Game Changers

STUDY OF THE REASONS FOR THE LACK OF INTEREST IN POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY AMONG THE YOUNG GENERATIONS

- *background study for schools and teachers*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study with advice and scenarios is aimed at secondary school teachers interested in organizing initiatives to engage young people in politics and democracy based on their own interests, understanding, voices and 21st century culture. The document is based on real-life examples and research on practices, innovative methodologies and didactic techniques.

This document consists of two parts. The first part explains the need to organize initiatives related to the involvement of young students in politics and clarifies the role of schools in this aspect. The second part offers methodologies, guidance combined with key information about what the partners have produced in the project.

During the course of the Game Changers project, student teams from schools in five countries were involved in practical activities on how to prevent a lack of interest in politics, democracy and values and how to support student involvement. This document is one of the results of these experiences. The projects were aimed at making a difference in their own local communities, and importantly, they were developed on the students' own initiative. By working in this way, students developed positive early experiences of politics while being at an age when important elements of their identity and personality are being formed, with the aim of preventing the later emergence of a lack of interest and engagement in adulthood.

This set of guidelines is based on research carried out by the knowledge partners and on materials collected by the practical partners of the project. The materials are included to exemplify good practice and potential educational methods and techniques.

The study is dedicated to secondary schools across Europe and aims to provide authentic inspiration for action based on innovative educational methods to support young people's engagement and interest in politics. Feedback from practice partners indicates a significant and desirable impact on students and their teachers.

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The consortium is composed of two knowledge partners:

1. Lietuvos demokratiškumo ugdymo kolegija (Lithuania)

2. Szczecińska Szkoła Wyższa Collegium Balticum (Poland)

Five practice - school partners:

1. Institut de Vilafant (Spain)

2. Pasvalio Levens pagrindine mokykla (Lithuania)

3. PLATON M.E.P.E (Greece)

4. ELAZIG DOGA ANADOLU LISESI (Elazig Egitimcilik Tic.ve San. (Turkey)

5. Osnovna sola Staneta Zagarja Lipnica (Slovenia)

and Working with Europe/Treballant amb Europa Associació (Spain) as the evaluation and quality partner.

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2. MISSION

The Game Changers project is very innovative and school engagement in politics even more so. It will take open minds, brave action and dedication to work through the project.

Why the name of the project is
YOUNG STUDENTS AS GAME CHANGERS IN POLITICS?
Why 'politics' and not 'political'?

Because the project is NOT about involving young people in political parties or in traditional political youth organisations (often linked to political parties). In fact, the project is not about political parties or specific political orientations at all. It is not about right-wing or left-wing politics in certain countries or in Europe, but about the term "politics", the way we know and experience politics in today's modern Europe.

"Youth involvement in politics" or "politicking"
does not indicate any form of specific political preference,
but simply means "taking an active part in local and global challenges as citizens".

It is therefore important to create conditions for students to reflect, to make decisions, to engage with their communities outside the classroom, to act, to observe the results and to take responsibility for it.

The Game Changers project very strongly emphasised that the impact should not be about students acquiring a skill, such as using a language. It was supposed to be a project or "mission" that would have a practical outcome. If young people do not take practical action and systematically engage in politics, the democratic project of the EU will become seriously endangered and may not survive.

This is an approach that seeks to develop a student's skills, knowledge, motivation and self-confidence in taking their own decisions in relation to a given issue (e.g. health or environmental concerns in the local community). The approach is partly a response to the lack

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of democracy in most schools; after all, students are rarely offered opportunities to choose what to do.

The Game Changers project is about politics in general, the kind of politics we have known for centuries in the Western world - and increasingly in the world at large. We know politics in the Western world as a form of POLITICAL GAME, with specific rules, power structures and practices throughout its history. But this project is precisely asking: perhaps this GAME no longer works, and especially not for the younger generations. Perhaps the young generation needs to fundamentally CHANGE THE POLITICAL GAME to make it work for them in the new globalised, networked and ever-changing world.

How to organise initiatives to engage young students in politics? The project, through its innovative methods, addressed the urgent challenge of the growing lack of engagement in politics by creating innovative guidelines for schools asking:

How can open education in secondary schools contribute to young people's engagement in politics, democracy and EU values?

To meet this challenge, traditional understandings of politics, democracy and EU values need to be thoroughly challenged and deconstructed, and students themselves need to be empowered to take up and co-create what politics, democracy and EU values mean in their world and, consequently, how schools can provide the necessary resources and the necessary space for such youthful innovation.

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3. CHALLENGES

3.1 Why is there a lack of interest in politics and democracy among the youth?

Research on young people's political participation is growing steadily. The reason for this increased interest is the recognition of a worrying trend - young people are moving away from more traditional and institutional forms of participation. Young people are often blamed for this decline and a range of political mechanisms are applied to them to 'remedy' this 'problem'. If young people do not systematically re-engage in politics, the democratic project of the EU will become seriously endangered and may not survive.

On the other hand, paradoxically, there is a strong youth presence and influence in movements that are led by young people or largely created by them - first in Europe and then worldwide.

As Phillipa Collin points out: „We are living in an era of democratic disconnect. A gap exists between institutional understandings and expectations of young citizens and the nature and substance of youthful forms of political action. In recent times youth participation policies have become a popular strategy to address a range of perceived 'issues' related to young people: either problems of youth disengagement from democracy or their exclusion from democratic processes"[1] . The strategies undertaken mainly focus on youth involvement, but here it is more important to prevent resistance to political involvement from arising in the first place, as this resistance has already been built up. Young people must have an authentic voice in the design, development and daily functions of activities. The importance of this shift from adult-led to youth-led and involving young people in community decision-making cannot be overstated[2].

In the first place, the very notion of "political participation" requires renewal and reconstruction. In view of the changes taking place, it is important not only to change or expand the definition of participation itself, but to look at the form and types of this

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[1]P. Collin, P., *Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society: Addressing the Democratic Disconnect,* U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015
[2] Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington 2007

participation in relation to young people through their eyes and on the basis of categories created by young people and to listen to their narratives.

In the book "What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes" Julia Weiss takes a close look at the literature on youth political participation in contemporary Europe and comes to the interesting conclusion that „existing definitions of political participation can be used to capture the political participation of young people, but she finds them falling short in accounting for new modes of participation that are common among young people (e.g., online or expressive) and in paying adequate attention to non-participation"[3].

Youth participation is a complex story to tell. According to C. Malafai,T. Neves, I. Menezes: „however, there is currently a wide agreement that the forms, repertoires and targets of youth political engagement are changing and expanding". Indeed, creative and non-traditional forms of engagement are on the rise, pointing towards a participatory transformation. However, when compared to older generations, today's youth are less interested in conventional politics, registering historically low levels of voter turnout and engagement in party politics across Europe". It can be argued that analysing political engagement requires overcoming both the reductionism of the birth cohort concept and the dichotomous understanding of participation[4].

Young people see participation as something that is part of their lifestyle and an expression of their identity. They are pragmatic, action-focused and uninterested in official roles or contacts with political elites unless it furthers their cause"[5].

As P. Collin emphasises, the younger generation is not less likely to participate in society, but they are less likely to use traditional channels. This is also underscored by the results of research[6], that the erosion of political participation and to transformations in youth

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[3]Per J. Weiss, *What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes* in: P.D. Ferreira, I. Menezes, *Editorial: The Civic and Political Participation of Young People: Current Changes and Educational Consequences*

[4] C. Malafaia,T. Neves, I. Menezes, The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research, Volume 29, No 5, November 2021

[5] P. Collin, P., *Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society: Addressing the Democratic Disconnect,* U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015

[6] Per J. Kahne, D. Crow, ,N. Lee, *Different pedagogy, different politics: High school learning opportunities and youth political engagement.* Political Psychology, 34(3), 2013; R.J. Dalton, *Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation*. Political Studies, 56(1), 2008, P. Norris, *Young people and political activism: From the*

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engagement patterns, reporting shifts towards 'little p' politics ", engaged citizenship and 'cause-oriented repertoires"[7] and linked to digital media, in which social life is increasingly mediated and networked.

„Young people today rank among the least civically engaged and simultaneously the most technology engaged of all age groups. Thus while trends show a decrease in young people's engagement in mainstream politics, there is considerable evidence to show that young people are not indifferent about politics, but that they have their own views and engage in democracy in diverse ways as related to their everyday. Thus, digital transformations have undoubtedly had a substantial impact on civic participation, especially concerning young people, and on how active digital citizenship is conceived, perceived and experienced"[8].

Is Youth Political Apathy for sure?

The Government and public debates tend to see young people as politically apathetic free-riders, taking the benefits of citizenship without voting. In this context, apathy is seen as an outcome of low political literacy or as resolvable through technocratic reforms of voting procedures.

However, it is increasingly recognised that apathy is not a sufficient reason for the lack of engagement of (young) citizens. Many studies suggest that widespread dissatisfaction and distrust of mainstream political institutions and processes goes hand in hand with high levels of civic engagement and unconventional and post-conventional forms of political participation[9]. It argues that young people live age, class, gender and ethnicity in ways that are political. Based on this broader understanding of politics, it concludes that young people are not apathetic but feel their interests and concerns are not addressed by politicians. Indeed, they are highly sensitive towards the limited nature of their political citizenship and this plays a key role in their disinclination to participate in mainstream politics[10].

politics of loyalties to the politics of choice? in: C. Malafaia,T. Neves, I. Menezes, The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research, Volume 29, No 5, November 2021
[7]Ibidem
[8] M. Delli Carpini, *Gen.Com: Youth, Civic Engagement, and the New Information Environment, Political Communication 17(4) 2000, David Marsh, Therese O'Toole, Su Jones, Young People and Politics in the UK: Apathy or Alienation?, 2007*
[9] *D. Marsh, T. O'Toole, S. Jones, Young People and Politics in the UK: Apathy or Alienation?, 2007*
[10] Ibidem

Researchers therefore often consciously and explicitly reject theories of apathy. Hay and Stoker write that" "Contemporary political disaffection is not […] a story of the decline of civic virtue, nor is it a story of political apathy -it is one of disenchantment, even hatred, of politics and politicians"[11]. Pippa Norris, on the other hand, sees, "Democratic Phoenix" rising from the ashes of traditional democracy, where "critical citizens" still participate actively in democracy but through different processes and institutions than formal politics offer"[12]. Russell Dalton sees "cognitively mobilised citizens posing a 'democratic challenge' by participating in more autonomous and diverse ways, which suggests that young people today understand politics in a different way than their political systems allow them to"[13].

The study results reveal that young people are not as apathetic when it comes to 'politics' as conventional wisdom would have us believe. Instead, what emerges is a picture of young people who want to play a more active role in the political process and its direction, but who seem to be sceptical about the way the contemporary political system is organised and run, and discouraged about politicians and political parties[14].

David Marsh, Therese O'Toole, Su Jones through their research project and in conjunction with the conclusions of other researchers on the topic, argue that young people are interested enough in political issues to dispel the myth that they are apathetic and politically lazy. They show a clear interest in many political issues. Moreover, there is a civic orientation towards the democratic process among young people: representative democracy is generally seen as a very good thing[15].

The main conclusion that emerges from these findings is that if this generation is to become more politically engaged, then the main political parties need to take a more positive and proactive approach in their attempts to engage with young people so that their voices are heard, listened to and heeded. It is therefore necessary to „explore the 'ordinary' and 'middle' ground of the relationship with politics and democracy undertaken by many young people who, despite their 'disillusionment with traditional politics remain interested

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[11] Ibidem
[12] Ibidem
[13] Ibidem
[14] Ibidem
[15] Ibidem

and continue to seek recognition from the political system'. Because these young people operate outside traditional and new contexts of political engagement, they are either misrepresented as apathetic or eventually disappear from the academic and political radar altogether"[16].

What are the conceptions of the roles of youth in the political game?

Use H. Bang theoory, Marsh, O'Toole, and Jones situate youth engagement more within the theory of **'everyday makers' than 'expert citizens'.** According to „everyday makers theory", citizens disillusioned with the state turn to **'do-it-yourself politics'** and community activism, with a lack of faith in government leading to political action rather than complete disengagement or apathy" . That means that they are „pragmatic and integrate their work for society with social activities. Young people are driven by a desire to belong to a particular network. Digital media is both a cause and an effect of this desire to connect with like-minded people". If organisations, whether non-governmental or (semi-)governmental, want to increase young people's participation, they need to make sure they are socially networked with them"[17] .

„Concerning the opposition between conventional and non-conventional participation, Hustinx and colleagues put forward the concept of **'civic omnivore'** to account for the existence of a repertoire characterized by 'a blended civic taste pattern that blurs traditional distinctions between old/institutionalized and new/individualized forms of participation[18]".

E. Andersson drawing on the criticisms to the developmental approach to youth political socialization and arguing for the recognition of youngsters' political agency, proposes the contingent approach. "This emphasizes that political development often unfolds in nonlinear, unstable and contingent ways and that 'young people already participate in society as situated agents implicated in social, economic, cultural and political domains'. Additionally, even

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[16] C. Malafaia,T. Neves, I. Menezes, The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research, Volume 29, No 5, November 2021

[17] *D. Marsh, T. O'Toole, S. Jones, Young People and Politics in the UK: Apathy or Alienation?, 2007*

[18] Za Hustinx, L., Meijs, L. C. P. M., Handy, F., Cnaan, R. A. (2012). Monitorial citizens or civic omnivores? Repertoires of civic participation among university students. Youth & Society, 44(1) in: C. Malafaia,T. Neves, I. Menezes, The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research, Volume 29, No 5, November 2021

though it is difficult to make clear-cut generational comparisons, the sociopolitical and historical context needs to be accounted for"[19].

Young people have maintained an interest in political issues over the last few decades, but have increasingly switched to single issue campaigns and are drawn to grassroots activist groups that are more open to influence, as opposed to the more rigid, hierarchical traditional political institutions such as parties and unions (a broader discussion of what might be driving these changing preferences and behaviours[20].

As can be seen from the above, political participation of youth and the range of roles they assume is highly diversified, there is no uniform approach of youth to politics, which makes it all the more important not to encapsulate its meaning in a traditional and already outdated framework. One should analyse factors which influence these changes and look for the most significant sources of influence and possibilities of prevention of the lack of involvement of youth in political life, and here, as the authors of the topic emphasise, the strongest influence on young people's attitudes towards politics is exerted by their educational experiences.

These recognitions and related challenges compel a re-examination of educational institutions and how they contribute to the political education of young people, as well as an understanding of how new opportunities, new focuses and new repertoires are transforming the way young people understand political action and themselves as political actors.

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[19] Per E. Andersson, The pedagogical political participation model (the 3PM) for exploring, explaining and affecting young people's political participation. Journal of Youth Studies, 20(10) 2017, in: C. Malafaia,T. Neves, I. Menezes, The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research, Volume 29, No 5, November 2021

[20] Ibidem

3.2 Developing resources for political commitment in schools

Today, the only and most important context in which youth can be systematically re-engaged in politics is school. Engagement with politics and global challenges should take place as early as possible, precisely in secondary school, because these are the years in which young people form their identity - but also build strong resistance, for example, to traditional politics.

A few years ago it would have been less understandable, and perhaps even irrelevant, for secondary schools Undertook initiatives that we could call "youth involvement in politics" and "taking an active part in local and global challenges as citizens". This therefore ties in strongly with the European Commission's long-standing call for active citizenship - and this must start as early as secondary school. The Commission calls for systematic initiatives to re-engage young people in politics - based on their own understanding and voices. Understanding and voice.

The strategies developed therefore aim to re-engage with a young generation who have already built up, Who have already built up significant resistance to engaging in traditional 'politics'. However, it is more effective to prevent the creation of resistance to political engagement than to attempt to re-engage once resistance has been built.

Therefore, young students should have the opportunity to create positive and exciting experiences of political engagement as early as possible, i.e. in secondary school. Why? Because it is in secondary school (during the teenage years) that they build their most basic identity and personhood, and offering teenagers an exciting experience in politics will allow them to develop identities that are open to political engagement, rather than building resistance to that engagement.

This identity strategy has been used with great success in initiatives to help young people build positive ideas about what science is (rather than building early resistance to science) - and the project is keen to apply this experience to the policy field.

Tanu Biswas makes the case for a reconfiguration of socio-political education where the roles of children and young people go beyond being taught, that acknowledges the contributions of children and young people to political participation and to how it can be understood, and learns from them. „Recognizing how Gen Z has been exploring the possibilities of large scale connective action in movements, which simultaneously resist

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adultist positions, bring things to say into the intergenerational dialogue about the future, and challenge the minor political role of "minors"[21].

In that case, education institutions can play an important role in this by „valuing, fostering and recognizing how students are engaging with pressing social topics within and beyond the school, and transforming citizenship and political education to become part of an intergenerational relationship where adults can teach but also learn with and from children"[22].

As highlighted by Pedro D. Ferreira, Isabel Menezes to the results in the paper by Tzankova et al.[23]: „aspects and experiences such as democratic school climate and student participation affect students' civic attitudes and behaviors. Results show that student participation (in student councils, groups or clubs) and political interest have an effect on civic participation, and students recognize the formative value of debates and confrontation of opinions as well of participating in school councils and assemblies in fostering interest in social issues, but they also say that teachers often avoid debate on topic issues in the classroom for fear of conflict, and that school authorities are frequently unresponsive to student voices. Interestingly, these results also point to the importance of participative environments (in and out of school), where young people can engage with issues they value, that invite critical reflection, where they can contribute and effect change. Schools and educators can play a role in promoting, supporting, and nurturing these kinds of environments and experiences, which play a significant role in the political education of young people"[24].

The papers within this research theme emphasise the importance of exploring and initiating young people's political participation in their own terms and in contexts that are particularly relevant to them. For this reason, it is important that the school also takes into account the two parallel worlds of young people's lives and exploits the potential of each of these realities in initiating and developing civic identity.

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[21] Per Tanu Biswas, *Letting Teach: Gen Z as Socio-Political Educators in an Overheated World* in: P. D. Ferreira, I. Menezes, *The Civic and Political Participation of Young People: Current Changes and Educational Consequences*

[22] P. D. Ferreira, I. Menezes, *The Civic and Political Participation of Young People: Current Changes and Educational Consequences*

[23] I. Tzankova, C. Albanesi, E. Cicognani, *Perceived School Characteristics Fostering Civic Engagement Among Adolescents in Italy*

[24] P. D. Ferreira, I. Menezes, *The Civic and Political Participation of Young People: Current Changes and Educational Consequences*

The findings of Tzankova et al.[25] showed, that online and offline participation are positively related, with participation in one mode increasing the likelihood of participation in the other. However, the advantage for the relevance of political participation experiences here is activity in the offline world, as it triggers a snowball effect increasing both online and offline youth participation in this aspect[26].

In their papers, Ferreira and Menezes highlight that: „The political subjectivation of young people is happening online and offline, in various movements where they act and contribute to change and to a future. This involvement matters and if schools should definitely recognize, nurture and support opportunities for youth involvement and learn from them, scholarship should also avoid looking at them as not-yet-adults. If they are becoming political, isn't everybody, despite their age?"[27].

Great hopes are put in the school as a potentially 'neutral' ground in which young people might learn politics engagement. Why school and not, for example, family? Because, as the results of the study[28] indicate, the family is not perceived as a context of political learning, both because the youngsters feel they have no legitimacy to participate in political discussions within the family and because they regard their parents' political discussions as not having what it takes to promote political learning: openness to plural political standpoints. Research has been providing evidence about the importance of contextual condiments that lead to individuals' political development, including an environment in which confrontation with different points of view is not only supported but stimulated"[29]. From this it follows that two seemingly important sources of influence - the family and the media, in fact in relation to

[25] I. Tzankova, C. Albanesi, E. Cicognani, *Perceived School Characteristics Fostering Civic Engagement Among Adolescents in Italy*; P. D. Ferreira, I. Menezes, *The Civic and Political Participation of Young People: Current Changes and Educational Consequences*

[26] P. D. Ferreira, I. Menezes, *The Civic and Political Participation of Young People: Current Changes and Educational Consequences*

[27] Ibidem

[28] C. Malafaia, T. Neves, I. Menezes, *The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects*, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research,Volume 29 Number 5 November 2021; A. Kudrnáč, P. Lyons, *Political inequality among youth: Do discussions foster a sense of internal political efficacy?* Young, 26(5); E. Quintelier, *Engaging adolescents in politics: The longitudinal effect of political socialization agents,* Youth & Society, 47(1) 2015; P. D.Ferreira, C. Azevedo, I. Menezes, *The developmental quality of participation experiences: Beyond the rhetoric that 'participation is always good!'*. Journal of Adolescence, 35(3) 2012

[29] C. Malafaia, T. Neves, I. Menezes, *The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects*, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research,Volume 29 Number 5 November 2021

political development, do not act in a pedagogical way. „Consequently, the message youngsters are getting is that the political world is an adult world, with an adult language and clouded by an adult bias. The school's role is called on, not only as context for providing needed political equipment (which is not limited to political knowledge), but also for creating conditions for political discussion (including being a platform for direct links with policy-makers, who 'should go to schools, face up, talk, explain things', according to one of the youngsters)"[30].

The EU commission and the current state of research agree that the growing lack of interest in politics among young students is a huge challenge and a threat to a sustainable, democratic EU. To address the challenge of the growing lack of interest in politics among young students, traditional understandings of politics, democracy and EU values need to be thoroughly challenged and deconstructed. Young students need to be provided with conditions at school to participate and co-create their own meaning of politics, democracy and EU values in their world. One way to do this is for young students to engage and participate in projects at the EU level, as these major challenges are directly related to the EU, the sense of the EU and the future of the EU.

As K. Mannheim emphasises in his debate: „it is political-economic changes and educational pathways that give rise to the different visions and meanings attributed to time and space by the 'individual' sharing common experiences and challenges. On this basis, young people articulate the types of political actors to which they aspire and re-imagine school, family, politics, democracy, making concrete proposals to bridge the gap between youth and politics"[31].

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[30] Ibidem

[31] Per K. Mannheim, *The problem of generations* in: C. Malafaia, T. Neves, I. Menezes, The Gap Between Youth and Politics: Youngsters Outside the Regular School System Assessing the Conditions for Be(com)ing Political Subjects, Young nordic Journal of Youth Research,Volume 29 Number 5 November 2021

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4. METHODOLOGY

Based on intensive analyses of recent critical research on youth participation and based on innovation in education, it can be concluded that three working methods have to work in parallel and coherently to lead to the expected innovations and results: preventing lack of interest and fostering policy engagement of young students and education in general:
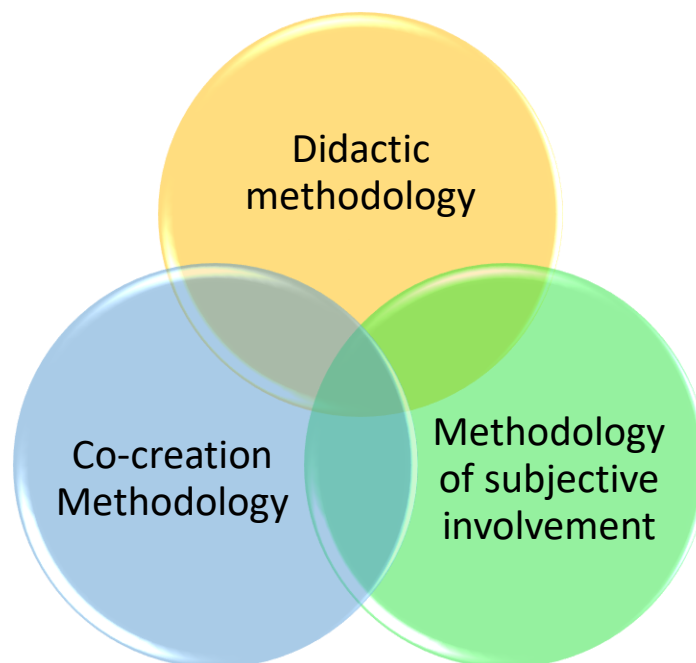
Didactic methodology

Traditional didactics in secondary school need to be changed to innovative open school didactics to generate interest and engagement. An open school approach in which students learn by interacting with authentic resources in the community rather than through formalistic and academic knowledge texts.

Methodology of co-creation

The principles and forms of work related to interest and engagement, which are conducive to politics and learning, must be developed and co-created by the young students themselves, and not deduced from any educational theory.

It is very important that political and democratic activities in secondary school are co-designed and co-constructed by young students themselves. This criterion of ownership is absolutely essential for success. Ready-made menus of involvement in politics and democracy do not work. They essentially block students' interest from engaging.

Methodology of subjective involvement

The youth of the 21st century are characterised by a number of subjective conditions and criteria for engagement. They are very different from previous generations; if these engagement criteria are not met, they will not engage. This criterion addresses the subjective and emotional conditions of young people's engagement, which calls for a methodology of subjective engagement.
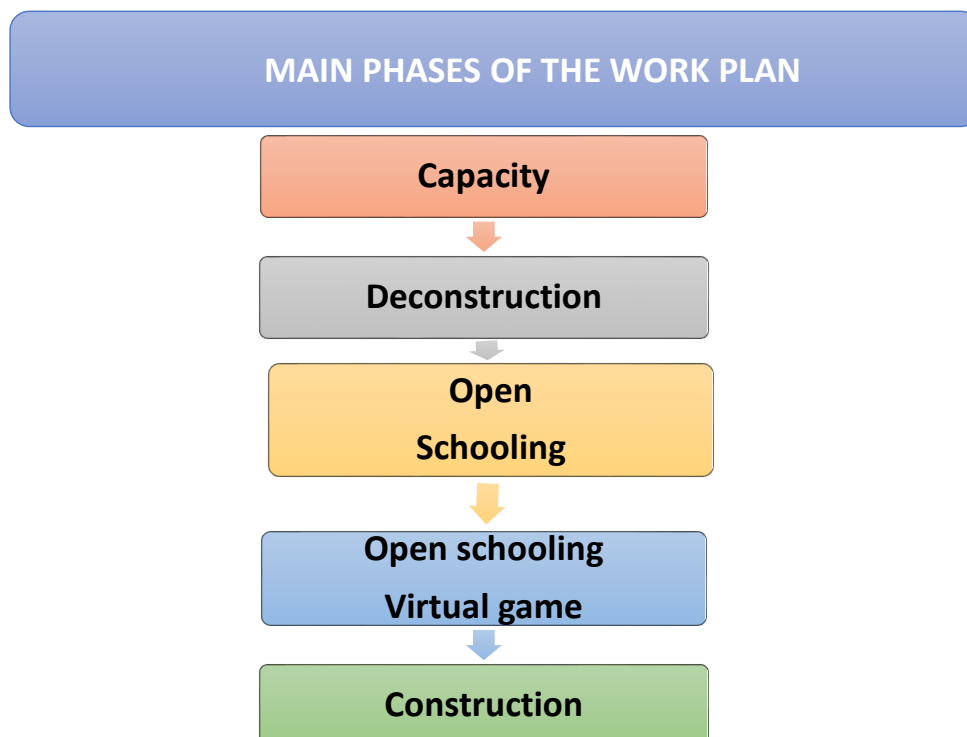
5. INNOVATIVE WORK PROGRAMME

The Game Changers project is very innovative and school engagement in politics even more so. It will take open minds, brave action and dedication to work through the project. It is crucial that the project and all its participants engage in discussions about this perception of 'politics' and do not get lost in debates about different party policies and traditional political institutions. In a subtle way we could say:

> *"it is not about the content of politics, but about the form of politics*
> *it is not about the content of engagement, but about the form of engagement"*

All this is not easy. This is why the project has followed key phases, the passage of which is intended to help begin the 'deconstruction' of traditional politics, which means asking highly critical questions about the foundations of traditional politics, looking beneath the surface, tearing it apart and analysing what it is really about.

The action plan is a framework that can be adapted by student teams. It answers the question: Which actions will lead to the creation of conditions and spaces for students' active contributions?

MAIN PHASES OF THE WORK PLAN

Capacity

↓

Deconstruction

↓

Open Schooling

↓

Open schooling Virtual game

↓

Construction

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5.1 CAPACITY

Opening up to: What does traditional politics mean to the new generations of students?

The first months were activities are about getting to know the project; getting it under our skin, so to speak:

<div align="center">

What is it about, what are the activities?

How can we work with these activities – and what should come out of all this?

</div>

We will recommend working with the following activities in your local teams:

1. CREATE YOUR TEAMS

  ➢ When we say "LOCAL TEAMS" we refer to the entire local team: teachers and students, and later on perhaps supplemented by dedicated resources from the community wishing to work with the students along the project or in certain missions

Why is this important?

As well as the generic lessons, such as teamwork or goal setting, each project introduces young people to a dimension of life that they might otherwise have missed. Examples include talking to elderly people from the community, discussions with technical experts such as architects and listening to people who work every day

Working in collaboration with others appears to be a hugely motivating factor. This could be done face-to-face but also using digital platforms (particularly for keeping in touch with team members who work at different times or with similar projects in other countries). Team structure is important with many reporting on how different members play to their strengths rather than all trying to do the same thing.

2. TALK ABOUT TIME AND SPACE

  • How can we mobilise the needed time and space to work in project? Can we use innovative and fresh ways to create more time and space? After school, families, community resources?

  • How can we help more students participate in partner meetings and in the mobility?

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- How can the project engagement integrate in the normal school life?
- Can we share our project engagement and local activities with more teachers and students in the school? How?

Why is this important?

The school site has the potential to become a local centre for initiating and disseminating youth political initiatives, using its infrastructure also for the community, its space and its physical and material resources. Simply encouraging curiosity and creativity is not enough; the context of the project is also critical. By locating work outdoors and beyond the school gate, students have the opportunity to grapple with the unpredictability and complexity of the world. This greatly increases learning and motivation. In other words, it's not just what you do, it's the way that you do it – and where.

3. TALK ABOUT THE OTHER STUDENTS

- How would we like to collaborate with the other student teams and how can we make that happen?
- How can we create strong student collaboration in preparation of the project climax?

As you see, there are many things you can do to build capacity to work well in the project.

4. TALK ABOUT PHASE 2

- How can we plan phase 2?
- What kind of activities should we do in phase 2?
- Will we involve people outside the school in phase 2?
- You can share ideas and activities in phase 2 with other teachers and students
- What would we like to result from phase 2?

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5.2 DECONSTRUCTION

We call this phase "WILD YOUTH-LED DIALOGUES"!
To create a language and culture of politics that make sense to the young students, they first need to reflect critically on what "politics" traditionally means.

Phase 2 will help student teams work well and better prepared in the important phase 3 action phase. It is a kind of "warming up" to the community work in phase 3.

What does that mean?

➢ the student teams should lead the activities in this phase, organise the activities and share with the project. The teachers are the helpers.

➢ we should ask **CRAZY, WILD AND UNTRADITIONAL QUESTIONS** about politics and what politics is for us in the 21st century.

➢ we should avoid traditional school question and ask direct and fundamental questions about young people's engagement in politics, locally and globally.

The phase 2 local teamwork is expected to prepare the student teams for their community actions and missions in the central phases of the project; to qualify these missions and to help make the missions more critical.

The key challenges will be:

➢ youth-led discussion and elaboration of the results of the deconstruction activities to be transformed into a product of the process, which will also be relevant for the final results.

➢ a joint discussion on: How can young high school students act as policy detectives in their community and in the global virtual space ?

➢ why detective activities are expected to prevent lack of interest in politics and foster political engagement

Youth-led discussion and elaboration of the results of deconstruction activities to be transformed into a product of the process that will also be relevant to the final results.

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HOW to work?

Discussing - Working - Evaluating. The guiding questions and points above are, of course, about the possible "content" of it.

DISCUSSING

The main aims of the discussions are for the student teams to step by step create strong images of what "politics" means to them, to the way they see themselves and the world – and in particular how to "politics" connect to: HOW THEY SEE THEIR FUTURE?

The discussions might anticipate what kind of political topics they might be confronted with the following phases' missions, such as, civil rights, climate change, migration, rich-poor, pollution, corruption, women's rights, political and economic power, etc. – at local as well as at global levels, and perhaps linking local and global levels.

What does politics mean for young students as political detectives?

What should change at the local level?

Dialogue with a diverse range of community actors, including politicians, political parties, alternative groups, citizens, and individuals associated with perceived community probles, i san essential component of student detective work.

Topics that might be relevant in these discussions could be:

- How do young students understand "politics"?
- What is active citizenship about?
- What does "participation" and "engagement" mean for young people today?
- What's the meaning of "(representative) democracy" to our young students?
- What does "power" mean? Who's in power and why?
- What does the European Union mean to young people?
- Do girls and boys see and feel politics differently? How and why?

Sharp topics might also be:

- How does traditional politics change in a world of social networking?
- How does politics change when everything is available on the internet?
- How does politics appear in the media in the 21st century?
- Some people call the 21st century "post-truth"; what does that mean?

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WORKING

It is important that the teams at the end of phase 2 arrive to some conclusions. Some of these conclusions might point towards what activities the teams will engage in during the third project phase. "Conclusions" in this project might also be formulating important challenges: to the project, to the community, to the other student teams: *We have been discussing this topic, and we simply do not understand why… or we completely disagree that…*

HOW to work with these challenges in phase 2??

➢ The teachers and student teams are free to create any form of activity that leads to those discussions, but here are a few ideas:

➢ The teachers and student teams are free to create any form of activity that leads to those discussions, but let us suggests a few options

The critical discussions in phase might be carried out in many ways:

- The two student teams working separately and then confront each other with the challenges they have created

- The teams can work collaboratively and divide the work into important topics, then bring the topics together later on

- The teams might wish to interview teachers at the school and use this material as a starting point for the team discussions

- The teams might wish to engage with other students in the schools, or outside the school, to find out what they feel about the topics discussed

- Some teams might even decide to engage with different kinds of young people to compare their reactions

- Teams might wish to involve their families or other citizens, as "politics" in indeed a generational matter

- Some teams might wish to anticipate phase 3 and engage with key resources in the community or online they find relevant to the challenges

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EVALUATING

How to check if it works?

The following questions can help to evaluate this phase:

Where are in the DECONSTRUCTION phase?
What have you accomplished and what are you planning to accomplish?

Currently our students are on the deconstruction phase. After an initial triggering inside the classroom we started questioning and deconstructing key elements in traditional political discourse (like cognitive frames, conventional understandings about the structure of society and relations with other societies), both on local and national level

Howe the students are reacting to the challenges?

Students really seem to like this stuff – to engage in issues. Students still spend most of the day listening to teachers talk. One reason we think kids like these issues is they finally get a chance to talk themselves. More than that, we did find that the content of these political issues was really interesting to kids. Especially when they were hearing multiple and competing views.

Do the students know how they can act as politics detectives in their community and in the global virtual?

One of the basic skills of Active Citizens is to be able to talk about politics. And that is a skill that students need to learn. In our opinion it would be great if it were learned in school because these are great moments in which you bring a group of young people together who are forming their political views.

Those basic skills are not part of any curricula and they are taught in school. So we decided to use an inquiry-based learning approach in order to trigger the students into acting as political detectives.

Obstacles you have faced in this phase - as a practice partner, in connection with the students teams

Student opinions, as well as other observations about politics in their communities are highly affected by their parents, peers and social media. Their social circle have influenced their

opinions. It ends up that being raised in a certain mindset makes it difficult to think of things any other way

Challenges you think the project should work with- to support your work

The main question that we will have to answer is how political do we want students to be? That's really a question that a lot of communities struggle with and a lot of teachers struggle with. One other challenge is that difference can often cause high emotions and often can cause breaches of civility. So teachers who are in classrooms that have lots of naturally occurring difference often have to go to great lengths to make sure that students understand what it looks like to participate in a civil manner.

Do the students discuss about how to plan, organise, document and share the politics detectives work in the local communities?

Still the students are trying to find a pace in that new context. They have planned some interviews with local politicians but they are not sure about their next steps.

You can also find these questions in this questionnaire.

5.3 OPEN SCHOOLING

Young students as policy detectives.
Learning on demand rather than as planned.

The following questions will be relevant in this phase:

- What is an open school and how can schools and student teams organise an open school at the heart of everyday school life?
- What does policy mean locally?
- What needs to change locally?

Key challenges will be:

➢ the ability of student teams to deal with politics and political players with confidence, and the ability of the local partner to support tchem

- the quality of engagement in specific political missions
- the willingness of teams to share with other teams from other countries and to document their experiences in creative ways

An open school promotes the independence and interdependence of each student. Open learning refers to a form of education in which students do not play a passive role, but are active members of their school and wider community. In this way, schools can create a more engaging learning environment. Open schooling promotes educational innovation and discovery learning, and is in constant interaction with the community, both as an authentic learning context and as an equal partner.

Through collaboration and guidance, students are empowered to understand and question their place in the world. The open school makes an important contribution to the community as pupils take part in projects and interact with the local community.

5.4 OPEN SCHOOLING/VIRTUAL GAME

Young students as political detectives.

The following questions will be relevant in this phase:

- What does politics mean in the world, online and in social networks?
- Why do young people get involved and in what?

Learning on demand, not when planned.

Key challenges will be:

- How student teams will cope with the huge amount of political information and communication

The quality of missions undertaken and the quality of student engagement.

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5.5 CONCTRUCTION

Youth-led construction of an alternative political discourse based on community of practice and virtual sensing

Youth-led construction of an alternative political discourse based on community of practice and virtual sensing, and how can this alternative discourse translate into guidance for preventing disinterest and fostering engagement in early childhood education?

Advisory: feedback from teachers, schools, researchers and policy makers on youth-led.

Key challenges will be:

- ➢ robust summarisation of feedback into useful recommendations
- ➢ detailed planning for the production of final results, including student co-creation
- ➢ detailed planning for dissemination of results.
- ➢ production of final results
- ➢ sharing them in the project's three networks: the network of young teams, the network of schools and teacher training, and the network of researchers and policy-makers at EU level.

6. GAME CHANGERS PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

This section contains best practices collected actual projects carried out by the partners of the Game Changers project. It addresses the best practices that have been undertaken to implement the different phases of the Game Changers project work plan.

6.1 Capacity

The first months were activities are about getting to know the project; getting it under our skin, to speak.

➢ Each partner formed a project team, agreed on the rules of work and cooperation, the forms of action and the delegation of students taking part in international meetings with students from other schools.

➢ Each school created 2 student teams with 4-5 interested students each, preferable 14 to 16 of age and mixed gender; each team should appoint a student captain to facilitate the work and participate in partner meetings; these were the STUDENT TEAMS .

The international meetings of teachers and students from different countries were a key point of the project.

6.2 Deconstruction

Crazy, wild and untraditional questions about: What does politics mean for young students as political detectives? What should change at the local level?

Students were preparing for a new team mission at this stage: each political mission trough social media, including the development of a game plan, communication with the leader. The teams were obliged to share their activities with the teams from the other countries, including discussion their own strategies and give feedback to the other teams' strategies. This sharing included the young student's preferred social network communication.

Teachers and students in schools have taken various approaches to listen to students' views and explore the political aspect in the local community:

1. Discussions and Debating about political issues, local and global concerns
2. Testimonies about students political experience
3. Story-telling about students political experience so far.
4. Role-playing

Some partners set up also political party, a political campaign, an electoral confrontation, elections.

Discussions and Debating

In the project we created an interactive radical GUIDE with tips for students to help them understand how to have discussions and conduct debates. The school - Osnova sola Staneta Zagarja Lipnica (Slovenia) ran a school parliament in which students discussed and debated important issues concerning the school, projects and world challenges.

To be able to understand that in practice and to inspire ourselves to be deep thinkers, school partners organized the oxfrod debates under different topic: "Women are Better Politicians than Men" and also young students were beginning to explore complex global topics such as African migrants coming to Europe.

Storytelling

In the project we created an interactive radical GUIDE with tips for students on what storytelling means and how this method can be used to express opinions and describe reality. Below link to story-telling examples prepared and conducted with students.
The Game Changers lessons learned: Pasvalio Levens pagrindine mokykla (Lithuania)

Testimonials

Not only did we use open discussions, but we also used an anonymous form of expression of pupils' opinions in the form of testimonials on the topic: "Why am I engaged/not engaged in Politics?"

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Role - playing

Example: <u>What kind of political party would you form yourself?</u>

What would your political party stand for?

6.3 Open schooling

This stage of the game involves „learning on demand" rather than traditional „learning according to plan" in school: policy and subject learning sessions are integrated into detection and, if necessary, missions. Youth teams from other countries exchange activieties, including strategies and feedback from other players.

The first stage open learning necessitates extensive political research in the student`s community:

– *What exactly is community politics, and how does it function?*

– *Who are the people involved in community politics, and why are they involved?*

– *What are the non-traditionaly political activities of the community?*

At this stage, students held dialogues with members of the local community, diverse range of community actors (for example, an <u>interview with the mayor</u>) including politicians, political parties, alternative groups, citizens, and individuals associated with perceived community probles, i san essential component of student detective work.

Covid-19 - new challenges and our changes

The Covid-19 crisis has been and will continue to be a big challenge and a learning experience for the global education. On one expected something like this. For the past years, the education community has been talking a lot about the need to change education to be able to adjust to the needs of the new world but actually – and in practice – not a lot occurred. And suddenly, all discussions about new ways of learning and teaching seem to be urgent. It was also urgent to make a move. What we saw during the last month in all countries around the world is that school, teachers and even parents have been pushed to the limit to create new tools and resources on the go. It took the education sector by surprise and unprepared. In a short period of time they had to adjust and implement an online teaching method to respond to the new needs.

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In document you can find some advise, which we created to help teachers imagine some ideas and what can they do to go further? The tips for the COVID19 period: Exploiting the project and Open the doors.

The innovative learning community Game Changers sends young people insights into the Covid 19 period. The project brings and present what they mean at this special time.

We used the pandemic situation to talk to students about what was happening, what they thought about it. we also used the Covid-19 pandemic situation as a point for discussion, reflection and sharing of reflections by the students

Do students think that EU respects manager to follow European values in recent time? Why?

As a result, we created and did some tasks connected with the topic "COVID": questionaire and video interviews

Questionaire – first part

In our case we also used the Covid-19 pandemic situation as a point for discussion, reflection and sharing of reflections by the students: How COVID-19 changed students' life? What are the main problems students have to deal with? Are students able to do anything about these problems? Etc. We have prepared a document with set of questions for students.

Their responses indicated that students are divided on this issue. Some believe that respect for the EU has recently manager to follow European values. Some believe that Europe has preserved its values because all the laws of the Member States are respects, but there are things that are done without citizen`s knowledge. However, there is a group that believes that the EU did not fully respect European values because some Eu institutions did not act unanimously and reacted too late to a pandemic. The EU did help the countries most affected by the pandemic (Italy, Spain, France) in time, did not provide any assistance to doctors or the necessary materials for hospitals. In their opinion, if we believe that European Union`s implementation of this value in time covid went surprisingly well – because, as they said, they understand that in Times of epidemics, freedom of movement is limited, but freedom of private life, freedom of thought, religion, association, expression and information must not be restricted. And here is an excerpt from what the Greek students said.

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Video interviews – second part

We asked students to make a video and express in it what they think and feel:

− *What would you like to tell people and society?*

− *What do you feel? What do you like and dislike now?*

− *What advice would you give people?*

− *What can people do now to make and promote a positive change?*

And here is one of the video examples, recorded by students.

Some partners have extended activities to include vaccination and provided discussion abput it with students:

− *Why are there so many Internet articles on how dangerous vaccines are?*

− *There is a large community of anti-vaxers. This is called vaccine opposition.*

− *Are there any other reasons people refuse vaccination?*

− *Some people don't believe vaccines can prevent these diseases because they say they are useless or create side effects, etc.*

In collaboration with community partner "Pasvalys Health Care and Vaccination Centre" created a funny video film teaching the importance of vaccination.

6.4 Open schooling and virtual game

In this phase, we first created a **guide to open school communities**: Virtual misssions Political detectives and open school scene were changing rapidly: the political detection scene was moving into a global virtual scene. Student team acted as politics take place in the global virtual world, including trough social networks.

− *What does poltics mean globally, on the internet and in the social networks?*

− *Why are young people engaging and in what?*

− *Who are the political players?*

− *How do they work politically?*

− *What challenges does Europe face globally and in virtual network?*

− *What is the role of social networks in policymaking?*

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EP member: join Future of Europe

The Game Changers Network had a fruitful discussion with the member of the European Parliament, Maria Spyraki, about open schooling in secondary school and how it could contribute to engaging youth in politics, democracy, and EU values. Maria Spyraki congratulated the Game Changers Network and inited join the Future of Europe platform. Thos meeting was organized by PLATON M.E.P.E (Greece). This meeting was a unique possibility to present Game Changer project at the international level and to engage young students in politics based on their own interests.

Remote citizen education goes global

The Game Changers Network was looking for innovative and attractive ways to involve studentsin the project activities.

We invited all partners to a **remote game: „Detectives around Europe".** We proposed a game within the project. The „pandemic game" was supposed to be a background for student`s work on political and democratic issues.

During game, the students teams will be completing by each other completing six different task while „travelling around Europe" (on Google My Maps. Students will be encouraged to get to know each other, work togheter, cooperate. This will happen especially during three online meetings. In every location, students will have one month tho complete one task.

How did we prepare remote game?

1. We prepared game board on Google My Maps - <u>Detectives</u>

2. We created the politics detectives scenario with <u>mechanic and rules of the game</u>

3. Then we prepared tips for students: <u>Detectives around Europe</u> with the tasks. Ideas for the tasks for students included:

- Icebreaking - making a video. The first task was to keep the students motivated and engaged by getting to know the team members better. Team members presented themselves, but impersonating a chosen character from the political scene. Students were asked to make a <u>video presenting members</u> of their teams to other project partners.

- The power of school council – making a presentation (video/ ppt/ digital story telling). Students were asked to imagine that the school council in their school has an unlimited

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power and can make any change they want. The task for students was to make a presentation about how the school from their dreams would look like.

- Getting to know project partners' countries – making a presentation (video/ ppt/ digital story telling/ etc.). Students were asked to become tourist guides and to present their home countries to others. Based on this, teams should prepare some questions about their countries and other teams will have to answer the quiz correctly in order to collect points

- Other country in my home – making a video. Students were asked to choose one country they got interested in during the previous task and to organize their every – day activities as if they were living in this country.

- Dealing with fake news – creating a post on Instagram. Students were asked to find out differences between real and fake news and create some news themselves.

- Hearing (in court) – discussion online. Students were asked to discuss about climate change. Teams will be informed what roles they will be playing during the hearing (judge, jury, attorney, prosecutor, witness, accused). They will have to preapre to play they role beforehand. The hearing should take place online.

6.5 Construction

Welcome to Game Changers Network

Game Changers pitching their ideas in schools. This was a final step of the project and a unique Chance for students and teachers to pich their in the communities.

All schools teams as well as a non-formal partner-rural NGO for children and youth at risk will pitch ideas in a special event for local communities. During the project, young students became political game-changers and run their own communities initiatives or projects. All best practices, lessons learn and practial partners e-portfolio could be found in the interactive platform (www.gamechangersnetwork.eu).

Game Changers Network welcomes and involves researchers or practitioners to promote and support youth and teachers in those field.

To read more about projects and all activities wisit open schools e-portfolio:

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and our project website: http://gamechangernetwork.eu/