



PARTICIPATION ERASMUS ALUMNI FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Final Report

**Participation Erasmus Alumni for Civic
Engagement (PEACE)**

Paul Blokker

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Erasmus+



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Introduction

Participation Erasmus Alumni for Civic Engagement (PEACE) is a Long-Term Action which focusses on the Erasmus+ Programme and its relation to civic engagement, political participation, and European citizenship. The priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme include the creation of

opportunities for people's participation in democratic life, social and civic engagement through formal or non-formal learning activities. The focus is put on raising awareness of and understanding the European Union context, notably as regards the common EU values, the principles of unity and diversity, as well as their social, cultural and historical heritage (EC 2023: 10).

This report contributes to the debate on how Erasmus+ activities and projects may stimulate civic engagement and political participation, amongst young people but also regarding adults. For this purpose, it is important to bring clarity on differences between social and civic engagement, and participation, on one hand, and political engagement and participation, on the other. The report reflects on the importance of engagement and participation for the project of European integration, disentangles the different dimensions of individual and collective engagement and participation, and briefly discusses how the Erasmus+ Programme relates to civic and political involvement.

The second part of the report brings the results of the international conference 'Erasmus+ Contribution to European civic participation', held on 19 and 20 December in Naples, Italy. At the event, on the afternoon of 19 December 2022, 11 deliberative roundtables were organized with a total of 110 participants. The deliberations focussed on the importance of engagement, participation and European citizenship, civic and political knowledge of the EU, and a focussed discussion on how the Erasmus+ Programme may contribute to enhancing civic engagement and participation, political literacy and participation, European citizenship education, a critical mindset, and adherence to European values. The rich discussions are represented by brief snippets of core insights and observations that emerged during the deliberations between stakeholders. In the final part, 15 of the most significant recommendations that were

proposed by the participants are presented. The recommendations form a highly useful and rich input for further discussions on how to re-imagine and re-invent the role of the Erasmus+ Programme in stimulating the civic, political and critical attitudes of (young) European citizens towards the European Union.

The annex contains an interview with Laura Cinquini, who reflects on her experiences as university student, Erasmus intern in Germany, and participant and citizen Ambassador in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

1. Why are civic and political engagement important for the EU?

The importance of engagement

There is a much discussion of civic and democratic engagement, and in fact civic engagement is one of the 4 core objectives of the Erasmus+ programme. In the Programme for 2021-27, the European Commission states that a major

challenge relates to the Europe-wide trends of limited participation in democratic life and low levels of knowledge and awareness about European matters and their impact on the lives of all European citizens. Many people are reluctant, or face difficulties, in actively engaging and participating in their communities or in the European Union's political and social life. Strengthening European identity and the participation of young people in democratic processes is of paramount importance for the European Union's future. This issue can also be targeted through non-formal learning activities, which aim at enhancing the skills and competences of young people as well as their active citizenship (EC 2023: 4-5).

Why is engagement then seen as so important? Beyond the usual reasons given – for instance, promoting common European values, furthering inclusiveness, and unity in diversity - there are immediate *urgent, concrete*

reasons, including the rise of illiberalism and authoritarianism, the erosion of democracy, and the decline of a civic spirit in Europe.

First of all, there is the persistent problem with **Euroscepticism** and a **declining trust in the European project**. Many “friends of the EU” are concerned that the European Union - or better the European project - is not anymore part of a widely shared consensus. Many European citizens, including young people, seem uninterested in Europe, take its achievements for granted, or are even increasingly critical of the European project. Many, in fact, vote for populist parties which demand a return to nation-states and national sovereignty. At the same time, a larger part of European citizens seems to have an only partial or skewed understanding what the EU is about. Here, civic engagement and political knowledge become crucial. A more active engagement with the EU, EU policies, and politics may importantly change people’s perspectives and appreciation of the EU. And it may also enhance a critical awareness. In fact, it should be acknowledged that there are many things that do not work in the EU – for instance, the implications of economic austerity and neoliberal governance, or major corruption scandals. Here, **critical awareness** and **pro-active citizens** are crucial in holding the EU accountable.

A second issue is a more widespread and complex problem: **general disaffection with representative democracy and our democratic societies**, which affects the European Union but clearly also its Member States. This general distrust includes increasing forms of **polarization and radicalization** in our societies and in Europe at large, feeding declining sentiments of tolerance, decreased openness and willingness to display solidarity with others. In general, populism is seen as a reaction of people who feel disenfranchised, left out. Specifically, some argue that we find youth support for right-wing populism due to the **precariousness** of the youth labour market. To counter democratic discontent, we need possibilities for meaningful participation in democratic politics. Renewal of democracy requires citizens who feel empowered and who are able to make their grievances heard and acted upon, such as consistent lack of attention for youth problems. Citizenship education becomes crucial here. Citizens who know how to act, which instruments to use, to be effective in making institutions listen are at the core of democratic renovation.

A third issue regards what can be called a **decline in civic spirit**. People seem increasingly hyper-individualized, hedonistic, navel-staring - or better - iPhone-staring - persons, predominantly concerned with their self-interest, their individual capacities to compete, and their employability and marketability. A broader concern for the common good and feelings of solidarity Europe-wide, or even beyond, seem largely missing. To counteract this, a hands-on engagement with practical civic projects, and collaboration with other people to try to bring about social change might re-ignite a civic spirit, which is essential for democratic societies.

A fourth major concern is the emergence of **uncivil forces**, that is, those societal forces that promote values that are in direct contrast with the European values as described in art. 2 Treaty on the European Union: discriminatory positions, anti-pluralism, anti-openness, contesting human rights, denying solidarity. Active citizens are hence needed to defend the core values of our democratic societies.

2. What do we mean by engagement?

But if civic and political involvement of European citizens is crucial for defending and strengthening the European integration project, what should we understand by **civic engagement**? How does civic engagement relate to **political engagement** and **political participation**? And how is it different? And, finally, what do we mean by **active citizenship**? One important difference is between social and civic activities, on one hand, and political activities, on the other.

In *Active citizenship in Europe*, Cristiano Bee (2017) gives us a useful definition: civic engagement regards the engagement of an individual with the 'interests, goals, concerns and common good of a specific community' (Bee 2017: 68). Civic engagement has to do with civic knowledge and sensibility/feelings of solidarity, while civic participation relates to activities that aim at increasing social inclusion and the enhancement of solidarity between citizens and (ethnic and social) groups in society. In the context of

Erasmus+, the dimensions of civic engagement and participation are highly relevant in parts of the programme that relate to forms of volunteering, internships, and/or youth work.

Table 1: Engagement and participation

	Civic engagement	Political engagement	Civic participation	Political participation
<i>Individual</i>	Civic knowledge, attention	Political knowledge, attention	Civic individual action	Political individual action (conventional; nonconventional)
<i>Collective</i>	Group belonging, identification	Political group belonging, identification	Civic collective action	Political collective action (conventional; nonconventional)

Source: Bee 2017: 71.

Broadly speaking, civic engagement and participation relate to activities that enhance the professional development of individual (young) people, and hence are focussed on individual skills and success as well as the wider labour market, while, in some cases, civic engagement may also relate to a political dimension, that is, it promotes civic skills, a critical awareness, community and European values, tolerance and solidarity. While in civic participation, the explicit objective is not to relate to formal politics or public policy in any strict sense, the effects of civic participation may relate to broader political dimensions.

For instance, in the *Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2023*, the Commission aims at enhancing ‘opportunities for people’s participation in democratic life, social and civic engagement through formal or non-formal learning activities’ (EC 2023: 10). The expectation is that through Erasmus+ activities, including volunteering and youth work, social, and even democratic and political engagement and participation are stimulated. However, while some evaluations indicate a (modest) impetus for civic engagement in the longer

run as a result of participation in Erasmus (RAY 2021: 271-3),¹ this does not indicate an unequivocal relation between activities such as volunteering and youth work, on one hand, and the civic, political and European attitudes – and more specifically, political involvement - of participants, on the other. Hence, a relation that is often presumed and articulated – that participation in Erasmus+ enhances a ‘more just, human rights-friendly and integrated Europe’ and contributes to the ‘renewal of the European integration project’ – cannot be taken for granted (Ohana 2019: 24, 17).

In fact, the political dimension of forms of civic engagement is a complex one. The relation between politics, and educational and learning activities is ever more frequently seen as problematic, because education and activities related to political dimensions (e.g. human rights) are by some understood as ‘inappropriate’, as compromising the ‘neutral’ mission of education, or even as potentially leading to ‘indoctrination’ (Ohana 2019: 10). Hence, the political dimension of youth work and volunteering involves controversy and is perceived in contrasting ways by different stakeholders and participants. Further problems are the disinterest or even rejection by some participants of the political dimension and the perception that attention for political matters compromises attention for other, more urgent issues (such as skills training for the job market) (Ohana 2019: 15-16).

Distinct from the dimension of civic engagement, where the focus is predominantly attitudes towards the community and social aspects (and where the political appears more of a ‘by-product’, a latent potential), political engagement and political participation directly relate to political attitudes and practices. Political participation can be understood as individuals acting or being active as citizens, on a voluntary basis, in relation to political objectives (CoE/EC 2021). It can be conventional (related to more traditional political activities, such as voting or being member of a party), or nonconventional (related to less traditional activities, such as signing

¹ For instance, the RAY MON Comparative Data Report for 2014-2020 found an increase in information, engagement, active civic support, and democratic participation ranging from 30 to almost 50 % of the participants in European youth programmes (2021: 271-6). In the extensive ESN survey on active citizenship and student exchange in the context of the European Parliamentary elections of 2019, key findings indicated that one out of four respondents did not know what civil participation is, and that students feel not acquainted with civil society organisations on the European level, but also that mobile students are far more engaged than the average European youth and are more likely to vote in European elections (ESN 2019).

petitions, being politically active online, being member of a social movement, engaging in civil disobedience).

An explicit, and critical, political dimension and an emphasis on European citizenship are generally less emphasized in European mobility programmes, and remain underdeveloped in mobility and educational projects. Nevertheless, democracy is one of the four priorities of the Erasmus+ programme, and is particularly relevant for the KA2 and KA3 parts. In KA1 (learning mobility of individuals), there is no specific focus on democracy and political citizenship, and in general, these dimensions are not visible and lack structural integration into the different part of the programme (EPRS 2021: 49, 54).

In the “universe” of the Erasmus+ programme, political engagement and participation – not least regarding European politics – and European citizenship education are relatively difficult to identify (EPRS 2021). One way of stimulating the political dimension could be by means of a targeted **European citizenship education**. According to one study, there is a lack of ‘concrete policy measures on citizenship education’, while the ‘policies that the EU *has* taken are primarily driven by a desire to get people on the labour market’ (EPC 2020: 7; emphasis in original). According to a research report of the European parliament, “[c]itizenship education should get a *higher priority* in the selection process of Erasmus+ projects’ (EPRS 2021: 54; emphasis in original).

3. How can the Erasmus+ programme stimulate engagement?

Civic and social engagement and participation are often referred to, not least in relation to the Erasmus+ programme (as in volunteering, youth internships and work), or also in other programmes, such as the European Solidarity Corps. According to the Commission, there is a tangible link between civic and political engagement. The Commission holds that democratic participation ‘can also be targeted through non-formal learning activities, which aim at enhancing the skills and competences of young

people as well as their active citizenship'. It is, however, not clear what this means in practice, that is, it is not evident how civic and community engagement – often very local - actually contribute to **active political awareness, political and human rights literacy**, and the **development of a political sense of European citizenship**. Moreover, as stated in the aforementioned report of the European Parliament Research Service, in Erasmus+'s KA1 – on student and teacher mobility – there is no explicit focus on political citizenship, but participants rather 'experience social and cultural elements of citizenship' (2021: 54). Hence, there tends to be less attention for explicit political issues, and there is a lack of a structural, explicit attention to European citizenship.

Therefore, **one the core objectives** of PEACE is to discuss and debate, explore, and develop the political dimension – and related dimensions such as political engagement and activism, the development of a critical mindset, and of EU political knowledge - and explicitly advance a series of innovative ideas and proposals on how civic *and* political engagement may be stimulated in a range of different, but interconnected, more systematic ways.

More specifically, this would address the major concerns in Europe regarding youth participation and the **political socialisation** of young people. Many worry that **young people do not participate**, in particular in formal politics (conventional engagement). In fact, research shows that young people today have the least trust in democracy than any other age group (Foa et al. 2020). Young people under 30 are underrepresented in politics and tend not to be involved in political life, in particular in that part of political life where real decisions are being taken. In terms of voter turnout, that is elections, young people tend to be less engaged (even if the last EP elections in 2019 saw an important increase). Young people do however seem to engage in alternative, less formal forms, of political participation, such as through Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future (see EPRS 2021). Such forms of politics tend however not to be well-connected with arenas of decision-making and policy-making. Young people tend to understand politics differently, in a more informal and **non-conventional** fashion, based on bottom-up, short-term forms of collaboration, crowdsourcing, do it ourselves type of politics.

And in fact, students come from **very different backgrounds**, contexts, and situations. Erasmus students and beneficiaries may build on very different experiences, for instance with regard to socio-economic situations, personal trajectories, or opportunities for civic and political engagement (the latter may include contexts of authoritarianism or democratic decline). Some students may lack extensive experience with engagement, which may also mean that they are much less knowledgeable about what for instance rights really mean in practice, how important political engagement is, and generally regarding how fragile many of the EU's values are in practice (including democracy, human rights, non-discrimination), always in need of defence. In fact, with regard to **European democracy**, a core matter is: what kind of knowledge do people actually have of European politics and institutions, and of the kind of instruments that are available (and young people should be aware of)?

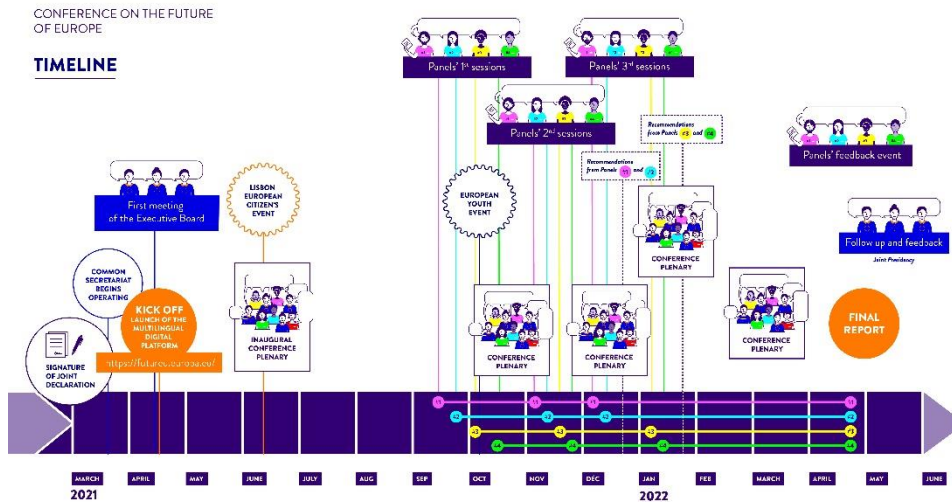
Over the years, a **range of participatory tools** have been developed in the EU, and which are generally accessible for citizens (see Good Lobby 2019; Alemanno 2022). These include:

- a. *Freedom of information request*. Any citizen or resident may request access to documents of the EU's institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies.
- b. *Complaint to the EU Ombudsman*. The European Ombudsman represents the interests of the citizens and protects them from EU institutions. Citizens, residents as well as businesses, associations and other bodies registered in the EU can file a complaint.
- c. *European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)*. The ECI enables 7 citizens from 7 different member states to propose new legislation to the European Commission. 1 million signatures from 7 member states need to be collected (initiatives include the Right to Water, Save Bees and Farmers).
- d. *Petition to the European Parliament*. Citizens can present observations or requests to the EU Parliaments' Committee of Petitions, asking the Parliament to take a position or to raise its awareness on an issue.

An exciting novelty in terms of citizens' participation is that of **Citizens' Assemblies**. This novelty is inspired by a unique experiment, that of the *Conference on the Future of Europe*, which was held from April 2021 to May 2022.² The Conference included 800 randomly selected citizens from all over Europe and from various walks of life, of which at least a third of young people under 25, who engaged in three rounds of deliberation in specific thematic European Citizens' Panels (in the Annex, you can find an interview with one of the student participants, and citizen ambassador, Laura Cinquini). A number of citizens were subsequently selected as Ambassadors and participated in the Conference's Plenary, which included Members of European Parliament, national politicians, local and regional authorities, representatives of the Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions, as well as civil society and social partners. The Citizens' Panels produced 178 recommendations, which were discussed in the Plenary. The Plenary itself produced a final report with 49 proposals and more than 200 measures. Important for the discussion here are a number of proposals directly related to the Erasmus+ Programme.

² The Conference on the Future of Europe has been monitored and analysed by the European University Institute/School of Transnational Governance Transnational Democracy Observatory, see <https://www.eui.eu/en/academic-units/school-of-transnational-governance/stg-projects/transnational-democracy-at-the-school-of-transnational-governance/eui-transnational-democracy-observatory/evaluating-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe>. The Conference was also monitored assessed by transnational civil society, such as those grouped in the coalition Citizens Take over Europe (CTOE), see <https://citizenstakeover.eu/>.

Table 1 *Timeline of the Conference on the Future of Europe*



Source: Futureu.europa.eu.

These proposals include:

22. We propose that the EU, in particular in its actions at the international level, ..., improve its accessibility for citizens through better information, education, citizen participation, and transparency of its action. “Allocating a specific budget to develop educational programmes on the functioning of the EU and its values that it could propose to the Member States that wish, so that they can integrate them into their curricula (primary, secondary schools, and universities). In addition, a specific course on the EU and its functioning could be offered to students wishing to study in another European country through the Erasmus programme. Students choosing this course would be given priority in the allocation of said Erasmus programmes”.

48. “In order to promote a culture of exchange and foster European identity and European diversity across different areas, the Member States, with the support of the European Union, should: 1. Promote European exchanges in different fields, both physically and digitally, including educational exchanges, twinning, travel and professional mobility (including for teachers and local elected politicians). Such exchanges should be made accessible across Member States for all, regardless of their

age, level of education, background and financial means. With this overall aim, the EU should inter alia strengthen existing EU level exchange and mobility programmes, such as the European Solidarity Corps, Erasmus+ and DiscoverEU, and ensure more widespread and diverse participation in these programmes and consider adding also new elements, such as an additional objective of civic service fostered through volunteering (for the European Solidarity Corps) and ‘cultural passes’ (for DiscoverEU). The local and regional authorities, under the auspices of the Committee of the Regions have a key role to play in this matter”.

In the wake of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the European Commission has set up a new generation of Citizens’ Panels, to be a regular form of citizen deliberation/consultation, ahead of key legislative proposals. The Commission is running three panels since December 2022, on food waste, virtual reality, and – most relevant for PEACE - **learning mobility**.

4. Deliberative roundtables in Naples, December 2022

During the international event ‘Erasmus+ Contribution to European civic participation’, held on 19 and 20 December in Naples, Italy, 11 deliberative roundtables were organized with a total of 110 participants. The variety of participants included Erasmus alumni, representatives from higher education institutions, adult education, primary and secondary schools, Erasmus ambassadors, role models, and staff from National Agencies. The tables were moderated by a facilitator, and discussions were reported by a note taker. The deliberations focussed on the importance of engagement, participation and European citizenship, civic and political knowledge of the EU, and a focussed discussion on how the Erasmus+ Programme may contribute to enhancing civic engagement and participation, political literacy and participation, European citizenship education, a critical mindset, and adherence to European values. The 11 tables concluded with the selection of a number of key recommendations, voted on by the participants.

Below, a selection of the key observations and insights that emerged in the discussions are presented, and subsequently 15 of the most significant proposals are put forward.

a. Social engagement

- *National Agencies might want to get involved in the organization of summer schools or organize volunteering opportunities (Table 3).*
- *Erasmus should engage with activities that contrast Euroscepticism, that provide a wider knowledge of the European project, and that promote European values and rights, as less and less people seem to believe in the European Union (Table 5).*
- *Engagement may include the involvement of students in extracurricular activities concerning the environment (Table 4).*
- *An example of how to foster volunteering on exchange with Erasmus students may be to join a semester-long volunteering programme and subsequently take part in weekly activities with local NGOs. The local ESN section may be responsible for coordinating the activities and supporting the students. Students get guidance to reflect on their knowledge and think about the impact of their actions (Table 4).*
- *Civic engagement means responsibility. An example of good practice, which articulates the importance of civic engagement and the responsibility that it implies is the re-creation of town councils, created and performed by students (in the school sector) (Table 7).*
- *Civic engagement can be stimulated through concrete incentives or rewards, such as credits (for internships, for instance) (Table 10).*

b. Political engagement

- *The idea of “youth city parliaments” may be taken as a form of best practice (Table 3).*
- *Educational programmes might organize simulations of the European Parliament using Virtual Reality (Table 3).*
- *An example of a best practice is the “International Village” event held at Polish universities. It includes students preparing a quiz, followed by a student debate. The topics are selected by the students themselves, who indicate topics that matter to them. Developing specific methodologies (e.g. gamification) is crucial to get young people engaged (Table 6).*
- *It is important to provide deep and systematic preparation beforehand to people involved in Erasmus mobility (on the education system, on politics and the political system, on attitudes towards the EU, and regarding cultural and historical aspects). The Erasmus Student Network could play a strategic role in this (Table 7).*
- *Civic and political engagement and participation are time- and energy-consuming. For many people, engagement takes too much time and involves too much work. One should consider how to incentivize people, reward them in some manner, and/or make convincing claims about the satisfactions, achievements (Table 9).*
- *Many of the available instruments, such as the right to petition or the European Citizens’ Initiative – remain little known. It is important to teach them to students (Table 11).*

c. Civic education/EU education

- *The Erasmus programme could use more education on Erasmus and mobility itself as well as more broadly about the EU, EU democracy, EU citizenship (and related matters such as the Schengen agreement, EU passport) and possibilities for civic participation (Table 1).*

- *Young people tend to be less knowledgeable about and interested in political topics. There is a generation gap. Pan-European mobility might help to stimulate interest and participation (Table 1). There is a tendency among young students to act in an individualistic manner and participate little in collective activities when in mobility programmes. More exposure to programmes and courses on civic engagement might help to stimulate engagement and participation (Table 2).*
- *Erasmus+ can stimulate engagement through the development of European curricula on crucial subjects for society as a whole (such as sustainability, violence, hate speech and bullying). An example of good practice is, have students re-write well-known fairy tales in order to tackle themes such as bullying and discrimination (Table 7).*
- *Jean Monnet activities (knowledge and modules on the European Project) could be exploited more and better for schools, creating easy modules for teachers on European institutions and European policies (Table 10).*

d. Role of educators/teachers

- *It is important to convince more teaching personnel of the importance and usefulness of Erasmus+ projects. Teachers are often unaware or sceptical of such projects. The benefits and positive sides of Erasmus+ projects could be communicated better to teaching personnel (Table 4).*
- *Erasmus+ can help people to get closer to EU institutions (not least with regard to critical issues), but specific actors – beneficiaries/stakeholders, teachers, educators - must help and accompany students towards this approach, offering them the right tools (against polarization and estrangement). An example of good practice is introducing civic and political elements in the curriculum, such as in a conservatory, the introduction and presentation women*

composers to children/students, to start a discussion about human rights and the role of women in society (Table 7).

e. Local embedding/peripheral areas

- *In the context of civic and political engagement, it is necessary to find ways to involve rural areas, and in general, “left-behind places” or disadvantaged areas, in a more structural fashion (Table 3).*
- *EU citizens tend not to be so engaged in their community. The solution might be to enhance cooperation with some associations (for example: against the mafia). Hence, it is important to strengthen links with to associations, also to try to overcome the fact that the EU is seen as related to “far-away issues”. The local and global perspectives have to be linked (Table 6).*
- *Erasmus+ helps to change one’s mind, to open pupils’ horizons, particularly for those that live in small villages, where there is only one school and the church. ERASMUS+ provides an opportunity to teachers to train and develop new methodologies. Erasmus+ has an impact on pupils but also on their families (Table 10).*

f. Information

- *A problem identified by participants is the lack of positive information on the EU and knowledge of the advantages of EU citizenship (Table 1). The EU could do more to communicate about advantages of citizenship and civic engagement, also by increasing the mobility rate of various types of citizens and enhance teaching matters related to the EU and EU citizenship (table 1).*

- *Civic engagement needs knowledge of the past and the present, knowledge of the EU as well as practical knowledge in order to allow for effective participation (Table 11).*

g. Collaboration between stakeholders

- *The synergetic collaboration between non-governmental organizations (NGOs), higher education institutions, and national agencies is needed in order to foster civic and political engagement and to embed such engagement in local communities (Table 3). Such collaboration might take the form of “openLabs”, connecting civil society with higher education institutions (also through specific web tools), as occurs in France (Table 3).*
- *Students should get involved more with local associations, starting from the local level, schools, NGOs, and different types of associations (Table 4).*
- *Northern EU countries are less much informed about how southern EU countries are affected by the climate and ecological crisis. Strategic partnerships could be a tool to better know “each-other” on relevant issues (migration, socio-economic matters). An example of good practice regards student reporters, who, while on Erasmus mobility, could offer an overview of political and social affairs linked to the country they are visiting (Table 7).*
- *It is important to develop cooperation with local organizations (regarding, for instance, voluntary activities or service work), non-institutional actors, as well as local authorities, developing activities that help embedding mobile people into local networks (Table 8).*

5. 15 key recommendations

1. Introduce **civic education** in international programmes as well as insert European topics in education to improve knowledge of political topics and stimulate civic engagement. EU education must become a mandatory topic, in order to emphasize the importance of integration as well as of international mobility, and to reduce prejudices (Table 1).
2. Improve the **connection between schools and the Europe Direct offices**, because there is a lack of communication and interaction/collaboration with educational institutions (Table 1).
3. It is important to **open projects to local authorities** to improve European citizenship in a sort of social service learning (related to extra-curricular activities). It is important to embed projects in the local context (Table 2).
4. In order to stimulate civic engagement, it is important to create **a support structure to engage headmasters, teachers, and all school leaders** (Table 2).
5. Focus on the **needs of local communities**, in the local language (e.g. foreign students coming to Naples or another European city to help peripheral communities in solving specific issues, mediated by local institutions) (Table 3).
6. Create **national, “customizable” programmes** to favour local communities and help to connect students with NGOs (Table 3).
7. The **recognition of informal and non-formal learning in formal education** mobilities and a more extensive focus on the connection with local realities, involving the participants in the political, civil and social life of their hosting communities. Erasmus participants should be given the spaces to participate in public life through volunteering, engagement with stakeholders, etc. (Table 4).
8. The creation of an **“Erasmus Radio”** – or podcast series - as an example of joint promotion at the European level, complementary to other channels (Table 4).

9. Activities and practical simulation on **reproducing a Parliamentary assembly**, to familiarize students with the experience of EU institution (Table 5).
10. Erasmus+ should not be a privilege, but **inclusive, open to everyone**. A way of opening up Erasmus is by means of blended and virtual exchange (internships and classes); connecting with people in the community/host families, also for people with disabilities; involve stakeholders more extensively and apply for extra funds for inclusion (Table 6).
11. Erasmus+ needs to **increase opportunities for engagement of and interaction between local students with incoming Erasmus students**: to avoid the “Erasmus bubble” and increase civic and political osmosis. One way of achieving this is by increasing the number of study/research projects in which incoming Erasmus and local students collaborate and co-develop, to help creating a proper international student community (Table 7).
12. Erasmus+ could develop **extracurricular activities** – for instance in the format of deliberative fora/roundtables – debating the importance of engagement, participation, also regarding the European level. Such activities also stimulate specific skills such public speaking, argumentation, assertive communication (Table 8).
13. Erasmus+ should be systematised and made structurally available for everyone, in the structure of education, towards a **right to Erasmus for everyone** (Table 10).
14. To use the resources created by the **Jean Monnet** programme to support teachers with training modules on the European Project and European citizenship (Table 10).
15. Not everybody has the possibility and funds for mobility so the suggestion is to **take advantage of students who experienced Erasmus+ mobility as a multiplier factor**: not only disseminating the Erasmus+ opportunities but also the awareness of Europe and different cultures and traditions and internationalisation (Table 11).

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Interview with **Laura M. Cinquini**, former student of the University of Bologna, participant and ambassador in the Conference on the Future of Europe, and Erasmus intern (interviewed by Paul Blokker).

1. Could you tell us about your experience in the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE)? How was it to be a selected citizen? And how did it change your life?

Honestly, the Conference was a life-changer experience. Looking back, I think it was a blessing that I was given such an opportunity as I wouldn't be who I am today without it. It really transformed me. Now I am more aware of the EU institutions, of their way of working, of their space of working. I also developed a sort of expert knowledge on the migration topic as I worked on it for almost a year with citizens, politicians, trade unionists, members of the civil society. My personal development throughout and thanks to the Conference was huge and was not only intellectual but also more personal, deeper. I got used to politics life, to dialogue and teamwork, to lonely travels

– which for me were something totally new. I started to feel at home everywhere in Europe... the Conference made stronger and more tangible my European identity. And it gave me a new, big, European family which includes Mansef from France, Huub from Netherlands, Gaby from Germany, Krsi from Bulgaria, Dragan from Croatia, Iness from Portugal... and many many others. Clearly, I cannot bore you with too many names which mean nothing to you while to me they mean everything. Literally. They mean happy memories and strong emotions. They mean discussions, speeches, public letters, interviews. They mean months of hard work and hard parties. They mean the Europe of the Future because the citizens which took part to the Conference didn't just make proposals for shaping the future of Europe, they actually showed it, they lived this future. Therefore, their proposals come from their mind as well as from their heart and life experience.

2. Did the CoFE experience make you more willing to engage in political participation?

I am not affiliated to any political party but I've always been interested in politics and political themes. Surely, the Conference strengthened this previous interest.

3. Did you feel empowered as a citizen in the CoFE? Or do you perhaps have mixed feelings?

I felt empowered as a citizen, during the Conference. I felt that my voice was giving a contribute for real. But today I have more mixed feelings. The Conference success depends entirely on the actual use the EU institutions will make of our proposals and for now... I haven't witnessed such a great, transparent, honest use of them. From the human side, the Conference has already succeeded. But it is not enough. I want it to be also a political success, after all the efforts we spent on it. The citizens deserve answers and actions inspired by their work. It is also a matter of respect. Not to mention that the EU institutions gave their word, they promised to follow-up. Their credibility is on stake... as well as the possibility of having a new kind of democracy in the upcoming years. I believe in this kind of democracy but still

don't know if I believe in the EU institutions; I am withholding my judgement to wait and see what it will come.

4. Which are the most important recommendations of CoFE for young people you think?

All of them. Certainly, the proposals made on topics like Youth, Education, Sport and so on are closer to young people and their daily life. Nevertheless, what really would benefit young people is an overall improvement of European politics, the society, the economy.

5. Did the experience of CoFe make you want to engage in other European experiences, such as your Erasmus internship? Or were you already planning such experiences? And how would you say the Erasmus internship changed you and your views?

Doing an Erasmus internship has always been a personal desire. Even before the Conference, I was sure that doing experiences abroad would have been useful and fruitful from a human and professional point of view. The Conference didn't really influence that choice. Actually, it made my application more complex to process because in the same period I had to deal with European plenaries and meetings on the one hand, university lessons and exams plus research and bureaucratic stuff for the Erasmus on the other hand.

Anyway, I am happy that I managed it eventually and that I was able to do an internship in Germany. I worked at the Landesmuseum of Hannover, co-organising a Chinese art exhibition... even if I actually did a little bit of everything, thus getting to know more and more about how a museum works behind the public scene. Now I have more professional skills.