraged participants to reflect on their initial perceptions and to actively engage with the topic. After the participants shared their thoughts, the facilitators provided the necessary context, explaining that the European Youth Goals are a set of 11 goals developed by young people across Europe. These goals were specifically designed to address critical areas impacting youth, such as education, equality, employment, social inclusion, and sustainability, with the overarching objective of improving their future prospects and enhancing their quality of life.

To further solidify the concepts, facilitators presented a [video](#) that outlined the specific targets and aspirations of the European Youth Goals, drawing attention to their relevance in fostering youth empowerment and engagement and offered a compelling overview of the goals and their practical applications across different European contexts.

4.4 Youth Engagement

In order to stimulate a more interactive dialogue, the facilitators posed the question: “*Can you think of a way to help achieve one of these goals, either in your school, neighborhood, or even online?*” This prompt invited participants to consider tangible actions they could take within their immediate environments to contribute to the realization of these goals. As participants shared their ideas, the conversation naturally expanded to a broader reflection on the role of youth in societal transformation, particularly regarding the importance of local initiatives in advancing European-wide objectives. Facilitators emphasized the importance of proactive youth engagement, underlining that these goals are not merely abstract ideals but practical objectives that require active collaboration and concerted efforts from young people to effect meaningful change.

The discussion also focused on participants’ reactions to the content presented, as facilitators opened the floor for a reflective debate. Questions such as “How did you feel during the presentation?” and “What are your thoughts on these topics and how they relate to your own experiences?” allowed participants to critically engage with the material, articulating their perspectives on the relevance of these goals to their daily lives. This exchange not only reinforced the participants’ understanding of the European Youth Goals but also underscored the importance of youth involvement in shaping policies and initiatives that impact their future. Through this process, the session fostered a deeper sense of ownership and responsibility among the participants, motivating them to envision themselves as active contributors to the broader European youth agenda.

5. FEEDBACK ON GREENSCAPE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

5.1 Reactions to Proposed GreenScape Activities

Participants expressed enthusiasm and keen interest in the GreenScape project’s proposed activities, which included a range of interactive workshops focused on sustainability, immersive simulations of EU decision-making, and hands-on community engagement initiatives such as waste reduction campaigns and local sustainability workshops. Many

participants resonated with the idea of gaining a practical understanding of the EU decision-making process, particularly through the real-time simulations. These activities were seen as highly relevant, offering participants the chance to not only learn but also to actively contribute to their local communities. However, some participants suggested that the inclusion of more digital tools and online platforms would help overcome geographical barriers and ensure broader access to the activities. Additionally, there were recommendations to incorporate more interdisciplinary approaches, such as collaborating with local artists or innovators to explore sustainability through creative mediums, which could foster greater engagement among diverse youth groups.

5.2 Aligning Activities with Participants' Interests

In discussing how to further align GreenScape activities with their personal and professional interests, participants emphasized the importance of providing hands-on, practical experiences that directly link to local sustainability issues. They expressed a strong desire for the opportunity to engage with policymakers and community leaders in more direct, structured ways, such as through advocacy training workshops or participatory budgetary discussions. Additionally, participants voiced the need for tailored content that reflects both the global context of sustainability and the unique environmental challenges they face locally. Some proposed the inclusion of more specialized sessions, such as those focused on climate justice or green entrepreneurship, which they felt would complement their career aspirations and encourage broader participation. Several participants also requested further support for collaborative youth-led projects, including access to funding, guidance on project management, and networking opportunities with other youth organizations across Europe. By addressing these suggestions and tailoring activities to participants' diverse needs and interests, GreenScape has the potential to significantly boost youth engagement and empower the next generation of environmental advocates.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Final Reflections

Finally, participants were invited to share their final reflections on the GreenScape project. They were asked to provide any additional thoughts, ideas, or suggestions on how the project could evolve to better meet the needs of young people and enhance its impact on sustainability and climate justice. This opportunity allowed participants to express their personal perspectives and consider ways in which GreenScape could be more closely aligned with the issues that matter most to them. Many participants offered constructive feedback, emphasizing the importance of hands-on activities and local involvement in fostering a deeper connection to the project's goals. Most importantly, the majority of the participants stated that the focus group facilitated a shift in their mindset, fostering a deeper sense of care and prompting a more committed approach to sustainability and active citizenship.

6.2 Thank Participants

The facilitators took a moment to thank the participants for their time, engagement, and valuable contributions throughout the session. They expressed appreciation for the active and thoughtful participation, highlighting the importance of these discussions in shaping the future of the GreenScape project. The facilitators acknowledged the depth of the insights shared, which would play an integral role in refining and expanding the project to better serve the needs of youth across Europe.

6.3 Next Steps

To conclude the session, the facilitators outlined the next steps in the GreenScape project. Participants were informed that the feedback gathered from the focus group would be carefully analyzed and used to inform future project activities. They were encouraged to stay engaged and remain involved in the ongoing development of GreenScape, with opportunities for further collaboration and participation in upcoming initiatives. Facilitators expressed their excitement for the next phase of the project, reiterating the importance of youth engagement and involvement in shaping the project's trajectory. Participants were also invited to share their continued interest in contributing to future focus groups or events, ensuring that GreenScape's impact would continue to grow.