



DEBATE ON, CHANGE
COMMUNITY



DELIBERATION TOOLKIT

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Hrvatsko
Debatno
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Toolkit | Deliberation

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What is deliberation?

The term **deliberation** represents a form of rational discussion among several equal individuals aimed at reaching a consensus based on understandable and acceptable arguments, where all forms of coercion are eliminated except the “unforced force of the better argument” (Habermas 1996: 306).

It can be classified as a subtype of participatory democracy that involves the active participation of citizens in the decision-making process. In **deliberative democracy**, a political decision is legitimate if it results from an adequately conducted public discussion that respects deliberative and democratic principles.

Deliberative democracy

When we talk about **deliberative democracy**, we refer to a type of political community that combines democratic values such as inclusiveness and equality with deliberative values and practices as the dominant mechanisms for making political decisions.

Deliberative democracy has its roots in ancient Athens, where all free citizens (excluding women and slaves) gathered to discuss decisions important to the polis. In the Middle Ages, deliberation lost its democratic character and became institutionalised in the form of parliaments, where members of the nobility and later other privileged classes negotiated the distribution of power with the king. In modern times, with the emergence of representative democracy, citizens with voting rights elect politicians who are supposed to defend their interests in parliamentary discussions. Today, we witness a crisis of representative democracy, struggling with numerous global issues, populists, and autocrats exploiting its weaknesses. **Deliberative democracy**, which focuses on the communication process instead of voting, emerges as a potential alternative or supplement to the dominant decision-making method that could alleviate the problems of the existing system.

In deliberative democracy, deliberative and democratic values are combined, which are generally compatible but do not necessarily come together. For example, political deliberation can occur between political and economic elites without involving the broader public. To be democratic, deliberation must somehow include different actors and make the content understandable to the general public. The principle of equality requires that all participants have an equal right to present

their views and arguments, regardless of ethnic, economic, cultural, or any other differences, and that arguments are evaluated solely based on their inherent strength, regardless of who presents them. Freedom from any form of external coercion and freedom of speech are also important features of the deliberative process. The diversity of participants ensures a wide range of ideas, perspectives, and opinions that will enrich the deliberation and represent the positions of different social groups. Rationality is somewhat a contentious value - although different forms of expression have a place in deliberation, it is crucial that arguments are formulated and evaluated according to generally accepted objective standards. **Consensus** is the desirable outcome of the deliberative process. Consensus is generally reached when all involved in the deliberation agree on the decision reached through the process. Of course, in practice, it is difficult to meet this requirement fully, but the key is the participants' intention to achieve consensus, meaning they are willing to revise their initial positions in line with rational arguments presented during the deliberation.

Recent examples of using this method include: drafting abortion law proposals in Ireland, formulating green policies in France, and the Conference on the Future of Europe, where citizens from all European countries discussed the direction in which the EU should develop.

Difference between deliberation and other forms of communication

Deliberation differs from ordinary communication in that it contains certain ethical and epistemic standards, while ordinary communication can use irrational arguments and language that shows disrespect towards the interlocutor. Debate, although it has certain elements in common with deliberative communication, differs in that it has a competitive nature, where one side fights against the other and strives to win. In deliberation, the emphasis is on cooperation - holders of different arguments try to reach a consensus through deliberation, the content of which may potentially differ from the participants' initial positions but will (at least partially) satisfy the preferences of each of them.

Advantages and critiques of deliberative democracy

Many benefits of deliberation exist for individuals and society, but there are also potential problems that can be mitigated by the adequate organisation of deliberative institutions. It has already been mentioned that deliberation involving members of different social groups has access to various perspectives and knowledge, increasing the likelihood of reaching a quality

decision and broadening the legitimacy of the decision in society. On an individual level, deliberation participants are exposed to information from experts, and different perspectives, and are put in a position to defend their own opinions. This increases their knowledge of the given topic and their competence to participate in democratic discussions. In this way, it is possible to mitigate the polarisation that arises around controversial political issues.

Deliberative democracy is not immune to the problem of unequal power distribution in society. Although it theoretically gives everyone the opportunity to participate under equal conditions, it is clear that in practice, differences in status and education of participants affect the outcome of deliberation. It is known that the less educated are not inclined to participate, while the most active are highly educated men, meaning the loudest voices will be those of the privileged social group. The role of a quality participant recruitment process and facilitators is to ensure equal representation of different voices.

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Deliberation as an activity in the project

Debate model of deliberation: Participants in the project, through their work in the debate club, have become familiar with the basics of debate as a formalised discussion. Through working with youth workers, they have learned to define key terms in the debate, identify problems within the given thesis, and create their own debate case based on arguments. This model of deliberation is called the debate model of deliberation. The deliberative process will be conducted as a phase of the debate club` work based on debate methodology. All the knowledge and skills they have developed through debate work will continue to develop during the deliberative process.

The general goal of the deliberative process is to influence decisions and show young people that their interventions can make a difference. It is important that the group of young people selects a problem they believe is worth solving and can show that it significantly affects the needs of young people (or another group if they choose to). Youth workers should keep in mind three primary goals of deliberation and adjust their work with the group of young people accordingly:

- ✓ Inform and educate young people about the problem in a fair and balanced way (considering the problem from the perspective of different stakeholders).
- ✓ Identify and describe concrete and realistic ways to solve the problem that can serve as a basis for discussing what, if anything, to do about the problem. Deliberation will ask young people to consider the topic and try to make a decision on what they think should be done if anything.
- ✓ Do the above in a credible and legitimate way in the eyes of young decision-makers and all other stakeholders.



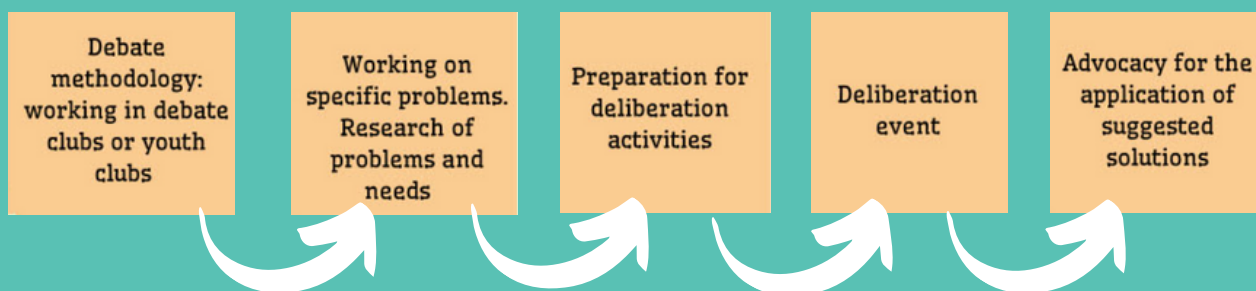
Working with young people on the deliberative process is almost identical to working with them on planning debate theses. At the moment of the meeting of all deliberation actors, it is expected that the group of young people will present their proposal for change, and one way to do this is by using their debate knowledge:

- **Problem:**
exactly what problem they have identified in the community
- **Significance of the problem:**
who the problem affects, how the problem manifests, are there studies recognizing the problem
- **Cause:**
why the problem occurs, what needs to be removed for the problem to stop appearing
- **Model:**
concrete proposal for change: how to solve the problem; who can help in this; how many resources are needed to solve the problem; what is the potential timeframe for implementing the plan
- **Arguments:**
main reasons showing why the problem is important to solve, with an emphasis on how exactly the concrete proposal does this best

One of the most important features of deliberation is the ability of participants to provide feedback directly to decision-makers and key stakeholders.

Key decision-makers must be open to the results of the deliberation and the views and perspectives that emerge from the participants. If decision-makers have a strong personal interest in a particular viewpoint or set of conclusions, it can undermine the value of the entire process. **Depending on the problem identified by the students, key decision-makers can include** principals, mayors, county governors, individuals in various administrative positions within local government units, etc.

Deliberation process



Activities

1. Stakeholder profiling (20 min)

Group activity: students create a stakeholder map based on the topic they are working on.

The facilitator guides them to think about:

- Who are the decision-makers?
- Who influences decisions?
- Who are the experts in the field?
- Who is affected by the issue?

Students place these stakeholders on a flipchart according to their level of influence and relevance.

2. How to ask questions (15 min)

Short input by the facilitator on the characteristics of effective questions:

- Open-ended, clear, and respectful
- Focused on solutions or accountability
- Encouraging dialogue, not confrontation

Then, students write 2–3 questions they would ask a key stakeholder.

3. Active listening role play (20 min)

In pairs, students take turns playing the role of a young person and a stakeholder.

The goal is to ask the prepared questions and listen actively — not interrupting, summarizing what the other person said, and asking follow-ups.

After each round, students give each other feedback on listening and communication.

4. Conclusion (5 min)

Facilitator leads a brief reflection:

- How can good questions influence dialogue with decision-makers?
- What did you learn about listening today?
- How will these skills help in public deliberation?

Protocol for deliberation events (for organisers)



When the problem and mechanism of solving it (agency, plan, resources) is determined, the organiser should agree on the dates for the event

- When the date is set, the the organiser should continue the organization process further
- When the date is set, the the organiser should create a mailing thread with everyone involved for that particular deliberation, to avoid noise in communication and to delegate tasks more easily
- When the date is known, youngsters are invited, potentially the local community, and the
- number of participants is estimated
- A month or three weeks before the deliberation, the tentative program for deliberation should be ready, along with the tentative number of participants
- A week before the deliberation, the the organiser should have a confirmation of all participants (audiences, experts/specialists, policymakers, young people presenting the suggestions/plans)
- Catering arranged at least a week before
- Accommodation and transportation for the the organiser should be arranged 2 days before (if needed)
- Media covering the event agreed 2 days before
- 5 days before the deliberation, the the organiser should send the problem and proposed solutions to the policymakers involved (to see if it is feasible)
- the organiser take notes of everything that happens and later we turn those notes into reports from deliberations and put them on the web
- Agreements on cooperation with institutions are signed during deliberations (if needed, e.g. schools, municipality)
- A certificate/thank you letter to the young people for participation can also be prepared
- After deliberation- the possibility of advocacy and policy briefing towards policy decision-makers



GOOD PRACTICES

This collection of good practices shares youth-led deliberation examples from the project's partner organizations, held in Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Sweden.

Structured around Preparation, Implementation, and Follow-up, they highlight how thoughtful planning, inclusive dialogue, and collaboration can lead to real impact. The aim is to offer both inspiration and practical guidance for future initiatives.

Good Practice From Croatia

Preperation

Description of local events

The local deliberation event titled "Debatiraj, mijenjaj zajednicu" ("Debate, Change the Community") took place on February 22, 2025 in Zagreb, organized by the Croatian Debate Society. The event gathered young people from across Croatia who had previously participated in debate clubs.

During previous months debate club Gimnazija Sesvete prepared their proposals for solutions for problems recognised in their local reality. Debate club team was split in three groups and each group focused on one of three themes: youth mental health, volunteering, or political participation. Young people explored real community issues, developed problem statements, and proposed three potential solutions per theme.

The deliberation event was designed as a youth-led, participatory space for democratic dialogue. Young people presented their analyses of key problems within the selected topics, shared proposals for potential solutions, and engaged in panel discussions with peers and experts. ~~The event had both educational and advocacy value, promoting civic competence, critical thinking, and public speaking.~~

Planning of the deliberation itself

The planning phase was an integral and intensive part of the DOCC project. Over several months, debate club leader conducted local workshops and debate club meetings (weekly from **December 2024 to February 2025**) to prepare young people for the public deliberation and to go through the following stages:

- **Identifying relevant youth issues:** young people began with brainstorming and mapping exercises to identify problems that affect their peers locally and nationally.
- **Developing argumentation skills:** using debate methodology, young people practiced building clear and convincing arguments supported by facts.
- **Problem analysis and solution development:** for each of the three selected themes, groups defined the core issues and collaboratively proposed **three potential solutions**, which were later refined through feedback and peer discussion.
- **Panelist research and preparation:** young people also engaged in identifying and profiling potential panelists, discussing what kind of questions would provoke useful insights and ensure dynamic discussions.
- **Speech writing and public speaking:** a portion of the sessions was dedicated to shaping strong, clear, and accessible public speeches to ensure that all voices could be understood and respected during the final deliberation.

Debate club team worked independently, guided by mentor and following a shared methodology. Young people were encouraged to take ownership of the process, resulting in a bottom-up deliberation that reflected their real interests and experiences.

The culmination of this process was a full-day event that included:

- Three themed **panel discussions** with expert guests and student moderators
- A **plenary session** where young people presented their final proposals
- A **discussion segment** involving all attendees, encouraging peer feedback and decision makers input.

Implementation

Activities and methods used

The implementation phase centered around the public deliberation event held in Zagreb, which served as both a culmination of youth-led preparations and a platform for democratic exchange. The event was divided into three main parts:

1. Panel discussions

Each group opened a thematic panel based on their chosen topic:

Panel 1: Youth Mental Health

- Panelists:
 - Hana Hrpka – A professor of psychology and president of the NGO Hrabri telefon.
 - Daniel Milošević – A psychologist at the Youth Health Center (Dom zdravlja Zagreb-Istok) and a psychotherapy school trainee with an integrative approach.
- Moderator: Tena Radić

Focus: The discussion centered on how to strengthen mental health support through educational and institutional reform. Young people raised issues such as stigmatization in schools, lack of accessible support services, and pressure related to academic performance. Proposed solutions included peer-led support initiatives, awareness campaigns, and mandatory mental health workshops in schools.

Panel 2: Volunteering

- Panelists:
 - Vladimira Čivrag Gosarić – Head of the Volunteering and Youth Department at the *Red Cross Zagreb*.
 - Anna Zvenihorodska – Former volunteer with *Ocean znanja* through the European Solidarity Corps.
 - Dunja Hafner – Executive Director of the *Volunteers' Centre Zagreb*.
 - Maja Adžaga – Pedagogue, psychotherapy student, writer, and team member of *Čisteći medvjedići* (Cleaning Bears).
- Moderator: Marija Merdžo
- Focus: The panel discussed how to improve youth access to volunteering, reduce administrative and logistical barriers, and ensure recognition for volunteer work. Proposals included formal acknowledgment of volunteering in school programs, better promotion of volunteering opportunities, and stronger school-NGO partnerships.

Panel 3: Youth Political Participation

- Panelists:
 - Maja Krištafor – Inclusion and equality expert, human rights activist, and educator with over ten years of experience.
 - Saša Milaković – Social activist. Through Mladforma, he's led youth engagement initiatives, including Bez filtera, a project that empowers youth for responsible and impactful social media participation.
 - Nikola Kožul – A lawyer and member of the Youth Council of the City of Zagreb, with eight years of experience in youth work via Forum za održivi razvoj – Zeleni prozor.
- Moderator: Fran Đurkan
- Focus: The discussion emphasized the need for formal political education in schools, safe spaces for youth expression, and the regulation of disinformation online. Young people proposed youth assemblies, political education workshops, and cooperation with local governments to include youth voices in real decision-making processes.

Young people introduced the topic with a short speech summarizing their problem analysis and proposed solutions. This was followed by moderated discussions involving guest panelists—experts, practitioners, or decision-makers—who shared their perspectives and responded to students' questions. The moderators were young people themselves, demonstrating leadership and communication skills.

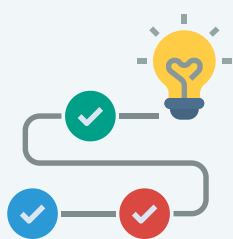
2. Plenary deliberation session

After the panels, all participants gathered in a plenary session to present their final proposals, listen to one another, and provide feedback. This format allowed cross-pollination of ideas between groups and fostered a sense of shared ownership over proposed societal changes.

3. Interactive peer dialogue

The audience, composed of young people and stakeholders, was invited to ask questions, comment, and vote informally on the most relevant or promising ideas. This part stimulated constructive peer feedback, encouraged critical thinking, and built a deliberative atmosphere where all voices were respected.





Methods used during the event included:

- Deliberative debate techniques adapted to youth-friendly settings
- Peer-to-peer education
- Panel moderation by students
- Interactive Q&A sessions
- Participatory evaluation (informal voting, reflection moments)

Workshops prior to the event used a scaffolded methodology, gradually building young peoples' analytical, communication, and civic skills. This ensured young people arrived at the final event confident, well-prepared, and fully aware of the deliberative process they were part of.

Participants and stakeholders involved

Participants:

The deliberation brought together around 30 participants from different regions of Croatia, most of whom were active members of their school debate clubs or in their organisations. Young participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 and were deeply involved in all stages of the deliberative process—from topic selection and research to presenting proposals at the public event.

Stakeholders:

The event engaged a wide range of stakeholders who enriched the deliberation with their expertise, institutional insight, and supportive presence. Key stakeholders included:

- Representatives of the City of Zagreb, who contributed valuable professional perspectives and took part in the discussions as institutional partners:
 - Mr. Luka Juroš, Head of the City Office for Education, Sports, and Youth
 - Mr. Darko Tot, Deputy Head for EU Funds, Youth, and Technical Culture
 - Ms. Marina Gatara, Senior Advisor in the Department for Standards and School Programs (Sector for Education)
- Guest panelists from civil society organizations and professional fields relevant to youth participation, volunteering, and mental health
- Teachers and school staff, including teacher who facilitated student involvement and supported the preparation phase
- Organizers from the Croatian Debate Society (HDD), who coordinated all aspects of the event—logistics, methodology, and facilitation
- Observers and community members, including youth workers, and former participants of HDD programs

This diversity of voices—including youth, experts, institutional representatives, and civil society actors—created a dynamic and inclusive environment for democratic dialogue. The deliberation served not only as a learning opportunity but also as a meaningful civic experience for all involved.

Follow-up

Feedback received

The deliberation event received **strong and enthusiastic feedback** from all involved—students, educators, experts, institutional representatives, and external observers. The responses confirmed the value of deliberative dialogue as a method for fostering meaningful youth participation and civic learning.

From students:

Participants described the experience as **empowering, engaging, and eye-opening**. Many noted that it was the first time they had been invited to publicly share their opinions on social issues in a structured and respectful setting. They appreciated not only being heard, but also having the chance to **shape the process themselves**—from research and problem analysis to public presentation.

Young people said that the experience helped them:

- Improve their public speaking and argumentation skills
- Develop teamwork and leadership
- Gain confidence in speaking to decision-makers
- Deepen their understanding of democratic processes and civic responsibility

Some even expressed motivation to continue working on civic issues beyond the event, including joining youth councils, volunteering, or advocating for change in their local communities.

“I didn’t expect that my idea could matter this much, or that someone like a city official would actually listen and respond. It felt real—and that gave me courage.” – Student participant

From mentors and educators:

Debate club leader and teacher praised the event for its **clear structure, youth-friendly methodology**, and focus on **authentic student agency**. They observed how the experience contributed to personal growth and social awareness among their students, especially those who previously lacked opportunities for public engagement.

They also highlighted that:

- The preparatory phase was pedagogically sound and motivating
- Young people became more independent in handling complex topics
- The deliberation fostered pride and a sense of accomplishment in youth

Mentors expressed interest in **scaling the format** to other schools and topics, considering it an effective tool for civic education.

From panelists and institutional representatives:

Guest speakers—including those from the **City of Zagreb**—were impressed by the **quality of student proposals**, the **depth of analysis**, and the **professionalism of the moderators**. They emphasized that youth events like this go beyond symbolic participation—they provide **concrete policy insight** and demonstrate that young people are both capable and committed to civic engagement.

“These are not just ideas for discussion. These are real proposals that could influence policy—and we should take them seriously.” – Panelist comment

City officials expressed interest in **continued cooperation** and mentioned that some proposals aligned well with existing policy goals.

From observers:

Observers, including former debate participants, and representatives of civil society, described the event as **inspiring, inclusive, and impactful**. Many praised the blend of **structure and spontaneity**, and noted how **respectful dialogue** was maintained even on sensitive topics. Some suggested formalizing the deliberation model into **school curricula or national youth programs**, and commended the Croatian Debate Society for facilitating such a participatory and empowering environment.

Main results and/or documents produced (incl.potential next steps)

The deliberation process produced a set of concrete and well-developed proposals, created by young people and presented publicly during the event in Zagreb. Each group focused on one of the three core themes—mental health, volunteering, or political participation—and worked intensively over several weeks to identify problems, research context, and formulate practical solutions.

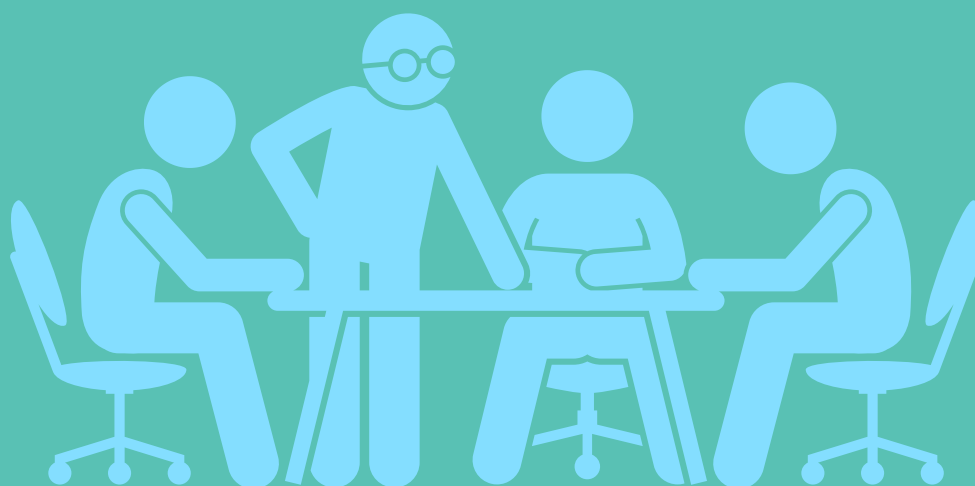
In the area of **mental health**, young people emphasized the urgent need to destigmatize mental health issues and improve the quality of school-based support. Their proposals included integrating mental health topics into sociology, psychology, and homeroom lessons, with special emphasis on social media's impact and the development of critical thinking. They also suggested annual mental health awareness lectures in both schools and universities. The most highly rated proposal in this category was the reform of professional support services in schools, including the mandatory employment of psychologists and psychotherapists and ensuring more ~~For active psychological volunteering, students~~ people highlighted how youth engagement through voluntary service remains under-recognized and under-supported. Their proposals ranged from introducing mandatory volunteer programs in schools, structured through a “volunteer points” system that would be connected to formal education, to the development of a national digital volunteering platform. This platform would serve as a central hub for accessing opportunities, sharing experiences, and applying to volunteer programs. Among these, the **digital volunteering platform** was selected as the most promising idea by peer vote, as it offered a scalable, accessible, and modern tool for increasing participation.

In the field of **political participation**, young people demonstrated a clear awareness of democratic deficits in the formal education system and online civic space. They advocated for the introduction of structured political education throughout all years of secondary school, delivered through interactive methods such as debates, simulations, and civic excursions. Additional proposals included encouraging youth membership in political and civic groups, and addressing the spread of misinformation on social media by promoting critical media literacy and collaboration with platform providers. The idea that resonated most strongly with participants was **the introduction of political education as a core element of the school curriculum**.

These proposals were presented and discussed during the event's plenary session, following panel discussions. Participants from different realities reflected on each other's ideas, providing a peer-based evaluation of feasibility and impact. Informal voting among participants helped highlight the top-rated idea in each theme, which may guide further advocacy.

As for **tangible outputs**, the deliberation generated individual school report that documented team's process of preparation and proposal development. The Croatian Debate Society also published multiple media articles and a photo gallery on its website, ensuring public visibility of the event. Informal evaluations and verbal reflections were collected from participants and mentors, contributing to future improvements.

Looking forward, the most **immediate next step** includes further presenting the student proposals to relevant local and national institutions, including educational authorities and other youth policy bodies. There is also strong potential for follow-up through local-level dialogues, pilot initiatives (such as the volunteering platform), or integration of student suggestions into civic education programming. Additionally, several stakeholders expressed interest in continuing this model of youth deliberation as a recurring practice—further bridging the gap between young people and decision-makers in Croatia.



Good Practice From Italy

Preparation

Our approach to the deliberation process has been multifaceted and context-sensitive, taking into account the diverse realities of the two main areas in which our NGO is active: the cities and provinces of Naples and Caserta, in southern Italy. Recognizing the complexity and uniqueness of each territory, we deliberately chose to carry out preparatory work in both areas in parallel. This allowed us to map different local dynamics, and to identify potential young participants and youth groups who could meaningfully contribute to the deliberative process.

The first step involved reaching out to individuals already engaged in local youth forums, as these spaces often represent a first form of civic engagement for young people. These **forums** provided not only a useful access point to motivated youth, but also offered a direct window into the issues, concerns, and aspirations already being discussed at the local level. Their members often have a good understanding of the structural challenges that young people face in their areas — from employment and education to mobility and participation — and are thus well-positioned to highlight territory-specific needs. By **initiating dialogue** with them early in the process, we were able to start shaping the deliberation agenda based on lived experiences and grassroots knowledge.

In addition to the youth forums, we broadened our network by establishing contact with various groups and organizations involved in **European Solidarity Corps (ESC)** projects, both at the local and international levels. This allowed us to integrate diverse perspectives and bring in young people who may have had experiences abroad or in multicultural settings, enriching the discussion with comparative viewpoints. These contacts were crucial for understanding how **local challenges intersect with broader European or global issues**, especially in terms of youth empowerment, inclusion, and active citizenship. The involvement of ESC participants helped us capture voices from those who have been exposed to different models of civic participation and could reflect critically on what works and what could be improved in their own local contexts. This **preliminary mapping and outreach phase** was not only essential for identifying potential participants, but also for defining the scope and tone of the deliberative events. It allowed us to build trust, co-design certain aspects of the process with the community, and ensure that the deliberation would be grounded in real, urgent, and locally relevant topics.



Local events

To reflect the diversity of the regions involved and to ensure that young people from both provinces could engage meaningfully, we decided to run parallel workshops in Naples and Caserta. The sessions brought together youth **aged 18 to 28**, coming from different social and educational backgrounds. This choice not only allowed us to respond to local specificities but also to create space for shared learning, cross-fertilization of ideas, and the emergence of regionally grounded yet widely applicable proposals.

The workshops were designed with a dual purpose: **to develop key competences among participants, and to spark active reflection on their role in shaping more youth-friendly communities**. Inspired by experiential learning principles and methodologies like those found in SALTO's Youthpass Islands activity, the sessions followed a hands-on, discovery-based approach that combined individual reflection, teamwork, and creative output.

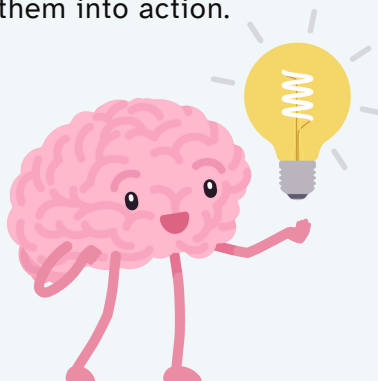
The first part of each workshop focused on Exploring the **8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning**. Instead of a frontal explanation, we opted for an engaging activity titled Discovering the 8 Key Competences. Participants were divided into small groups and invited to move through eight thematic “stations”, each presenting an interactive challenge or scenario subtly linked to one specific competence—ranging from cultural awareness to mathematical thinking, digital skills, entrepreneurship, and beyond. Importantly, the themes weren't revealed upfront; participants had to interpret the clues, solve the tasks, and guess which competence was behind each activity.

This playful yet thought-provoking format sparked rich conversation. Once all stations had been visited, a collective **debriefing** session allowed participants to connect the competences to their own lived experiences, and to discuss how these skills show up in school, work, volunteering, and everyday life. It also highlighted the transversal nature of these competences and encouraged participants to recognize their own strengths and areas for growth, while building a shared vocabulary around lifelong learning.

After a short break, the second part of the session shifted towards a more community-oriented brainstorming activity centered on the question: **“What is missing in our community?”** Participants were guided through a series of reflection prompts:

- What do we want to change in our community?
- Why is it important?
- What should it look like?
- What do we hope to achieve?

Young people worked in groups to **visualize their ideas** through posters, blending text, drawings, and simple planning tools. Each group then presented their poster to a panel of local youth workers and educators, receiving feedback and encouragement on how to further develop their ideas or turn them into action.



The ideas generated during these sessions were both creative and deeply grounded in the everyday realities of the participants. Some groups envisioned practical solutions, like a free, inclusive sports space equipped with basic fitness structures and a basketball court. They not only sketched out the space but also drafted a mock budget, outlined goals, and identified potential partners, such as local councils or youth departments. One group proposed to present their concept directly to the mayor of Casapesenna, showing a strong sense of **agency and ownership**.

Other ideas focused on cultural and social spaces: the creation of a youth center that could act as a hub for learning, creativity, and connection, offering everything from a reading room to creative workshops and peer-led sessions. This proposal included potential funding sources through community fundraising, and envisioned collaborations with schools, libraries, and religious organizations.

Participants also expressed the desire for more **inclusive** and regular community events, like movie nights, debates, or artistic gatherings held in already existing informal venues. These were seen as opportunities to bridge generational divides and strengthen social bonds within the community.

Lastly, several groups identified infrastructural issues as key concerns — for example, unsafe sidewalks or the lack of routes for pedestrians and cyclists. These were not just presented as complaints, but as proposals for local advocacy, with ideas for awareness campaigns, visual materials, and direct dialogue with local authorities.

These workshops provided a space for young people to explore their **personal development**, while at the same time encouraging **civic engagement** and a concrete sense of agency. They laid the foundation for the deliberative events to come, by surfacing real needs, amplifying youth voices, and fostering the beginnings of collaborative problem-solving within each local community.

Following the success of the first workshop, which focused on understanding the 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning and identifying gaps in the local community, we designed a second session titled **“From Ideas to Action – Building Initiative and Citizenship”**.

The goal was to take things one step further — helping participants move from awareness to action, and begin transforming their reflections into real, concrete initiatives. At the heart of the session was the aim of strengthening two core competences: **entrepreneurship and citizenship**, both in the personal and collective sense.

The workshop opened with a guided reflection, encouraging participants to revisit the ideas and proposals they had developed during the first session. They were invited to share whether any of those ideas had “stuck with them,” and how their understanding of citizenship had evolved — especially when thinking about what it means to take responsibility for creating change in one’s own community. This helped create continuity between the two sessions, grounding the discussion in lived experiences and ongoing thought processes.

Building on this, the main part of the session focused on personal action planning. Using a step-by-step method inspired by tools and activities like the Personal Development Plan, the Wheel of Life and the European Youth Portfolio, participants were invited to choose two ideas that resonated most with them personally — these could be proposals from their own group or concepts that had emerged from other teams during the previous workshop.

They were then guided to break these ideas down into realistic, time-bound steps:

- What action can I take within one week?
- What can I do in one month?
- What could I achieve within six months?

This simple, yet powerful structure helped participants visualize their own role in bringing an idea to life. It turned vague aspirations into **concrete micro-goals**, helping young people recognize that even small actions can be part of longer-term change. The exercise was also designed to foster personal responsibility and ownership, key elements of both entrepreneurship and active citizenship.

Once individual plans were completed, participants paired up to exchange feedback and merge their plans, eventually coming together as a full group to create a shared action plan. This collective moment was especially meaningful — it allowed participants to see overlaps in their ideas, identify shared goals, and develop a stronger sense of group identity and collective purpose.

Among the concrete actions proposed:

- ① Drafting a formal proposal for the creation of a free, inclusive sports space and presenting it to the municipality;
- ① Launching a donation campaign to gather funds and support for a future youth center;
- ① Organizing a movie night with open discussions at Café Letterario, focusing on social themes chosen by youth;
- ① Designing communication materials (e.g. posters, videos, social media campaigns) to raise awareness about mobility and infrastructure issues, especially for pedestrians and cyclists.

The final part of the session focused on **political engagement and advocacy**. A special guest — a local representative from a youth-led political party — joined the group to share real-life examples of grassroots initiatives that had influenced local policy. They also provided direct feedback on the participants' action plans and offered tips on navigating municipal processes, building coalitions, and identifying potential funding opportunities or partnerships. This **external contribution** gave participants a clear sense that their ideas could be taken seriously and carried forward.

Before closing the session, each participant was asked to define one small action they would commit to within the next seven days — something practical and doable, like talking to a peer about their idea, drafting an email to a youth worker, or sketching a first outline of their **proposal**. This micro-commitment was framed using the same goal-setting logic, inspired by the “DO IT NOW!” philosophy often used in personal development strategies.

The impact of this second workshop was clearly visible. Participants left with a renewed sense of purpose, equipped not only with ideas but also with tools, timelines, and strategies. They had tested what it feels like to turn reflection into action, and several initiatives were already in motion by the time the session ended — including a scheduled meeting with the mayor, the setup of a fundraising campaign, and initial planning for a community event. Beyond specific outcomes, what stood out most was the shift in mindset: a stronger belief among participants that **their ideas matter and that they have the power to act**.



One of the most critical components of this phase was framing the content of the deliberation. Drawing on the outputs of the workshops, and inspired by debate-based activities developed within our project so far (adapted for a non-competitive setting), we also prepared background material that explored potential challenges or objections to each part of the programme.

Moreover, we synthesized a cross-section of problems and proposed solutions proposed in the local events, formatted them into short, accessible briefs, and prepared visual posters and handouts to support the presentations. Each proposal was described in terms of what it aimed to change, why it mattered, what steps had already been taken, and what support or resources were needed moving forward. Participants from the previous workshops were re-contacted and encouraged to take an active role in presenting such proposals.

Finally, we confirmed participation from local stakeholders, youth workers, and representatives of associations active in the community, as their involvement added both legitimacy and practicality to the event, helping assessing the feasibility of ideas and provide real-world input.

To this end, personalized invitations were sent to local institutions, including municipal offices, schools, youth departments, and cultural centers, while NGOs working in the youth and civic engagement sectors were invited leveraging our networks of contacts. This approach would help to keep the discussion balanced and constructive, encouraging decision-makers to respond not only with support but with critical, solution-oriented feedback, while discussing and interacting directly with the young people themselves

Implementation

After a careful and collaborative planning process that involved both the organizational team and the young participants, the time came to bring the deliberation event to life. The groundwork laid in Naples and Caserta served as the foundation for what was designed to be a participatory and meaningful moment of civic engagement.

The transition from planning to implementation was not simply logistical; it was conceptual. The challenge was to create a space where young people felt ownership of the process, where their voices would not only be heard but actively engaged with. It was also crucial that the event provide room for dialogue between generations, between institutional knowledge and community-based insight, and between ideas and action.

With these goals in mind, the structure of the event was carefully designed to encourage participation, foster critical thinking, and build a sense of shared responsibility. From the tone of the opening activities to the tools used throughout the day, every element was intended to support an environment that would merge youth agency with democratic values and collaboration.

The focus, indeed, was on translating preparation into participation, ensuring that the programme, environment, and methods used on the day would empower young people to take the lead, engage meaningfully with decision-makers, and turn ideas into actionable outcomes.

What follows is a breakdown of the programme, the methods adopted, and the participatory strategies used to turn the deliberation into a dynamic and engaging experience for everyone involved.

Programme, activities and methods used

The main deliberation event was designed to be interactive, participatory, and reflective, building on the themes, proposals, and energy developed during the previous workshops. From the beginning, the aim was not just to present youth concerns, but to create a space for collaborative thinking and real dialogue, where ideas could evolve through shared understanding between young people and adult stakeholders.

The event began with an informal networking activity, inspired by the need to create immediate connection and ease among participants. Set up in a relaxed environment with snacks and music, this icebreaker used playful but thought-provoking prompts:

- What are you really good at?
- What's something you struggle with?
- What was your last social media post?
- When did you last vote, and what for?

Participants were encouraged to move around, share, and reflect not only on personal skills but also to start reflect on their roles as citizens. This activity helped to break the ice, initiate peer-to-peer exchange, and surface themes of civic engagement and identity from the outset.

A brief introduction followed, outlining the goals of the deliberation and the structure of the day, as well as the explanation of our project “D.O.C.C. – Debate On, Change Coming”, its partners and involved stakeholders. Emphasis was placed on the event’s dual purpose: to give visibility to youth-generated proposals and to foster constructive dialogue with institutional figures and community actors.

Participants were then invited to complete a short self-assessment handout titled “How engaged are you in your local community?”. This reflection tool, adapted from models of multidimensional citizenship, asked participants to respond to Yes/No questions about their involvement in civic, social, economic, and cultural activities, such as signing petitions, participating in protests, volunteering, fundraising, or engaging in intercultural events.

The debriefing that followed was key: participants discussed what surprised them, which activities felt most meaningful, and where they saw gaps in their engagement.

This was followed by a brief explanation of the four dimensions of citizenship:

1. **Civic** – engagement with institutions and political processes.
2. **Social** – participation in collective life and community-building.
3. **Cultural** – awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity.
4. **Economic** – engagement in work and contribution to collective prosperity.

This reflection helped personalize the concept of active citizenship, anchoring it in real experiences and preparing participants to approach the day's discussions with greater depth and intention.

The next core session was a Debate & Participation Workshop, where youth and adult participants explored local challenges from different angles. Structured like a dialogue rather than a formal debate, the session allowed young people to voice concerns, while adults responded with additional insights, questions, or counterpoints. The format was designed to show how structured dialogue can clarify thoughts, foster mutual respect, and transform disagreement into collaboration.

This method, inspired by some of the methods from our project, highlighted debate as a practical and empowering tool for civic participation. During this part of the program, participants were also introduced to the project's main outputs, the three manuals about how to coordinate local debate clubs, how to use debate in non-formal education settings, and how to link debate to volunteering and social impact.

Translated materials were shared, and participants were encouraged to explore how they might replicate or adapt these models within their local settings.

In the second half of the event, the spotlight turned fully to the youth participants. They were divided into small groups and asked to identify and select the most pressing issues facing their communities.

This process followed a clear, timed structure:

1. **Idea generation** – each person listed 2–3 local problems, individually.
2. **Group prioritization** – the participants, divided into 2 groups, selected 1 top-priority issue.
3. **Pitching round** – groups briefly presented their chosen issue to the others.

After a short break, the groups participated in a World Café-style discussion, rotating between the two issues tables for 15-minute deep dives. The logic of the two groups was to ensure that discussions remained locally grounded yet enriched by diverse input, therefore participants were divided based on their area of residency — one for the province of Naples and one for the province of Caserta. This allowed each group to focus on issues that were directly relevant to their local context, drawing on lived experiences and area-specific challenges, as already carried out during the local events.

Later in the session, the rotation system enabled participants for cross-group interaction, bringing in external perspectives, encouraging constructive comparison, and helping broaden the scope of discussion. The rotation also fostered a sense of regional solidarity, as participants were able to support and contribute to ideas from neighbouring communities, offering fresh insights and complementary suggestions.

During the session, young people worked collaboratively to explore:

- Root causes of the issue.
- Who is affected and how.
- What change is needed.
- What actions could realistically be taken.

Facilitators guided the conversation, ensuring everyone had space to contribute and that ideas were documented clearly.

Once the youth discussions had matured, adult stakeholders, including local decision-makers and youth workers attending the event, were invited to join the tables.

These intergenerational working groups provided space for:

- Sharing institutional perspectives and constraints.
- Offering practical suggestions or resources.
- Exploring partnerships or existing initiatives already in motion.

Together, the groups worked to transform ideas into proposals, using a common template that included:

- A problem statement.
- The proposed solution and its rationale.
- Suggested actions and implementation timeline.
- Required resources and potential allies.
- Anticipated impact on the local community.

Youth were coached through the process with the support of facilitators and visual guides, equipping them with concrete skills in planning, advocacy, and communication.

By the end of the session, the atmosphere was one of energy, clarity, and ownership. Young participants had not only identified and framed their challenges but had worked side-by-side with institutional actors to start solving them.

Participants and stakeholders involved

The deliberation event brought together a diverse and well-balanced mix of participants, each contributing unique experiences, perspectives, and roles within the local ecosystem of youth engagement. This intentional mix was crucial to the event's success, ensuring both peer-level solidarity among young people and a meaningful intergenerational dialogue with institutional and professional figures.

The core group consisted of 20 young people, aged between 18 and 30, who either took part in the preparatory local workshops in Naples and Caserta or joined the process in response to our open call. Their backgrounds varied widely, from university students and recent graduates to young professionals, volunteers, and youth activists. What united them was a shared motivation to engage with their community and explore how they could contribute to positive change.

Many had already been involved in the earlier stages of the project, having participated in workshops on active citizenship, key competences, and community mapping. This prior engagement meant they arrived at the deliberation with a strong sense of purpose and a set of well-developed ideas. At the same time, welcoming new participants helped bring fresh eyes and energy to the group, enriching the discussions and broadening the spectrum of lived experiences.

The decision to maintain a local balance between participants from the province of Naples and the province of Caserta ensured that each area's specific context, challenges, and youth realities were equally represented. The youth participants played a central role throughout the event: not only did they share their concerns and proposals, but they also actively led the discussions, moderated breakout groups, and took part in final presentations, highlighting the event's youth-led and peer-driven nature.

The second group of participants was composed of professionals, decision-makers, and youth workers, aged approximately between 30 and 45, who are actively involved in local governance, education, and community development. Their profiles were diverse, reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of youth policy work and civic engagement at the local level.

This group included municipal representatives from youth departments, school officers with influence in the annual programme development, professionals involved in non-formal education and ESC project coordination, as well as representatives from local NGOs, youth forums and informal civic networks.

These stakeholders were not invited merely as passive observers or “external experts,” but as active contributors to the deliberative process. Their role was to listen, offer constructive feedback, and engage in direct dialogue with the youth participants, particularly during the problem-solving and proposal development phases.

Many brought valuable institutional knowledge and technical insights, helping young people better understand how public administration works, what kinds of partnerships are possible, and how civic ideas can be translated into formal proposals. Several of them had prior connections with the youth sector, while others were brought in specifically for this occasion, creating opportunities for new relationships and collaborations to emerge.

Importantly, their participation signalled that institutions were willing to engage, to listen, respond, and build with, rather than for, the younger generation. This added a strong element of authenticity and legitimacy to the event and laid the groundwork for future cooperation beyond the project itself.

Follow-up

After the implementation of the deliberation event, the focus naturally shifted toward evaluating its impact and identifying the tangible outcomes it produced. This phase was essential not only for assessing the overall quality of the experience, but also for understanding how it was received by both young participants and the institutional actors involved. Through structured feedback and observation, we gathered valuable insights into what worked well, what could be improved, and how the proposals and connections developed during the event could be carried forward. The follow-up phase therefore served a dual purpose: to reflect on the quality of the experience and to solidify its results through documentation, reporting, and possible next steps.

Feedback received

The feedback collected at the end of the deliberation event clearly showed that the experience was not only appreciated, but also impactful. Participants were asked to evaluate the event using both quantitative scores (from 1 to 10) and open-ended reflections in specific evaluation forms. The results highlight a high level of satisfaction, strong engagement, and an encouraging sense of motivation moving forward.

When asked to rate the overall experience of the event, 90% of participants gave a score between 8 and 10, with over half awarding it a 10. This indicates a deeply positive response to both the content and the atmosphere. The event was widely described as “stimulating,” “inspiring,” and “a moment of personal growth”.

The relaxed and friendly tone set from the beginning was repeatedly mentioned as one of the reasons participants felt at ease and open to sharing. It created a non-judgmental and informal environment where even those who were initially shy or hesitant felt comfortable joining in. This openness carried through the entire day, contributing to the sense that the deliberation was a shared and safe space.

The programme content and activities received equally strong evaluations, with 85% of participants rating them between 8 and 10. Several commented on the diversity of formats — from personal reflection to structured group dialogue — as a major strength of the event. The “how engaged are you in your local community” self-assessment stood out as particularly effective: it was described as “an eye-opener” that helped participants connect abstract ideas of citizenship to their own real-life actions.

The group division by province, followed by the cross-rotation, was praised for its thoughtful design. Participants noted that it allowed them to focus on issues they knew well, while later benefiting from external perspectives that enriched the discussion and challenged their assumptions. The structure promoted not only collaboration, but also a sense of solidarity across regional differences.

The involvement of decision-makers and youth workers was one of the most valued elements of the event. More than 80% of participants rated this aspect 9 or 10, underlining the importance of direct and respectful dialogue between youth and adults. Participants highlighted how rare it is to have such open and accessible interaction with institutional figures, and how empowering it was to be treated as serious interlocutors. Comments emphasized that this kind of intergenerational exchange helped demystify the relationship with institutions and made the idea of engaging in public life feel more realistic and approachable.

In terms of personal growth and learning, feedback was equally encouraging. All respondents (100%) stated they had learned something new, whether about citizenship, collaboration, public speaking, or how local institutions work. Many noted that they now felt better equipped to take action on issues they care about.

The hands-on process of developing proposals, especially when supported by both peers and adult stakeholders, was described as a key highlight. Participants felt proud of the fact that the event didn’t stop at conversation, but pushed toward action, showing them that their contributions could lead to real change.

While the overall response was highly positive, some participants offered constructive suggestions to improve future editions, as follows:

- more time in the idea development phase, especially during group discussions.
- incorporating more creative tools, like visual storytelling or interactive formats, to better present and communicate the ideas developed.
- develop other interconnected events, either online or in person, to maintain the momentum and allow participants to engage further.

Alongside the feedback gathered from the young participants, we also engaged the second core group of the event — composed of local decision-makers, youth workers and professionals — to collect their reflections on the process, format, and outcomes of the deliberation. This was done in a more qualitative way, without assigning scores and filling in specific forms, but focusing on direct talks and consultations.

Their responses provided important confirmation of the event's relevance and impact, while also offering insight into how it was perceived from an institutional and practitioner perspective.

From the outset, many of the adult stakeholders expressed appreciation for the welcoming and dynamic atmosphere of the event. Several noted that the informal opening created an accessible entry point for youth to engage — something they often find difficult to replicate in more formal consultation processes.

Stakeholders commented on the balance between structure and flexibility throughout the event. The programme was described as well-paced, with sufficient space for listening, dialogue, and concrete collaboration.

From the perspective of content, decision-makers and youth professionals found the topics and discussions to be highly relevant to their work. They appreciated that the event didn't just focus on identifying “problems,” but emphasized solution-oriented thinking, with young people bringing proposals that were grounded, realistic, and often quite sophisticated for their age.

The use of self-assessment tools was highlighted as a strong pedagogical element, not only useful for the youth, but also helpful for professionals to understand the level of civic awareness among participants. Some stakeholders expressed interest in adapting or reusing the tool in their own educational or community work.

The most frequently mentioned strength was the quality of intergenerational dialogue, remarking on how genuinely engaged and well-prepared the young people were, not just emotionally invested, but capable of articulating their ideas clearly, and open to feedback.

Professionals found value in being part of a co-creative process where their role wasn't to dominate the conversation, but to listen, support, and advise. This shift in dynamic, from “experts speaking” to “peers collaborating”, was seen as a refreshing and effective approach to youth participation in policy-making.

From a professional standpoint, decision-makers appreciated that the event opened new channels for collaboration. For example, several indicated interest in following up with specific proposals, such as those concerning youth centers, urban safety, or public space use. Others expressed the desire to stay in contact with the organizers and explore ways to replicate similar formats in their own departments or projects.

While the overall feedback was highly positive, some stakeholders also noted areas for further development, as follows:

- more time to explore feasibility and budget constraints of the final proposals.
- Involvement of an even broader range of institutional actors, connecting it with the specific topics raised.
- formalizing specific follow-up channels, to ensure that the enthusiasm generated during the event could be translated into lasting cooperation and action.

The feedback given by decision-makers and youth workers involved viewed the deliberation not only as a successful one-time initiative, but as a potential model for future civic engagement activities. The event was recognized as a bridge-building experience, one that helped institutional actors reconnect with the energy, creativity, and critical thinking of the younger generation — while also providing concrete tools and proposals that could feed into local policies and programming for more inclusive decision-making processes outside of institutional boundaries

Main results

The deliberation event resulted in significant outcomes both in terms of individual empowerment and collective mobilization. Beyond the success of the activities themselves, the event left behind concrete, actionable proposals and a stronger sense of youth engagement within the two local communities involved.

The immediate impact of the deliberation was visible in several ways. First of all, participants not only discussed issues but structured their ideas into formal proposals, demonstrating new skills in advocacy and teamwork. Additionally, the process fostered a direct connection between youth and local institutions, with decision-makers expressing interest in supporting the next steps. Also, a shared sense of citizenship and collaboration was established, bridging different backgrounds and perspectives across the provinces of Naples and Caserta. The process allowed the youth to leave the event with increased confidence in their ability to contribute meaningfully to local policy discussions and community development efforts.

Most importantly, the event concluded with the production of two formal documents, one from each local group (Naples and Caserta), summarizing the main challenges identified and outlining practical solutions. These proposals were addressed directly to local decision-makers and are intended to serve as a foundation for further dialogue and action. An example of the general structure of such a document is provided at the end of this section, and it can be used as a template for future youth proposals, distributed as a model handout during workshops, deliberations, or project activities.

The first group, composed primarily of participants from the province of Naples, focused their deliberation on the breakdown in communication between institutions and citizens, particularly young people. Their proposal highlighted several negative consequences of this disconnect, including:

- Lack of information about available funding and cultural initiatives.
- A widespread sense of distrust and alienation from institutional figures.
- Cultural and social "desertification", with young people leaving their hometowns or disengaging entirely from community life.

Recognizing the urgency of this challenge, the group proposed a multi-year plan (3–4 years) to rebuild trust and create sustainable mechanisms for dialogue and participation. Key solutions included:

- The establishment of specific youth forums, associations, or working groups dedicated to foster grassroots civic engagement.
- Development of a collective involvement project, encouraging young people to actively contribute to community decision-making processes.
- Promotion of a shared civic consciousness aimed at collectively addressing problems rather than relying solely on institutional intervention.

To make this plan feasible, they identified the need for:

- Project funding related to cultural initiatives.
- Accessible spaces for meetings and activities.
- Streamlined bureaucratic processes to facilitate civic initiatives.

The expected benefits outlined in their proposal included improved communication and mutual trust, revitalization of the social fabric, and a self-sustaining cycle of new initiatives generated by young people themselves.

The second group, working from the context of smaller towns and rural areas in Caserta province, identified a different but equally critical challenge: the lack of social engagement among young people. They described a dynamic where many young people spent their free time passively, often in bars, without meaningful cultural, civic, or creative alternatives. The negative impacts of this situation were framed clearly:

- Social isolation and limited personal development opportunities.
- Weak sense of belonging to the local community.
- Lack of motivation and initiative among youth.

The group emphasized that youth participation is vital to the social and economic vibrancy of any community. Their proposed solution focused on creating alternative spaces and opportunities for aggregation and engagement, structured around three main phases:

- Short-term: Organizing open events and meetings with young residents to understand their interests and propose initial activities.
- Medium-term: Establishing dedicated youth spaces for workshops, cultural events, debates, and informal social gatherings.
- Long-term: Building partnerships with local associations and institutions to secure the continuity and growth of these initiatives.

The project would be carried out by local associations and volunteer groups, with support from public institutions. Essential resources identified included spaces for activities, materials and equipment, and support from facilitators or educators.

The group envisioned the following benefits:

- Greater social integration and a renewed sense of community among young people.
- Skill development through participation in workshops and learning activities.
- A cultural and social renaissance for the entire community, fostering both youth engagement and intergenerational dialogue.

These two proposals were formalized into a document addressed to local authorities, accompanied by a clear offer of collaboration, open dialogue, and a request for institutional support.

Together, these proposals capture the spirit and outcomes of the deliberation event: local challenges were not only identified, but translated into credible, actionable strategies for community improvement, led by the young people themselves. The documents produced will serve as a starting point for future advocacy efforts and potential collaborations with municipalities, schools, and youth services in the two provinces.

Handout (letter to decision maker): _____

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of [Name of the NGO], an association active in the [local area of reference] for [number of years], we would like to draw your attention to an important issue currently affecting [City/Neighborhood/Community]. Our goal is to address [Main problem], which is currently having a negative impact in the following ways:

- IMPACT 1
- IMPACT 2
- IMPACT 3

We believe that this issue requires urgent attention because [Reason why solving the problem is important].

To tackle this challenge, we propose [Brief description of the solution]. This initiative will include:

- STEP 1 (short-term action)
- STEP 2 (medium-term action)
- STEP 3 (long-term action)

The plan will be implemented by [Who is/will be responsible], with the support of [Key stakeholders/partners].

To successfully carry out this initiative, we foresee an estimated duration of [anticipated duration], and we will require:

- [List of necessary resources]
-

Thanks to the implementation of this solution, the following improvements are expected:

- BENEFIT 1
- BENEFIT 2
- BENEFIT 3

We kindly request your support, and we would be pleased to discuss this proposal further, exploring together how to collaborate for a significant and lasting impact.

We look forward to your kind response.

Best regards,

[names and titles]

Additional comments

While the deliberation event successfully brought together young people, decision-makers, and community stakeholders, it is important to acknowledge that organizing a full deliberative process involving the most relevant institutional actors is not always possible. Factors such as limited availability, political sensitivities, or logistical challenges can make it difficult to secure the participation of key figures — for example, a mayor or municipal official directly responsible for a specific issue.

However, these obstacles should not prevent youth engagement or the deliberative process from moving forward. One effective strategy is to leverage the existing network of partners, associations, and professionals connected to the NGO or organizing body. By identifying profiles among the network — such as youth workers, educators, local activists, or civil society representatives — it is possible to simulate the role of decision-makers and create a setting that still feels meaningful and relevant for participants.

This adaptive approach allows young people to practice presenting ideas, debating solutions, and building arguments in front of figures who, even if not formally responsible, can offer credible feedback, advice, and support. It preserves the core objectives of deliberation: critical thinking, collective problem-solving, and a sense of civic agency.

Moreover, organizing a series of smaller-scale, simulative deliberation events can have a cumulative effect. As youth become more engaged and skilled in articulating their proposals, and as the events attract greater attention and support from the community, it becomes increasingly feasible to scale up the initiative. Over time, this momentum can lead to a larger, more visible event where the presence of actual decision-makers is not only possible but actively sought after, due to the credibility and energy built around the process.

In this way, even when immediate access to power structures is limited, the spirit of deliberation (that is: empowering youth, building community, and promoting participatory democracy) remains alive and active, laying the groundwork for deeper civic impact over the longer term.

In this perspective, it is also crucial to think creatively and broadly about who qualifies as a "decision-maker". While institutional figures like municipal officers and government representatives are valuable, there are many other individuals within a community who can hold influence, leadership, or advocacy power, and whose involvement can significantly enrich the deliberation process.

Potential non-institutional decision-makers can include:

- Leaders or active members of youth forums and youth councils.
- Community organizers and grassroots activists.
- Representatives of local NGOs focused on civic engagement, social justice, environment, or youth work.
- School principals and/or officers, teachers, and educators with influence in youth spaces.
- Business leaders supporting local development and employment.
- Cultural association leaders (e.g., heads of local libraries, museums, or cultural centers).
- Journalists or media figures known for advocacy on local issues.
- Religious or spiritual community leaders engaged in community support activities.
- Artists or cultural promoters who mobilize public attention and dialogue through creative projects.

Involving such figures can still provide young participants with valuable feedback, networking opportunities, mentorship, and a sense of visibility for their ideas, while maintaining the spirit of deliberation even outside of formal institutional frameworks.

By adopting a flexible and resourceful approach to stakeholder involvement, deliberative events can remain impactful, sustainable, and genuinely rooted in the life and energy of the community



Good Practice From Portugal

Preparation

The preparation phase laid the groundwork for addressing the school's cleaning inefficiencies through structured deliberation and collaborative planning. Over seven sessions (December 2024–February 2025), students engaged in problem identification, prioritization, and solution design. Initial activities included individual problem submissions and group discussions to rank issues using urgency/importance criteria, culminating in the selection of "Inefficient School Cleaning" as the focal challenge. Root causes were analyzed via problem tree diagrams, highlighting systemic gaps like low student cooperation and insufficient environmental education. Concurrently, students brainstormed actionable solutions (e.g., recycling campaigns, awareness events) and evaluated them through impact/control matrices. Parallel to this, the forum "Clean School, Alive School" was meticulously planned, with guidelines for event design, role assignments (moderators, speakers), and logistics (audiovisual setup, invitations). Rehearsals ensured readiness, emphasizing student leadership and stakeholder coordination.

Description of local events

The primary local deliberation event was the **Forum "Clean School, Alive School"**, a student-led initiative facilitated by youth worker and researcher Alexandra Ataide, addressing the problem of inefficient school cleaning raised by the students. Preceding this forum, seven structured sessions were conducted (December 2024–February 2025) to:

- Identify and prioritize school issues (e.g., waste accumulation, low student cooperation).
- Develop solutions through brainstorming, problem tree analysis, and impact/control matrices.
- Plan and rehearse the final deliberation event, including roles (moderators, speakers, facilitators) and logistics (audiovisual setup, invitations).

Planning of the deliberation

The deliberation process was methodically planned across sessions:

- Problem Identification: Students individually identified issues, ranked them by urgency/importance, and selected "Inefficient School Cleaning" as the focal problem.
- Root Cause Analysis: Used a problem tree diagram to map causes (e.g., lack of environmental education) and effects.
- Solution Development: Brainstormed ideas (e.g., recycling campaigns, awareness events) and prioritized them using a matrix (impact vs. student control).
- Event Design: Structured guidelines for event planning (objectives, target audience, roles) were provided, culminating in a rehearsal session.

Implementation

The implementation phase transformed planning into action through participatory methods and stakeholder collaboration. Students employed tools like problem tree diagrams and storytelling (e.g., the parable of the six blind men and the elephant) to foster critical thinking and collective problem-solving. Brainstorming sessions generated diverse solutions, refined through impact/control matrices to prioritize student-led initiatives. Public speaking workshops equipped participants with rhetorical skills, guided by Aristotelian principles. The forum itself became the pinnacle: a student-led event featuring two roundtable discussions with school administrators, municipal leaders, and environmental experts. Collaborative exercises engaged attendees in ideating solutions, while moderators and facilitators ensured inclusive dialogue. Over 300 participants, including students, teachers, and external stakeholders, attended, with roles distributed across teams (audiovisual, communication, logistics) to execute the event seamlessly.

Activities and methods used

Participatory Techniques:

- Problem Tree Diagram: Analyzed causes/effects of school cleaning inefficiencies.
- Storytelling: The parable of the six blind men and the elephant emphasized collaborative problem-solving.
- Brainstorming & Matrices: Generated and prioritized solutions (e.g., recycling initiatives, student patrols).
- Public Speaking Training: Sessions on speech structure (Aristotelian rhetoric) and presentation techniques.

Event Execution:

- Two roundtable discussions with stakeholders, collaborative exercises, and student-led moderation.

Participants and stakeholders involved

Core Participants: 55 11th-grade students (vocational and academic tracks).

Stakeholders:

- School: Headmaster, teachers (Philosophy/Biology), Debate Club.
- Municipality: Environment Director (Águeda City Council).
- Local Associations: Agora Aveiro (project partner), Cabeço do Santo (environmental experts).
- External Experts: Biologists, project managers.

Follow-up

Post-event follow-up focused on evaluating outcomes and charting future steps. Feedback highlighted enthusiasm from both participants and stakeholders: the school headmaster endorsed replicating the model, while municipal representatives invited students to a June 2025 environmental event. Students expressed pride in their impact but noted challenges, such as limited role distribution and time constraints. Tangible outputs included the forum program, problem tree diagrams, solution matrices, and checklists for future events. Action plans, such as waste exhibitions and recycling campaigns, were documented for implementation. Next steps emphasized scaling the forum model to other school issues and deepening collaboration with municipal partners. The project concluded with a shared meal and reflective discussion, underscoring the value of youth-led initiatives in fostering civic engagement and practical skills.

Feedback received

Positive Outcomes:

- School headmaster praised the initiative, advocating for regular student-led events.
- Municipality officials deemed the forum "inspiring" and invited participants to a future environmental event.
- Students reported pride in their impact but desired broader role distribution.

Constructive Criticism: Students highlighted time constraints and limited involvement opportunities for all classmates.

Main results and documents

Outputs:

- Forum program, problem tree diagrams, solution matrices, event checklists (audiovisual, communication).
- Action plans (e.g., waste exhibitions, recycling campaigns).

Next Steps:

- Replicate the forum model for other school challenges.
- Participate in the municipality's June 2025 environmental event.

Additional comments

The project exemplified effective youth-led deliberation, blending structured methodologies (problem trees, matrices) with creativity (storytelling, brainstorming). The forum's success—attracting **300+ attendees**—demonstrates the potential of student-driven initiatives to foster civic engagement and practical skills (public speaking, collaboration). Future iterations could expand role allocation and integrate longer timelines for deeper inclusivity.



Good Practice From Sweden

Preparation

In early 2025, Ungdomsfronten worked hard to organize two important events that gave young people a chance to speak out and take part in shaping their communities. The first event took place in Botkyrka in collaboration with ABF Botkyrka-Salem. The second one was held in Umeå together with FN-föreningen at Umeå University. Even though these two events had different focuses, the goal was the same: to let young people talk about the things that matter to them and to support them in finding solutions together.

In Botkyrka, the young people spoke openly about the challenges they face in their area. Some of the issues they raised were feeling unsafe in public places, not having enough places to gather or hang out, and feeling like they are not part of society. These conversations showed how important it is to listen carefully to what youth are experiencing in their everyday lives. Together with ABF, we held four preparation meetings. These meetings helped the youth to think deeply about their concerns, to listen to each other, and to get ready for the main event which was called “Ung Röst – Vår Framtid,” meaning “Young Voice – Our Future.” The sessions were also spaces where trust could grow between participants. It became clear that many young people shared similar worries, and they began to support one another in imagining better futures.

In Umeå, the students focused more on global questions. With the support of FN-föreningen, they talked about democracy, the climate crisis, and how young people can influence international decisions. These were not easy topics, but the students took them seriously. Over the course of five sessions, they had time to learn, to share ideas, and to prepare for a larger event that took place at the university. These meetings allowed the students to understand how global challenges are connected to their lives, even though they live in a small city in northern Sweden. They explored how climate change, international politics, and youth participation are linked, and they discussed what kind of actions they could take, both as individuals and as a group.

Description of Local Events

In Botkyrka, the event “Ung Röst – Vår Framtid” gave young people the opportunity to present their ideas for improving their community. They were brave, honest, and thoughtful. Some of the ideas they shared included creating safe spaces led by youth themselves, organizing cultural evenings to bring different communities together, and giving more emotional and academic support in schools. These suggestions were shared with local politicians, who attended the event to listen and respond. This kind of direct communication between youth and decision-makers does not happen often, so it was a powerful moment for everyone in the room.

The forum also included moments for art and creative expression. Young people shared poems and songs that reflected their experiences. This helped to add emotion and depth to the day. It was not just a meeting – it became a space of connection.

In Umeå, the event was called “Youth and Global Challenges.” Here, university students had the chance to speak about their role in the world and how they could become more active in global issues. They discussed topics like the United Nations, climate change, and how peace can be built through youth engagement. The students invited teachers, researchers, and experts to join the conversation. They shared their thoughts and asked questions that were both challenging and full of hope. The goal was not to find perfect answers but to understand more and to be part of something bigger than just one classroom or one country.

Planning the Deliberation

Planning these events took time and care. In both cities, the youth helped choose the topics they wanted to talk about. In Botkyrka, the focus was on local problems, while in Umeå, the discussions were more about international questions. The process of choosing themes was not rushed. Instead, it was based on listening to the real concerns of the participants.

To understand the root causes of the issues, we used something called “problem trees.” This is a method where people look at a problem and try to find out what is causing it and what effects it has. It helps to go deeper and see the bigger picture. For example, if young people feel unsafe in public spaces, what causes that? Is it poor lighting? Is it a lack of police presence? Or maybe it's something more social, like feeling judged or excluded? By asking these kinds of questions, the youth were able to think in new ways about familiar problems.

The youth also worked together to come up with solutions. They used simple tools to organize their ideas and see which ones were most realistic and useful. This part of the process was very creative. People drew diagrams, made lists, and talked through different possibilities. It was important that the ideas did not just stay as dreams but were turned into real proposals.

Before the big day, the young participants were also part of planning the program. They helped with things like writing invitations, deciding who would speak, and choosing who would be moderators or presenters. This gave them a sense of responsibility and made the event feel like it truly belonged to them. Many said afterward that they had never felt so involved in an event before.

Implementation

Methods and Tools Used

Problem Trees: To understand why problems happen and what they lead to.

Group Brainstorming: To come up with ideas together.

Public Speaking Practice: To help the youth feel ready and confident.

Small Group Talks: So everyone had a chance to speak.

Before the events, we organized small training sessions to help the youth feel more confident. They learned how to speak clearly in front of others, how to tell their own stories in a powerful way, and how to feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Storytelling was an important part of this process, as it helped make their experiences feel real and personal. Some participants told stories about their lives, their families, and their dreams. These stories helped others in the room to understand and connect.

In Botkyrka, the event included discussions with politicians and adults from the community. The young people presented their ideas in smaller groups. Some of them even led parts of the discussion. This helped make the conversations feel more equal and respectful. It also showed that young people are not just future leaders – they are leaders now.

In Umeå, the students invited teachers, researchers, and experts to take part in the forum. They spoke about how youth can contribute to climate action and peace work on a global level. It was clear that the students had spent time thinking deeply and preparing thoughtful questions and suggestions. The atmosphere was serious but also full of energy and motivation.

The discussions in both events were supported by visual materials. Participants used flipcharts, drawings, and notes to explain their points. This helped make the sessions more dynamic and easier to follow, especially for people who prefer visual learning.

People and Groups Involved

In Botkyrka:

Around 35 young people (15–25 years old)

ABF Botkyrka-Salem staff

Local politicians, youth workers, and cultural leaders

In Umeå:

Around 30 university students

FN-föreningen at Umeå University

Teachers, researchers, and NGO guests

Follow-up

After the events were finished, we held follow-up sessions in both Botkyrka and Umeå. These sessions were important for reflection. We asked participants to think about what they had learned and how they felt about the process. Many said they felt proud and that they were taken seriously. Others mentioned that it was the first time they had been in a room with politicians or experts who truly listened to them.

In Botkyrka, ABF expressed interest in organizing more events like this in the future. They saw how much the young people had to offer and how powerful their voices could be when given a proper platform. Some of the ideas from the forum were shared with local decision-makers, and there are early discussions about how to turn them into real projects.

In Umeå, the students created a summary report from the event. This report included their main points, ideas, and conclusions. They also planned to organize a webinar later in the year so they could continue the conversation and share their experiences with others in different parts of Sweden and possibly even abroad.

Feedback received

What worked well:

Youth said they felt proud and listened to.

Stakeholders said the events were well organized and showed real engagement.

Some students in Umeå said they are now more interested in joining international forums.

What could be improved:

In both places, some people wanted more time for planning.

In Botkyrka, a few youth said they wished there were more fun or creative parts.

The feedback from both events gave us useful lessons. One of the main things we saw was that young people want to be involved, but they need support. When they are given time, space, and trust, they can come up with powerful ideas. The presence of supportive adults, like youth workers and educators, also made a big difference. These adults helped to guide without taking over.

Participants also mentioned that the preparation time was helpful but could have been a bit longer. Some people wished they had more time to meet before the main events so they could get to know each other better. In Botkyrka, a few participants suggested that the sessions could include more creative or fun activities. They felt this would make the experience even more engaging.

Additional comments

The events in Botkyrka and Umeå showed us that young people in Sweden have strong voices, great ideas, and a real desire to make things better. They do not need others to speak for them, they need opportunities to speak for themselves. When we give them space, support, and respect, they rise to the occasion.

At Ungdomsfronten, we believe in youth leadership. We believe that change begins when people talk to each other, listen to each other, and work together. These events were just the beginning. There is more work to do, and we are excited to continue this journey with young people across the country and beyond.

Results and Documents

What we made:

Program flyers and posters

Notes and drawings from the sessions

Feedback forms and quotes

Videos and photos from the events

Next steps:

We want to do similar events in other places in Sweden.

We also plan to make a small guidebook for how to organize youth-led deliberations.



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