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EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Outline of a European Curriculum for Education for Democracy

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Abbreviations

CoE Council of Europe

EDC Education for Democratic Citizenship

EfD Education for Democracy

ENoLL European Network of Living Labs

EU European Union

ICCS The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study

LL Living Labs

LLLPs Living Lab Local Pilots

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

NW National Workshop

OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

PDC Professional development communities

RDC Responsible Democratic Citizenship

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

UN United Nations

UNCRC The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WP Work Package

Executive Summary

This document outlines the European Curriculum for Education for Democracy (EfD), addressing the key role education plays in fostering active citizenship and democratic values within communities and societies. Recognizing the significant impact of educational practices on both individuals and society, this curriculum aims to dissolve the barriers that isolate schools from their communities, promoting a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to learning.

In the world, democratic citizenship is not commonplace among the most prevalent forms of state government; global citizenship condenses many interpretations of responsible democratic citizenship in Europe. UNESCO's emphasis on fostering global citizenship through education underscores the necessity for learners to become informed, critically literate, and socially connected global citizens. The first section of this document elaborates on the global and European context and highlights UNESCO's role in promoting global citizenship, and promoting the democratic culture through educational frameworks, such as CoE's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

The Project's framework implementing EfD is Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) framework that emphasizes four key competencies: Solidary Participation, Deliberation, Judgement, and Democratic Resilience. These competencies are designed to nurture active, informed, and resilient democratic citizens. This Outline of a European EfD Curriculum (hereafter Outline) lays out the development of the RDC framework, the current circumstances in the 6 European countries for its implementation and its possible applications in educational settings. It ensures alignment with specific educational standards and requirements while addressing local challenges to democracy.

Effective implementation of the Outline for a European EfD curriculum requires innovative learning approaches, high-quality pedagogical materials, and comprehensive teacher training programs. Teachers are equipped with the skills to facilitate democratic education through participatory teaching methods and ongoing professional development. The inclusion of emotions and readiness to change within the learning process enriches students' educational experiences, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.

The Outline describes several methodologies, such as Living Labs—innovative research environments involving multiple stakeholders—to develop and test educational initiatives that promote democratic values and RDC competences. These labs provide real-life settings for collaborative problem-solving and continuous improvement of educational tools and strategies. The research approach, combining national and international workshops, desk research, and fieldwork, provides comprehensive data and insights crucial for curriculum development. A RDC evaluation framework is suggested to assess the effectiveness of the pilot projects in Living Labs, focusing on the development of RDC competencies and the overall impact on EfD.

The proposed European EfD curriculum integrates democratic values into educational frameworks, preparing individuals to actively contribute to democratic societies. By promoting a holistic approach to education that encompasses formal, non-formal, and community-based learning, the Outline aims to promote the development of RDC competences across diverse educational contexts. The expected outcomes include the cultivation of informed, critically literate, and socially connected citizens who can navigate and contribute to democratic processes effectively. This structured and adaptable approach lays the foundation for a sustainable and effective democratic education system throughout Europe, fostering a generation capable of upholding and advancing democratic principles in an ever-evolving global landscape.

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1. Introduction

To have a clear understanding of what students should learn in school, it is important to consider how schools are organized so that they facilitate effective learning. Learning and schooling not only impact individuals but also society as a whole. In democratic societies, educational curricula aim to shape students' relationship with the community, fostering both personal growth and active citizenship. However, translating these goals/aims into the curriculum and operationalizing them into classroom practice is a huge task, especially at the European level. This document proposes an outline of the European Curricula of Education for Democracy (EfD). Based on desk research (e.g., reviewing of national curricula, strategies, existing research, pedagogical resources) and fieldwork (e.g., interviews, workshops) carried out by DEMOCRAT project partners, we offer perspectives on what the curricula for EfD should encompass at the European level.

1.1. The Global context for EfD

In a world where liberal democracy is not universally prevalent, the concept of "global citizenship" encompasses a broader range of elements typically associated with responsible democratic citizenship, collaboration and sustainability in Europe and the political West. Thus, education for global citizenship refers to building a sense of shared humanity and understanding the interconnections among the local, national, regional, and global levels, even if the institutions of the state and the constitutional framework may vary from one national and regional context to the other.

In 2012, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) made fostering global citizenship one of its three education priorities, and three years later it issued guidance on the integration of global citizenship education in national curricula (UNESCO, 2015). This guidance was the result of extensive research and consultations with experts from different parts of the world, and before its issuance it “was field-tested by education stakeholders in selected countries in all regions to ensure its relevance in different geographical and socio-cultural contexts”. The stated goal of the guidance is to “help Member States ensure that learners of all ages and backgrounds can develop into informed, critically literate, socially connected, ethical and engaged global citizens.” (UNESCO, 2015; p.7).

The core conceptual dimensions of global citizenship education, as per UNESCO’s guidance, are presented in Figure 1 below, under the three domains of learning, namely: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural, which are interrelated. Also presented are the intended key learning outcomes, and the topics to be taught. The latter are arranged under the three intended learner attributes, namely: informed and critically literate, socially connected and respectful of diversity, and ethically responsible and engaged – which largely correspond to the DEMOCRAT competencies explained in section 1.3. The UNESCO guidance proceeds to more granular guidance on curriculum development for specific age groups, (UNESC, 2015; p.23-25).



Figure 1. Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives (UNESCO 2015: 29)

Even closer to the approach adopted by the DEMOCRAT project is the publication entitled Curriculum Development and Review for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, prepared by Felisa Tibbitts

for UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Organization of American States (electronic edition slightly revised, Nov. 2015 - https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234386). It provides an overview of both the conceptual framework and curriculum implementation, covering both Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC – a combination of EfD and responsible democratic citizenship) and Human Rights Education. Case studies include description of key stakeholders and national decision-making processes for reforming the school curricula. Among the countries covered is Finland, which is also part of the DEMOCRAT Project.

Also, other international organisations have worked with topics relevant for democratic citizenship education. As an example, the OECD learning framework 2030 in figure 2 (OECD 2018) emphasizes reconciling tensions and dilemmas, creating new values, and taking responsibility.

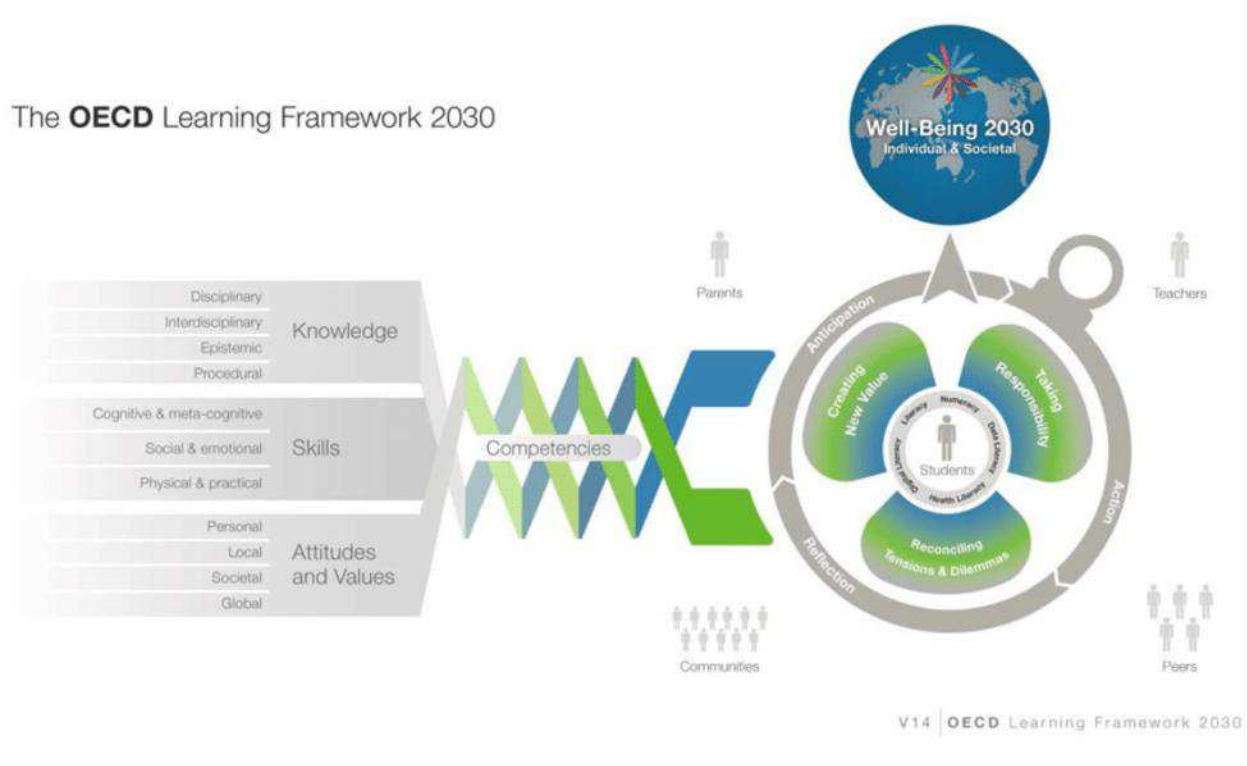


Figure 2 OECD learning framework 2030.

1.2. The European context of EfD

“The strategy focuses on the development of three dimensions in every learner: the "civic" learner, the "intercultural global" learner, the "digital" learner. Particular attention will be paid to the overall well-being of the learner.” Education for Democracy is a visible theme in education at the European level. The Council of Europe, member states, and other key actors have committed to advancing democracy and democratic citizenship through education, as outlined in the new **"Learners First" Education Strategy 2024–2030**. This strategy aims to safeguard democracy by fostering a culture of democratic participation among all learners. By promoting values, skills, attitudes, knowledge, and critical understanding necessary for active engagement in democratic societies, the strategy underscores the importance of embedding democratic principles across all levels of education.

The key objectives include placing democracy and citizenship at the heart of education, promoting competences that support democratic culture and intercultural understanding, and strengthening links

between education and sustainable development. The strategy also emphasizes non-discriminatory access to quality education, ethical approaches in education systems, and the active role of higher education institutions in fostering democratic participation.

Through flexible curricula, professional development for educators, and participatory governance, the strategy aligns with global efforts such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). With a focus on developing "civic," "intercultural global," and "digital" learners, the strategy seeks to equip individuals with the tools to contribute to democratic processes and promote social cohesion. As implementation progresses, member states are encouraged to actively collaborate with stakeholders to bring these ambitions to life, ensuring a democratic future for all.

Education for Democracy (EfD) is a central and visible theme in education at the European level, reflecting a shared commitment to fostering democratic values and participation among learners. Both the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) play vital roles in promoting EfD, albeit through different approaches. While the EU supports member states through non-binding policy recommendations, funding for educational projects, and collaborative platforms, the CoE, as a human rights and educational institution, has been at the forefront of developing comprehensive frameworks and strategies for EfD.

In the EU context, all European-level policy documents are non-binding as education is regulated on a national level. Thus, the EU is using its regular tools to support national policy making in the EfD field, trying to influence national educational practices by:

- providing EU funding for policy experimentation and development - like for the current project,
- providing various opportunities for teaching professionals for mutual learning - e.g. through relevant monthly topics in the European School Education Platform, programmes like eTwinning, funding teacher mobility for training and job shadowing, sharing inspiring practices on the Erasmus+ Results Platform,
- using the Open Method of Coordination for national governments to learn from each other, and
- providing policy documents that mostly take the form of recommendations or non-binding frameworks.

The Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning, the main policy document created with the aim of guiding curricular development and last updated in 2019, outlines holistic framework emphasizing eight core competence areas, including personal and social development, sustainability skills, and digital literacy, fostering learning, employability, and sustainable development across all aspects of life. The Framework separately names Citizenship competence as one of the 8 main competence areas using the following main definition: “Citizenship competence is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability.” (EC, 2019: 12) It goes on to define the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that could be used as the basis of national or local curricula.

To support the implementation of the recommendations presented in the Key Competencies document, the Joint Research Centre has developed more detailed competence frameworks. These additional frameworks clearly show the transversal nature of EfD and provide support for embedding EfD elements in various subject curricula beyond civics. For example:

- the LifeComp (Life competencies framework) contains support for including topics such as empathy, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking,
- the GreenComp (sustainability competence framework) include topics such as critical and systems thinking, political agency, individual initiative, and collective action,
- the DigComp (digital competence framework) cover engaging in citizenship through digital technologies, and protecting the environment, and
- the Entrecomp (framework for entrepreneurial competencies) includes ethical and sustainable thinking, taking initiative, mobilising others, spotting opportunities, and creativity.

The European Education Area 2025 strategy of the EU emphasises the importance of a stronger Europe and puts a lot of emphasis on teachers and their education for achieving the main EU policy goals. In November 2023, the European Council emphasised the importance of strengthening citizenship education as one of the main means of the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship.

The Council of Europe has various documents and frameworks of relevance for democratic citizenship education. Of these, probably the best known is the CoE reference framework of competencies for democratic culture (Barrett, M. et al. 2018). This framework (Volumes 1-3) outlines a comprehensive set of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and critical understanding necessary for individuals to participate effectively in democratic societies. It serves as a guideline for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to foster a culture of democracy through education, promoting human dignity, equality, justice, openness, respect for diversity, and active citizenship.

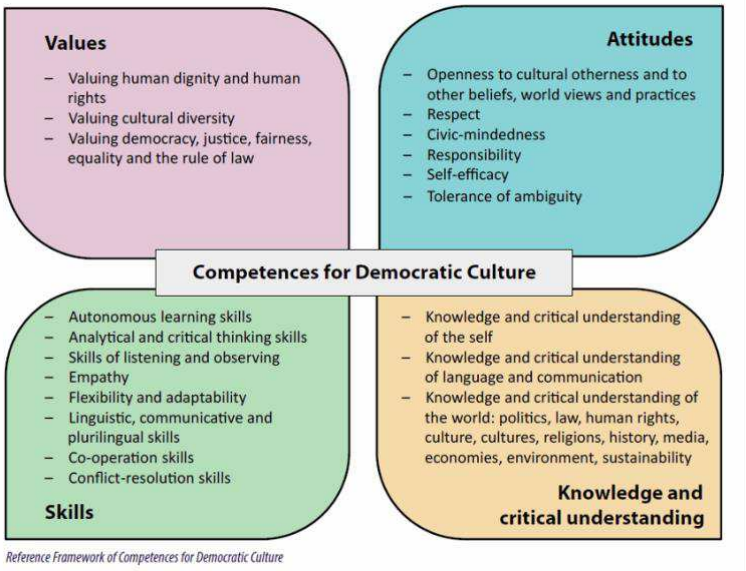


Figure 3 CoE reference framework of competencies for democratic culture (2018).

Currently, the Council of Europe works on curricular support for Digital Citizenship Education, year 2025 being selected as European Year of Digital Citizenship Education 2025. Their work is based on the 2010 Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education that defines EfD as education that "focuses primarily on democratic rights and responsibilities and active participation, in relation to the civic, political,

social, economic, legal and cultural spheres of society" that defines curricular support work. However, they regularly evaluate EfD in the light of human rights education that - according to the CoE definition - is concerned with the broader spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms in every aspect of people's lives.

The CoE Digital Citizenship Framework is built on 10 digital citizenship curricular domains grouped into 3 main groups as follows (Figure 4):



Figure 4 CoE Digital Citizenship Framework.

The Digital Citizenship Education is part of the education strategy, titled "Learners First: Education for Today's and Tomorrow's Democratic Societies," that places a strong emphasis on Education for Democracy (EfD). The strategy aims to promote a culture of democratic participation among all learners to safeguard democracy. (CoE 2023) Documents related are **Education Strategy 2024-2030** and **Programme and Budget 2024-2027**. The strategy is structured around three priority pillars:

- **Renewing the Democratic and Civic Mission of Education**: This pillar focuses on enhancing learners' understanding of democratic processes and encouraging active participation in civic life.
- **Enhancing the Social Responsibility and Responsiveness of Education**: This involves fostering inclusivity, respect for diversity, and social cohesion within educational settings.
- **Advancing Education through a Human Rights-Based Digital Transformation**: This pillar addresses the integration of digital citizenship into education, ensuring that learners can exercise their democratic rights and protect human rights online.

In alignment with this strategy, the **Programme and Budget 2024-2027** prioritizes supporting the participation of young people in democratic life and decision-making processes. It emphasizes education about human rights and core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency, and accountability.

As outlined in the project proposal, DEMOCRAT's ambition is to overcome recognised shortages of current civic education policies by promoting holistic EfD based on a transformative education approach. Taking up the recommendations of the Council of Europe on civic education (e.g. 1978, 2002, 2004 and 2012), the project will promote holistic EfD as transversal topic in the democratic setting of open education projects, in which schools and other actors participate in its design, implementation and monitoring.

Utilising the holistic approach of Negt (1971), DEMOCRAT will revise the European Competence Frameworks - as e.g. the Reference Framework of Competence for Democratic culture (Council of Europe 2016), the Framework of Key Citizenship competencies (EU 2019a), the European e-Competence Framework (CEN 2014) the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (Carretero et al 2017); the Framework for Key Citizenship Competencies (WeareEurope, 2016), the European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competencies (Sala 2020) and the Key Competencies for Lifelong learning (EU 2019b) - and other proposals for citizenship competencies.



Figure 5. 4 key dimensions within every learner in CoE's Education Strategy 2024-2030.

https://rm.coe.int/education-strategy-of-the-council-of-europe-2024-2030/1680aee0c4

The project will use a participatory methodology which involves the education community in the development, use and testing of the framework. DEMOCRAT's ambition responds to the need to promote active democratic citizenship in EU member states and beyond, in order to a) to defend, consolidate and improve the plural democratic model, and b) strengthen the backbone of the European model of sustainable development. Bringing together both aspects pave the way for new policy advocacy coalitions in education to promote transformative learning aligned with democratic principles and the SDGs.

1.3. RDC Framework - Key Competences of Responsible Democratic Citizenship

The Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) framework, developed through rigorous analysis by the DEMOCRAT project (Krüger et al, 2024) outlines the competencies essential for cultivating engaged, responsible, active, and informed citizens.

DEMOCRAT starts from normative assumptions that:

a. Democracy is a core principle of the European Union and of the European identity, which complements the national and regional identities of the European citizens. It is the fundament of the European Union's social model for addressing climate change and biodiversity loss while ensuring a just sustainable transition is based on democratic principles.
b. Democracy is not only a political, but also a social order assuring ideally "the equal right of all citizens to participate equally in the collective shaping of the social living conditions that affect them" (Lessenich 2022:14). Such an ideal democracy does not exist and is unlikely to ever exist, because real democracies are imbued with social inequalities and mechanisms of social exclusion, for example through the definition of national citizenship but also through the ownership or the disposition of production means and income or gender, ethnic group, age group and religion. Democracy is a contested terrain for the permanent dispute over democratic fundamental principles, rights of participation, deliberation, and democratic procedures (norms and rules).
c. Democracy needs to be confirmed continuously through citizens' actions. Democratic behaviour is not an innate virtue but must be learned, applied, and relearned in practice. It requires policies as strengthening EfD to strengthen responsible democratic agency of the people.

There are several well-funded competence frameworks for citizenship competencies in democratic societies, but they do not place enough emphasis on the nature of democratic agency. The first step in developing the RDC-competence framework was to define its scope, as it is not the same as political education, citizenship education, civic education or others. It concerns democratic agency in the sense defined above, putting into practice the vision for responsible democratic citizenship developed in the conceptual framework (Krüger et al., 2024). In so far, DEMOCRAT does not try to re-invent democratic competencies. There is an extensive debate on this issue and high qualitative proposal. Some of them has been mentioned in the previous section, to which the proposal for citizenship competencies of Johnson & Morris (2010) were added.

In the line of the work of Ten Dam and other (2007 and 2011) we focused not on the concept of civic education, but on the nearer field of democratic agency. Our revision of the policies of civic education in the 6 countries covered by DEMOCRAT indicates that the principles of civic education are guiding visions for the national education system although that its content and outreach differs strongly between the countries. For this reason, DEMOCRAT focused on competencies framework centred on the issue of democratic agency, which could be operationalised in practice, and which is considered complementary for instance to the competence framework of democratic culture developed by the Council of European. The analysis of models of democracy and citizenship, together with current frameworks for citizenship competencies conduces us to define four competencies for responsible democratic citizenship: solidary participation, deliberation, judgment, and democratic resilience. Three transversal axes are identified: globalization, digitalization, and sustainability.

These competencies (as in Krüger et al. 2024: 51) are not merely academic concepts but are vital life skills that every individual needs to actively participate in and contribute to a democratic society:

- Solidary Participation which refers not only to one's own participation in democratic processes but also to promoting the inclusion of the other, especially of minorities and social groups significantly affected by the problems discussed and in need of a solution. It also includes collaboration with (different) others, with whom one has social, cultural, religious and other differences to get things done. Solidarity is understood here as the social practice of overcoming existing social inequalities in the processes of participation and deliberation, especially in times of crises (see Lessenich 2022).
- Deliberation ideally means that "people come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face and, on the basis of those discussions, decide on the policies that will then affect their lives." (Bächtiger et al. 2018; p.2). Mathews defines deliberation as "to weigh carefully both the consequences of various options for action and the views of others" (Mathews 1999: 110). Similarly, Bächtiger et al. (2018; p.2) define it minimally as "mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern." Without discussing in depth these and other definitions and their relation to formal democratic decision-making processes, a fundamental point is to confront different arguments and interests in a public debate and dealing with conflict situations and conflicting interests.
- Judgement of what is trustworthy information or not is requisite for the deliberation process. It should not be confused with rationality in the strict sense or with scientific judgement. Judging trustworthiness is even more important in the digital realm, where the internet and applications of artificial Intelligence allow to create disinformation and distribute it at a massive scale.
- Democratic resilience as part of individual and collective resilience when facing the polycrisis. Adapting a definition by Merkel & Lührmann (2021) to our concept of democratic agency, democratic resilience is defined here as the ability of an actor (or an agent) to prevent or react to social challenges, of internal (socio-political) or external (e.g. economic or environmental) nature, without losing their democratic disposition (in the sense of attitudes or patterns of behaviour)[1]. Democratic resilience is based on a critical commitment to democratic norms and rules. It means acting democratically by critically following existing norms and rules also in adverse situations (see Lührmann 2021).and contributing to the consolidation and development of democracy by supporting the improvement of these norms and rules. It also means acting responsibly for the community to which one belongs at local, regional, state and global levels. Democratic resilience includes supporting democratic procedures in the face of authoritarian tendencies.

These competencies are interdependent, each reinforcing the other to create a comprehensive framework for democratic education. Their role extends beyond the classroom, influencing the way individuals interact with their communities, participate in governance, and shape the future of democracy.

In summary, a competence framework of responsible democratic citizenship has been outlined from the understanding of democracy as a socio-political order and a way of life. For their application in education, it is

[1] From the perspective of the political system; Merkel and Lühmann (2021: 872) defined democratic resilience as "the ability of a political regime to prevent or react to challenges without losing its democratic character."

necessary to define learning outcomes linked to the competencies. The learning outcomes will then serve to insert the competencies into existing (global) citizenship curricula or to develop a curriculum of their own.

1.4. Curriculum development in the context of EfD

Curriculum development for Education for Democracy (EfD) within the European context is a complex task shaped by the evolving socio-political landscape. European democracies currently face significant challenges, including societal fragmentation, mediatisation, and the technocratisation of governance. These issues contribute to a decline in representative democracy and an increase in citizen disenchantment with politics, as well as rising tendencies toward both depoliticization and radicalization (Papadopoulos, 2013; Louw, 2010). To address these challenges, the curriculum for EfD must equip citizens with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to engage constructively in democratic processes and resist the negative influences of contemporary societal trends (see e.g. Westheimer 2015, Krüger et al 2024, Mathews-Schultz, Sweet-Cushman 2024).

The Role of Tyler's Model in Curriculum Development

The primary objective of curriculum development within the EfD framework is to create a comprehensive and adaptable outline that aligns with the RDC competence framework. This outline serves as a multi-layered structure for learning programs designed to promote democratic values and practices, adaptable to a wide variety of educational settings. The development of this curriculum integrates both the curriculum content and the teaching and learning processes, drawing heavily on the educational theories of Ralph Tyler. Because of the innovation-oriented approach of the research project, our idea for an outline for a curriculum should not only be based on to transmitting predetermined knowledge, but more as an "interdisciplinary" dialogue in the daily lives of school communities and people. Democracy is a practice that is partly co-created and contextual and the curriculum process needs to take this into account.

Tyler's Model of Curriculum Development offers a linear and systematic approach that is particularly effective in establishing a solid foundation for the EfD curriculum. Tyler (1949) structures his model around four key steps: 1) defining learning objectives, 2) establishing useful learning experiences, 3) organizing these experiences logically, and 4) evaluating the curriculum to ensure the objectives are met. Tyler emphasizes that the most critical step in this process is the initial definition of clear and specific educational objectives. He argues that any systematic study of an educational program must begin with a precise understanding of its goals, as this sets the direction for all subsequent educational activities (Tyler, 1949). In addition to Tyler's approach that laid out a systematic, objective-oriented perspective to developing curriculum outline, our thinking has been informed and inspired by other researchers in the field, including for instance Pinar's (2004; 2019) discussion of curriculum theory, where he rejects very rigid objectives in favour of a more fluid process that prioritises understanding and reflection.

DEMOCRAT project has utilized Tyler's model to define learning objectives based on the RDC competence framework. This approach ensures that the curriculum outline addresses essential democratic competencies, setting a clear pathway for the subsequent development of educational experiences and their organization within the curriculum. The evaluation process embedded in Tyler's model further ensures that these objectives are continually assessed and refined, maintaining the curriculum's relevance and effectiveness (Tyler, 1949; Posner, 2004).

Dewey's Perspective on Learning Processes

While Tyler's model provides a robust structure for curriculum development, John Dewey's educational philosophy offers essential insights into the learning processes that should underpin the EfD curriculum outline. Dewey (1910) views education as an ongoing process of habit formation through experience, particularly through problem-solving. He argues that learning occurs when students encounter situations that challenge their existing habits, prompting reflection, exploration of alternatives, and the development of new habits that are better suited to addressing future challenges (Dewey, 1910).

Dewey's emphasis on problem-solving as a central component of education aligns with modern educational practices that prioritize inquiry-based and experiential learning (Simpson & Stack, 2010). The role of the teacher, according to Dewey, is not merely to transmit knowledge but to facilitate an environment where students are encouraged to think critically and solve problems. This approach has been influential in shaping educational models that focus on developing a problem-solving mindset among students, preparing them to navigate the complexities of democratic life (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

In the EfD curriculum outline, Dewey's ideas are integrated to ensure that the learning experiences designed to meet the educational objectives are not just didactic but also interactive and reflective, encouraging students to engage actively with democratic principles through real-world problem-solving activities (Dewey, 1910, see also Doll 1993). With a more process-oriented emphasis this is reflected in the work of Paolo Freire (1990) and Augusto Boal (1992, 2000).

The Integration of Taba's Model at the Local Level

Hilda Taba's Model offers valuable insights for adapting this curriculum to meet specific local needs. Taba's approach is inductive and emphasizes starting with the unique needs and circumstances of individual classrooms rather than broad, predefined educational objectives. This flexibility allows for the continuous refinement and adaptation of the curriculum to better suit the specific contexts in which it is implemented (Taba, 1962).

At the local level, teachers can use Taba's model to tailor the general EfD curriculum outline to their specific educational environments. By beginning with an assessment of the local context and the needs of their students, educators can develop more responsive and relevant learning experiences. This bottom-up approach empowers teachers to become active participants in curriculum design, ensuring that the educational programs they deliver are not only aligned with the broader democratic goals set out by the EfD framework but also deeply connected to the realities of their students' lives (Taba, 1962; Oliva, 2009).

Other EfD related curriculum development approaches

Westbury (2008) views curriculum primarily as a governance tool used to manage and steer educational systems. Curriculum development, in this context, is driven by political, public, and institutional decisions, with centralized authority playing a significant role. Stakeholder involvement is limited, focusing mainly on state and institutional interests. The pedagogical approach reflects a traditional, top-down methodology with an emphasis on compartmentalization to manage complexity, ensuring system stability and control. Consequently, curricula tend to be rigid and are designed to maintain stability across the system. Teachers are often seen as implementers of predetermined curricula, with little scope for autonomy. Students, similarly, have limited influence on the curriculum's content and structure, and the focus remains on standardized learning outcomes. Assessment and standards are typically handled in separate compartments, often disconnected from the curriculum-making process. The focus is on traditional subject-based learning, with an

emphasis on preserving established knowledge frameworks. Ideologically, curriculum making reflects state ideologies and political priorities, focusing on maintaining system legitimacy, with power concentrated in state institutions and limited decentralization.

In contrast, Hopkins's (2014) democratic curriculum is seen as a tool for fostering citizenship and collaborative learning among students. Governance and decision-making emphasize shared responsibility among students, teachers, and other stakeholders, with strong local community involvement. The pedagogical approach is centered on democratic values, promoting collaboration, dialogue, and negotiation, while encouraging a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge. Consequently, curricula are more flexible and responsive, allowing for student participation and adaptation based on local needs. However, implementation challenges arise from the need for constant negotiation and participation, which can be resource-intensive. Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators and collaborators in the learning process, balancing their authority with democratic practices. Students are central to the curriculum development process, actively participating in decision-making and learning as part of a collective enterprise. Assessment criteria are negotiated and aligned with democratic and participatory education principles. Knowledge is approached in an interdisciplinary and experiential manner, encouraging the blending of academic and vocational knowledge. The curriculum reflects democratic ideals, promoting social justice and active citizenship, with an emphasis on challenging social hierarchies and divisions. Power is decentralized, and there is a strong emphasis on student and community agency in the curriculum-making process.

The process of curriculum making can also be viewed as a form of institutional problem-solving, rather than purely an educational reform effort. This involves navigating through competing interests and reconciling different societal needs. Carlgren (1995) emphasized that curriculum creation is a complex exercise, balancing various institutional and societal demands. A strategy often employed in curriculum making is compartmentalization, which involves breaking down complex educational reforms into manageable tasks. This approach allows educational systems to address different issues separately, thereby preventing the overwhelming of existing structures.

Building on the work of democratic education and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), several key principles underpin the EfD curriculum. These include:

1. **Respect for Human Dignity**: Fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment that values the inherent worth and equality of every individual.
2. **Promotion of Freedom**: Encouraging freedom of expression, thought, and conscience, while teaching students to exercise their rights responsibly.
3. **Commitment to Equality**: Challenging discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for all students.
4. **Justice and Accountability**: Instilling a sense of fairness, responsibility, and adherence to the rule of law.
5. **Solidarity and Community Engagement**: Nurturing empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect, fostering a strong sense of community involvement.
6. **Active Citizenship**: Empowering students to participate in democratic processes and engage critically with civic responsibilities.
7. **Celebration of Diversity and Pluralism**: Promoting understanding, tolerance, and dialogue among individuals and communities.
8. **Environmental Sustainability and Global Citizenship**: Fostering a sense of responsibility towards future generations and the planet.

9. **Ethical Leadership and Integrity**: Preparing students to contribute positively to society through ethical decision-making and leadership.
10. **Continuous Learning and Reflection**: Encouraging intellectual curiosity, critical inquiry, and personal growth.

These principles collectively aim to prepare students to be responsible, engaged, and ethical citizens capable of contributing to a complex and interconnected world (Papadopoulos, 2013; Louw, 2010).

The Role of the Curriculum Outline

The primary objective of the EfD curriculum outline is not to propose a rigid, one-size-fits-all curriculum but to provide a flexible framework that identifies essential elements for incorporation into localized curricula, pilots, and lesson plans. Designed as a modular guide, the outline includes core principles and competencies derived from the RDC framework and the findings of comparative analyses across European contexts. It serves as a valuable tool for development and implementation at local and national levels, ensuring that curricula align with shared democratic goals while remaining adaptable to specific contexts.

The EfD framework benefits from the integration of Tyler, Dewey, and Taba's models, combining their strengths to create a robust yet adaptable structure. Tyler's model provides a systematic approach to defining and organizing the curriculum at a transnational level, ensuring consistency in addressing democratic competencies across regions. Dewey's emphasis on problem-solving and reflective learning enriches this structure, making it more experiential and student-centered (Dewey, 1910). Taba's methodology adds the critical element of adaptability, allowing local educators to tailor the curriculum to diverse educational settings (Taba, 1962), and choose their approaches for the local Pilot Project, and the objectives too. These theoretical underpinnings form the basis of the RDC Framework, which is at the core of the EfD curriculum outline. Through the project DEMOCRAT and its Living Labs, the framework will undergo testing, exploration, and iterative revisions to ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

Building upon this foundation, the next phase of the project focuses on Work Package 5 (WP5) and the implementation of local pilot projects. These efforts aim to develop concrete action plans, lesson plans, and curriculum models that refine and expand on the general outline. By incorporating insights and feedback from local implementations, these detailed and practical models will enable educators to adapt the EfD curriculum to their unique educational environments (Papadopoulos, 2013). This iterative process aligns with the vision of creating an adaptable and contextually relevant framework that empowers teachers.

Achieving a shared vision among educators is a central goal of the EfD initiative. By providing a clear framework and tools for planning and applying democratic education principles, the project positions teachers as active participants in shaping educational experiences. This approach moves beyond prescribing a curriculum, instead fostering a collaborative environment where teachers can adapt and implement democratic education in ways that resonate with their specific contexts. The curriculum outline serves as a foundation, offering essential components and guiding principles that inform localized curriculum designs.

The outline ensures flexibility and relevance (Biesta & Burbules, 2003), by drawing on Tyler's structured approach, Dewey's focus on experiential learning, and Taba's adaptive methodology. This adaptability is vital in fostering democratic competencies that address the diverse needs of students across Europe.

1.5. Signposting for this report

This document outlines the structure and guiding principles for the proposed European-wide EfD curriculum, built upon data collected during the project's WP2, WP3, and WP4, and the ongoing WP5. It represents our project's vision, based on extensive research, of what the EfD curriculum should include.

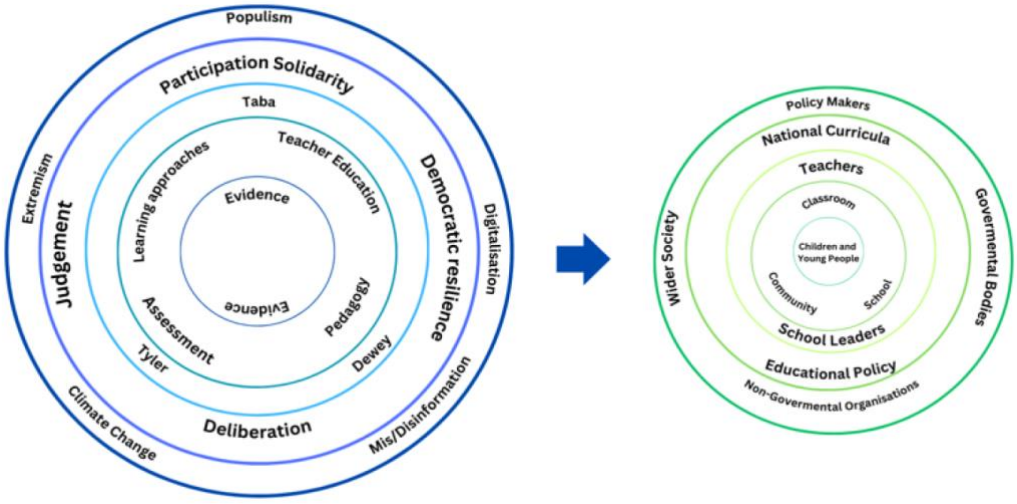


Figure 6. The main structure and phases of the outline's development.

This outline is a preliminary framework, and various components will be piloted in later work packages, including pedagogical approaches, assessment, and teaching organization in collaboration with pilot projects. The outline will therefore still evolve as the project progresses.

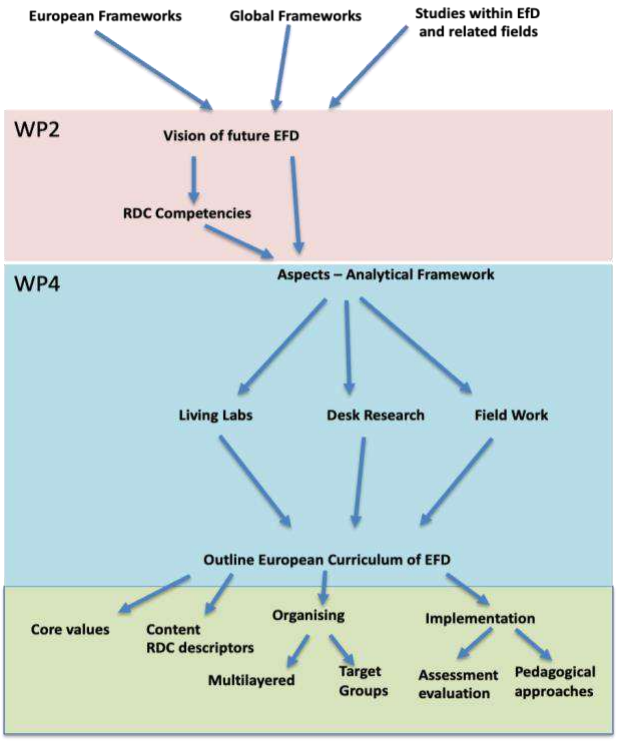


Figure 7. The main structure and phases of the outline's development.

Figure 6 depicts the main structure and phases of the outline's development. The green section represents the components of the outline, which will continue to be refined and developed in subsequent work packages.

The outline has roots in WP2, which includes the RDC framework and vision, built upon European and global frameworks as well as studies within EfD and related fields, as shown in Figure 7. It has then been further widened with an expanded analytical framework constructed in WP4, with various aspects (see chapter 2.1).

The next Section of this Outline will present the analytical framework used within WP4, and research approaches, which encompass Living Labs (long-term projects that provide practical insights and data) and Desk Research and Field Work (conducted during WP4, including national studies and interviews). In the third section we present the project's recommendation for the EfD Curriculum,

which covers RDC framework at its core and consists of core values, content descriptors, multilayered target groups, and implementation strategies, using Insights and data from other work packages and relevant literature. The next work packages will further investigate the content, organization, assessment, and implementation aspects. The experience, insights, and research data gathered will continuously update the outline throughout the project's duration. This Outline conveys the project's vision and initial findings, supported by international research in the field.

Figure 6 provides an outline of EfD curriculum and its intersection with the national education systems and local practices within each of the partner countries. Within the wider context of rising populism, increasing extremism, mis and disinformation, societal digitalisation and climate breakdown, the RDC framework is shaped and created by the theoretical frameworks of Taba, Dewey and Tyler, and the empirical evidence regarding democratic pedagogies to provide a curriculum framework for EfD focused on pedagogy, learning approaches, assessment and teacher education. This outline of EfD curriculum is then implemented, through the DEMOCRAT Living Labs, in each of the national contexts, applying the pertinent and contextually relevant parts and approaches, each shaped by their wider social and political contexts, national educational policies, and at a local level, the teachers and school leaders and the microsystems of classroom, school and local community.

2. Research approach and findings

2.1. The Analytical Framework

Since the RDC competency framework consisted of only 4 competencies, and in order to broaden the terminology and vocabulary used in our various studies, we developed an analytical framework based on the work of WP2, with some minor additions, which included a total of 10 aspects. We utilized this framework in desk-based research, fieldwork, and Living Lab workshops.

The analytical framework underpinning the research was derived from the two frameworks in Project's Conceptual Framework and Vision: Responsible Democratic Competencies framework developed in WP2 (Krüger et al. 2023:31-32), illustrated in Table 1 below, and the conclusion of what the" EfD for tomorrow" should entail:

Empower students by right and knowledge to actively participate in the making of decisions that govern the affairs of the polities they are part of, to shape the policies and the actual polities themselves, as well as the economy that serves them, while maintaining a healthy natural environment. Specific elements include: ● Knowledge of rights, personal and collective, civic, social, etc. ● Knowledge of goals and policy frameworks, like the SDGs, the European Green Deal and Just Transition ● Knowledge of electoral, judicial, administrative and other processes ● Access to/participation in electoral and other decision-making processes ● Recourse to objective adjudication regarding decisions that may affect one ● Access to knowledge vital to the running of infrastructure and society, including algorithms ● Access to finance, at least the basic income necessary for a dignified living for students and their families without fear of destitution
Enable students to deliberate and develop further their many dimensions and personal characteristics, including defining ones, like ethnicity, culture and gender/sexual identity, as well as linguistic skills and relationships, as expressed in person and online. Specific elements include: ● Exposure to different ways of thinking, languages, cultures, etc. ● No one size fits all, encouragement to search and identify personal characteristics without fear of persecution or ostracism. ● Exposure to diverse knowledge areas. ● Exchange of ideas and direct debate.

Cultivate individual judgement of what is truthful and what is fake, in terms of news but also behaviours and intentions of others, again as expressed in person and online. Specific elements include: ● Clarity of vision, not obstructed by chatter, obfuscation, flattery, misinformation or disinformation. ● Not compromising ethical principles for short-term gain, as ethics is a proven path for long-term personal and societal stability. ● Decision-making techniques and personal "algorithms", healthy suspicion, double-checking, proof seeking. ● Trust, but verify.
Provide students with conceptual and practical tools to remain resilient when facing personal and collective crises, enabling them to successfully address threats to their physical and psychological survival. Specific elements include: ● Personal peace and balance. ● Solidarity and sense of duty to the community. ● Empathy expressed towards others and accepted when it comes from others. Individual survival skills from food growing and cooking through making do without electricity, internet, etc., to first aid and other core skills. ● Knowledge of alternative practices, focus on substance rather than form. ● Solution oriented, collective problem-solving, not zero-sum thinking.

Table 1 RCD Framework (Krüger et al.2023: 30)

In summary, the framework synthesised each of the competencies into a wider suite of 'aspects' which were created to enable the desk-based research to support a comparative pan-European analysis of both the competence framework and wider issues related to EfD. Also, to avoid the discussion on the term "competence" and it's meaning, we decided to use the word "aspect". Each of the 'aspects' and their attendant descriptions are noted in Table 2 below. There is also each aspect's relation to the RDC Framework.

ASPECT	Description	Relation to RDC Framework
Understanding democracy basics	- What does democracy mean (for everyone), which areas of personal life are open for democracy, which are closed - what is society, how does it work - what is democratic political and governing system, how does it work - democratic societies: rights and responsibilities - decision-making processes: politics, elections etc. - infrastructure - what are the roles and expectations for citizens in a democratic society	**Participation/Solidarity**: Encourages active participation in democratic processes and societal engagement, fostering solidarity. **Judgement**: Enhances critical understanding of political systems and decision-making processes, aiding in discerning the democratic structure's reliability. **Deliberation**: Informs respectful discussions and debates on democratic processes and structures.
Understanding self: identity and culture	- be who you are, building identity in a safe environment (also ethnicity, culture, gender/sexuality etc.) -"we are products of our culture", the role of identity and culture in society - exposure to different ways of thinking, languages, cultures etc.	**Participation/Solidarity**: Promotes inclusion and collaboration across different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, fostering a sense of solidarity. **Deliberation**: Encourages respectful dialogue and understanding of diverse perspectives, essential for democratic deliberation.
Engagement and participation	- willingness/ desire to contribute/participate in society, 'active citizen' with agency - having the feeling that one belongs and can have an impact (politics, community, society) - participating and engaging in a time and energy adequate way - promote inclusion of others and collaboration - manage one's time, diverse obligations, plan, implement and achieve results - engage in community and political affairs in a time and	**Participation/Solidarity**: Directly aligns with fostering participation and promoting solidarity by encouraging active involvement and collaboration. **Deliberation**: Involves engaging in public discourse and community debates, essential for democratic decision-making. **Democratic Resilience**: Enhances the ability to participate and contribute during crises, maintaining democratic principles.

ASPECT	Description	Relation to RDC Framework
	energy adequate way, with an impact	
Commitment to ethics, norms, democratic values	- personal responsibility as a democratic citizen - defending democracy - not compromising on ethical principles for short-term gain - being aware and addressing social inequalities in democratic processes, particularly during crises	**Democratic Resilience**: Emphasizes the commitment to democratic values and ethical principles, particularly in times of adversity. **Participation/Solidarity**: Involves defending democratic principles and addressing social inequalities, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity. **Judgement**: Upholds ethical discernment in democratic processes.
Collaboration & deliberation	- respectful discussion for collective decision-making, including conflict - resolution and dealing constructively/peacefully with diverse perspectives, arguments and interest in a public debate - collaboration with the others getting things done	**Deliberation**: Central to democratic life, emphasizing respectful and constructive discourse for decision-making. **Participation/Solidarity**: Encourages collaborative efforts, essential for fostering solidarity. **Democratic Resilience**: Supports resilience by promoting collaboration and effective conflict resolution.
Respect and empathy	- towards self and others	**Participation/Solidarity**: Enhances solidarity by promoting respect and empathy within diverse communities. **Deliberation**: Facilitates respectful and empathetic dialogue, crucial for democratic deliberation.
Problem-solving ability and solution oriented mindset	- defining problems and analyzing their root causes - applying critical thinking, systems thinking, design thinking etc - generating solutions and deciding on courses of action - having a can-do attitude always seeking solutions	**Judgement**: Enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills, crucial for evaluating and addressing issues within democratic processes. **Democratic Resilience**: Supports the capacity to solve problems and find solutions during crises, maintaining democratic values. **Deliberation**: Involves critical discussions and collective problem-solving in democratic contexts.
Judgement of trustworthiness	- discerning reliable information, behaviour and intentions of others, especially in the digital age of misinformation - media literacy and also scientific literacy more broadly, such as being aware	**Judgement**: Directly relates to the competence of discerning trustworthy information and evaluating sources, essential for informed democratic participation.

ASPECT	Description	Relation to RDC Framework
	of algorithms, having healthy suspicion, double-checking, proof seeking, understanding data and how it is presented etc.	
Reflection, learning to learn, emotions and readiness to change	- critical reflection in order to learn and to have transformation - embracing and working with emotions that are a strong factor in learning - lifelong learning - basics about psychological well-being, learning to self-regulate emotions, learning to learn, growth mindset, setting healthy boundaries etc	**Democratic Resilience**: Enhances personal resilience and adaptability, crucial for maintaining democratic values in changing circumstances. **Judgement**: Encourages critical reflection and continuous learning, essential for informed and reflective democratic participation. **Participation/Solidarity**: Supports personal growth and active participation through self-reflection and emotional readiness.
Resilience and thriving in uncertainty	- not compromising democratic values - collaboration during crisis - facing crisis together, problem-solving in crisis - personal peace and balance - basics about psychological wellbeing, learning to self-regulate emotions, learning to learn, growth mindset, setting healthy boundaries etc - individual survival skills from food growing and cooking to making do without electricity, internet	**Democratic Resilience**: Directly relates to the competence of maintaining democratic principles and effectively responding to crises. **Participation/Solidarity**: Encourages collaborative efforts and mutual support during crises. **Judgement**: Involves critical evaluation and problem-solving in uncertain situations. **Deliberation**: Promotes collective problem-solving and decision-making in times of crisis.

Table 2 Descriptions of 'aspects' within analytical framework

Integrating Reflection, emotions and readiness to change

As indicated above, some adjustments were made to add to the work of WP2. Due to the possible cognitive biases inherent within the frameworks of Education for Democracy (EfD), as discussed in Hytti and Sandström's forthcoming work (2024, submitted, under revision), it became apparent that certain crucial aspects needed to be incorporated so that the aspects would in fact reflect the multidimensional nature of learning (see Barrett et al. 2018). Therefore, we included a section titled "Reflection, Learning to Learn, Emotions, and Readiness to Change''. These aspects are usually mentioned in the background text of learning frameworks or

curricula, but as it seems, they are not so well trackable into the descriptions of competencies or seen as competencies substantial enough to be mentioned. For this reason, to make them more visible, and not forgotten, we also wanted to separately include them into the aspect list.

Reflection is an integral part in fostering critical thinking and self-awareness, both of which are essential components of democratic citizenship. Especially from the transformative learning approach, reflection is essential for expanding thinking and mindset and thus a pathway for developing many of the aspects listed above. Reflection is an important part of the learning process in developing those competencies. Also, by encouraging students to reflect on their beliefs, values, and actions, educators can facilitate a deeper understanding of democratic principles and their application in real-life situations. Moreover, cultivating the skill of reflection empowers individuals to assess information critically and engage in informed decision-making, enrich the process of deliberation, and thereby enhance their ability to participate meaningfully in democratic processes.

Learning to learn, or metacognition, is another vital aspect of EfD. By helping students develop metacognitive skills such as goal setting, planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning strategies, educators can empower them to become independent and self-directed learners. This not only fosters a sense of agency and autonomy but also equips individuals with the necessary tools to navigate complex socio-political landscapes and contribute effectively to democratic societies.

Emotions play a significant role in shaping individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, and thus, they cannot be overlooked in EfD. In fact, emotions are an inseparable dimension within the learning process (Mälkki 2011, Carter & Nikolaides 2023). By acknowledging and addressing the emotional dimension of learning, educators can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to express their thoughts and feelings openly, and engage in critical reflection in the transformative learning process. Moreover, by fostering emotional intelligence and empathy, educators can promote positive interpersonal relationships and collaborative problem-solving, which are essential for building cohesive and resilient communities.

Readiness to change refers to individuals' willingness and ability to adapt to new ideas, perspectives, and practices. In the context of Education for Democracy (EfD), fostering readiness to change involves challenging ingrained beliefs and attitudes, encouraging open-mindedness and critical inquiry, and promoting a growth mindset that values lifelong learning and continuous personal development (Hoggan-Kloubert et al. 2023). By cultivating a culture of curiosity, exploration, and experimentation, educators can inspire individuals to embrace change as an opportunity for growth and transformation, both personally and collectively (Formenti & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2023; Hoggan-Kloubert & Mabrey, 2022; Mälkki & Raami, 2022). By integrating these themes into the framework, and making sure they are named and brought up in wording, we hope to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of democratic citizenship education in today's rapidly evolving world, by making the learning paradigm more holistic.

2.2. Research approach

In order to develop the Outline of European EfD Curricula, it was necessary to first have a better understanding of participating countries' challenges as well as existing good practices and policies when it comes to supporting democracy through education. We approached this task in three ways: a) national and international living lab meetings (workshops national and transnational) and the project conference that facilitated discussions with various stakeholders, b) desk research, and c) field research conducted in the 6 DEMOCRAT Living Lab countries.

2.2.1. Living Labs

The project Democrat aims to foster democratic competencies and practices through innovative educational frameworks. Living Labs, described further below, are particularly suited to this project due to their focus on multi-stakeholder engagement and real-life experimentation (Schuurman & De Marez, 2012; ENoLL, 2015). They provide a platform for developing and testing educational initiatives that promote democratic values, critical thinking, and active citizenship (Bergvall-Kåreborn et al, 2009). Embedding Living Labs in the methodological approach of the project ensures that the project aligns with one of the EU Horizon 2020 programmes aims of 'promoting user centric co-creative projects' (Lopez-Plana, 2021, p.128).

International Living Lab workshop meetings in June 2023 in Amsterdam, December 2023 in Helsinki, February 2024 in Tallinn (including the Tallinn Transnational Conference), and June 2024 in Dublin and brought together various stakeholders (teachers, researchers, NGOs and others) interested in improving the EfD in Europe. The National Living Labs commenced throughout the consortium from Autumn 2023 and continue throughout the partnership at various times and a range of contextualised foci. Each partner captures the work, influences the focus, and supports the stakeholder groups. As communities of practice (Gherardi, 2009), the participants themselves have autonomy of the Living Labs further guided by the National Research teams. Data was gathered and analysed, and the reflections and summaries of the discussions are captured in an iterative fashion. The national and international living lab meetings and the project conference brought together various stakeholders (teachers, researchers, NGOs and others) interested in improving the EfD in Europe. The international living lab meetings provided reflections and summaries of the discussions of current main points and desired changes for EfD, providing suggestions for the European EfD Curricula.

Living Labs are innovative research environments that involve multiple stakeholders in real-life settings to foster open innovation and co-creation (Leminen, 2015). This methodology focuses on integrating users not just as subjects but as active contributors to the research process. The essence of Living Labs is to bring together citizens, businesses, public sector organisations, and researchers to collaboratively address challenges, develop, and test new ideas, and create sustainable value for all involved stakeholders (Malmberg et al, 2017; Schuurman & De Marez, 2012; ENoLL (European Network of Living Labs, 2015).

In the context of education and social research, Living Labs provide a dynamic and participatory approach to exploring and addressing local educational challenges. They operate as collaborative spaces where educators (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009), students, technologists, and policymakers can co-create and evaluate educational tools and methodologies. This co-creation process ensures that innovations are grounded in real-world needs and contexts, thereby enhancing their relevance and impact. Living Labs often involve iterative cycles of exploration, experimentation, and evaluation. These cycles help in refining educational tools and strategies based on continuous feedback from users, ensuring that the solutions developed are practical,

effective, and user-friendly. Moreover, Living Labs help bridge the gap between research and practice by facilitating the direct application of research findings in educational settings (Ruiz-Calleja, et al., 2017).

Living Labs offer significant benefits and possibilities for the Democrat project, particularly in their ability to adapt to various national and transnational contexts. By involving local communities in the co-creation process, Living Labs ensure educational initiatives are culturally relevant and tailored to the specific needs of each community, which is crucial for fostering a deep and sustainable understanding of democratic practices among diverse populations (Malmberg et al., 2017). A key feature of Living Labs is the participation of various stakeholders, including educators, students, policymakers, and community members (Leoste, Tammets, & Ley, 2020). This inclusive approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in developing educational tools and strategies. In the Democrat project, this multi-stakeholder involvement is essential for creating comprehensive educational frameworks that address the complex nature of democratic education (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

Moreover, Living Labs facilitate continuous dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, vital for the iterative refinement of educational initiatives. This ongoing interaction helps identify and address potential challenges early in the development process, increasing the project's likelihood of success. Operating in real-life settings, Living Labs provide valuable insights into how educational tools and strategies work in practice, crucial for developing practical and effective solutions (Malmberg et al., 2017). By involving users as active participants, Living Labs ensure the developed solutions are user-friendly and meet the community's actual needs, fostering engagement and the adoption of democratic practices.

Focusing on creating sustainable value for all stakeholders, Living Labs in the Democrat project aim to develop educational initiatives with a lasting impact on democratic education and practice (Compagnucci et al., 2021). Additionally, the iterative nature of Living Labs allows for the continuous improvement of educational tools and strategies, making them scalable and adaptable to different contexts and populations (Bergvall-Kåreborn, Eriksson, Ståhlbröst, & Svensson, 2009). The suggestions of the Outline, as the RDC competence framework and pedagogical approaches for example, are being tested in pilot projects within the Living Labs in each 6 partner countries.

2.2.2. Desk-based research

The exploratory desk-based research was designed to capture the breadth of EfD provision and possibility across each of the partner countries and to offer a tentative comparison of EfD through the lens of the RDC framework. The desk research was conducted from October-December 2023, and its main aim was to build on work packages two and three by further analysing the national curricula, strategies, learning approaches, pedagogical material and teacher training. The desk-based research included two phases - country-based analysis and comparative analysis and was based on the analytical framework (10 aspects of EfD). The Desk research was later on complemented by a literature review conducted during autumn 2024 between the Living Lab partner countries.

The country-based analysis involved a researcher from each of the partner countries undertaking a desk-based review of EfD provision within their own context. This included a high-level analysis of national curricula, the collection of examples of EfD within curricula and strategic documents, gathering examples of learning approaches or methods used in schools, collating examples of EfD approaches outside of the formal education system (e.g. within informal and non-formal education), collecting pedagogical materials related to EfD, and gathering information on teacher education provision concerning EfD. To support reliability in the gathering of country-based data, Table 3 (below) was developed as an example in order to define the key search

parameters, to provide examples of relevant material, to illustrate inclusion and exclusion criteria for the element, and finally to signpost potential locations for gathering of data.

Code	Definition	Example	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Where to search?
National curricula	National programme of study for schools designed to ensure uniformity	The Irish Primary Curriculum (1999) The Finnish national core curriculum (2014)	Refers to a national or regional programme of study Relates to primary or post-primary/secondary education	Does not constitute textbooks (even if state mandated)	Relevant legislative documents (recommendatory and normative) Government websites
National strategies	National documents other than curricula (current and for the future) that set out strategic goals, problem areas that need addressing, etc (for citizenship education)	E.g. Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035 https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/national-initiatives/national-strategies/estonia-education-strategy-2021-2035	Refers to policies or strategies that shape or are relevant to EfD.	Does not include National Curricula	Relevant government or regional departments with a remit for EfD or similar.
Outside school, informal learning	Learning spaces which take place outside of schools	Youth club projects Museums Local government practice or events National government and its subsidiaries practice or events Civic society practice or events	Relevant projects taking place outside of school settings	Does not include school-based extra-curricular activities (e.g. those taking place after school)	Youth organisations or organisations which represent youth organisations
Learning approaches	Pathway how to achieve the goals of EfD (aspects/skills/competencies)	Approaches such as active learning, experiential learning, problem based learning relatedness to students' lives, drama/simulation	Pedagogical approaches	Learning activities	Government teacher guidelines

Code	Definition	Example	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Where to search?
		based learning, interdisciplinary learning			
Pedagogical materials	Resources (such as teaching materials and guidelines) developed to further learning	A resource library for Irish teachers/schools https://developmenteducation.ie/resources/		Does not include national curricula	Repositories of teaching materials Teacher Education programmes/materials Outputs from Funded Projects
Teacher training	Teacher education provision across the continuum from initial teacher education to in-service teacher education	A module in Teacher Education programme focused on Global Citizenship Education			Existing teacher education programmes

Table 3 Code definitions and parameters for country-wide desk-based research.

Due to the varied societal and educational contexts within which the desk-based research was undertaken, it was not imagined that the desk-based research would provide an exhaustive overview of EfD in each location, but rather that the desk-based research would provide a high level exploration of EfD spaces, practices and possibilities in each partner country. With each of these country wide analyses completed, the research team reviewed this data, identifying emergent themes but also apparent gaps within the national information. These gaps would later form the focus of the fieldwork.

Guide for comparative analysis				
Aspect (Initials)	**Commonalities**	**Differences**	**Gaps**	**Questions**
What is the aspect? (initials of analyst)	What things are common across countries? What useful foundations are evident?	What things are different across countries? For example, what outliers are there? What promising practices are apparent?	What gaps do you notice? What are the challenges?	What questions do you have about this aspect and how it is addressed? What potential connections to literature are there?

Table 4 Guide for comparative analysis

The gaps and challenges identified from the comparative analysis are pointed out within the suggestions of the European Outline of EfD. The comparative analysis can be found in the Annex.

2.2.3. Fieldwork:

The purpose of the fieldwork was to delve deeper into the findings of desk-based research and to investigate more thoroughly the issues raised in various Living Lab workshops. The aim was to conduct interviews with educational experts, researchers, teachers, and students in each Living Lab country. Fieldwork was conducted between January 2024 and July 2024.

The fieldwork aimed to complement the desk-based research and thus used the same analytical framework while expanding on it to go deeper and gain a more personal insight and experience into the aspects of the EfD mentioned in the table. We therefore asked some additional research questions that addressed perceptions of individuals involved in EfD, recognized practices for EfD within national contexts, the current status of EfD teaching and organization, and the influence of individuals' experience on their understanding and practice of EfD:

- How do the teachers, officials, and students see themselves in the context of EfD? In which ways and/or aspects of EfD do they feel empowered and disempowered?
- What are the acknowledged (good) practices for EfD? What EfD strategies, curricula, learning approaches, and pedagogical materials are recognized within national country contexts? What interventions are considered effective, and why? What adaptations to these interventions are desirable from different stakeholders in national contexts?
- What is the situation with EfD teaching and organization in the country (to the extent of filling in the gaps left in desk research)?
- How do the actors' own experience and conception of being a democratic citizen influence their understanding of EfD and their practice of EfD?

The fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews and focus groups with teachers, experts, and students; with a minimum of one focus group or 3-5 interviews from each target group. Data was analyzed by thematic analysis. The findings of the fieldwork are integrated into country briefs and then offered as insights, examples of practices, and pedagogical approaches within EfD.

2.3. Country context

The country context sections have been developed based on data gathered during WP4, incorporating desk research, field work interviews and relevant studies and other literature from the field. All national partners were exploring their country's current context of EfD.

2.3.1. Country Brief Estonia

The foundational regulating document for the education system in Estonia is the Republic of Estonia Education Act, adopted soon after the re-indepence on 23.03.1992. It stipulates the basic principles, structures, roles and responsibilities, as well as the purpose of the education system. For example, it clearly defines the roles and responsibilities between the state, local government and school (Estonia has a decentralised Education system). It states that the education system consists of four levels: preschool education, basic education, upper secondary education and higher education. Basic education is compulsory for all and until the person turns 17 years old. The language of education is mostly Estonian (with some exceptions) and education is

generally free of charge for citizens. The learning goals and standards for each level are set out in national curricula while the strategic development needs and goals are to be described in various strategy documents - decided by the society (the Republic of Estonia Education Act).

As to the definitions and purposes of education, according to § 2, sections 1 and 2 (emphasis added by authors):

(1) /…./ education is a system of knowledge, skills, experience, values and behavioural norms which is **determined by curricula**, which is recognised by society and the acquisition of which is controlled by society.
(2) The fundamental principles of education are based on the recognition of universal and national values, freedom of the individual, religion and conscience.

And § 2 section 3 states the objectives of education as to:

(1) create favourable conditions for the development of the individual, the family and the Estonian nation, also for ethnic minorities, and economic, political and cultural life in Estonian society and also nature conservation, within the context of the global economy and global culture;
(2) shape individuals who respect and abide by the law;
(3) create opportunities for everyone to engage in lifelong learning.

These particular objectives are rather broad, but clearly indicate the centrality of **the development of the individual,** family and nation, part of which is **engagement in lifelong learning**. The connection to democracy is somewhat vague: in relation to DEMOCRAT's four competence areas one could argue there is a link with solidary participation by mentioning 'ethnic minorities' and 'everyone', and clearly the 'freedom of the individual, religion and conscience' as well as respect for law are signs of liberal democratic values, even though the mentioned 'universal and national values' leave room for interpretation.

However, in § 11 a more specific definition, with a connection to 'responsible (democratic) citizenship' is given about general education, which is: "/---/ a system of knowledge, skills, experience, values and behavioural norms which enables a person to evolve into a continuously developing personality who is capable of living with dignity, respecting himself or herself, his or her family, other people and nature, choosing and acquiring a suitable profession, **acting creatively and being a responsible citizen**."

More elaborate and specific descriptions of education's purposes are found in the national curriculum for the basic education and upper secondary education, both of which consist of the general part and subject area specific annexes. The general parts are very similar, with the secondary education curriculum adding some minor elaborations.

Having said this, the national curriculum places a strong emphasis on developing key values and attitudes, **including mentioning democracy and freedom as some of these values.** The emphasis is on general humane values and societal values that derive from the state constitution, UN Human Rights Declaration, the Convention of the Rights of Children and foundational documents of the EU. Democracy is also mentioned alongside being law abiding, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, solidarity, and equality between genders.

The curricula also outline a number of general competencies (*üldpädevused*) as well as cross-curricular topics (*läbivad teemad*) that are to be addressed across subjects and more generally in the school environment. In the secondary education's curriculum there is slightly more emphasis (in comparison with the basic school

curriculum) on learners becoming independent, responsible (for society and environment), able to collaborate and also development of citizenship skills: being active and 'responsible' is mentioned again (*"kodanikuoskuste, -aktiivsuse ja -vastutuse väljakujunemisele"*). The **social and civic competence** has the important addition of the ability to understand global problems and take co-responsibility for solving these; the valuing and following of sustainable development principles; and the ability to 'engage in dialogue' as a member of the society in Estonia, Europe and the whole world. This is a very significant addition which is not in the basic school curriculum (Gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava, Riigi Teataja).

The entrepreneurship competence description also adds a few aspects that could be considered relevant for citizenship: "to react creatively, innovatively and flexibly to change and take calculated (smart) risks; think critically and creatively, evaluate one's own and others' ideas, and to apply financial literacy" (Gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava, Riigi Teataja). This corresponds well with DEMOCRAT's democratic resilience competence.

All in all, here are some of the key takeaways from the general part of the national curriculum in relation to EfD:

- In basic school the foundation is created for **self-determination as a self-aware personality**, as a member of family, nation and society, who has a caring and open-minded attitude towards the world and diversity of human beings.
- The general parts of the curriculum state learning goals, such as "is interested in (cares about) the development of the community, nation and the world; understand the causes, consequences and connections of changes happening in the society" and "respects democracy and human rights, knows one's rights and responsibilities/duties, is law-abiding, regards general humane values accepted norms of behaviour; forms one's own opinion and is a responsible and active member of the society"
- On both basic and high school curriculum, the following general competencies have descriptions that are highly relevant for EfD: **social and citizenship competence, self-determination competence, cultural and value competence, digital competence,** and one can argue that also some of the other competencies, e.g. technology and maths are relevant.
- **Social and citizenship competence** mentions aspects like ability to self-actualize; act as active, aware/knowledgeable person, be helpful and responsible citizen, and support the democratic development of the society and Estonia's independence as a state; to know and follow societal values and norms; to respect the rules of different environments and societal diversity, the peculiarity/diverse characteristics of religions and nationalities; collaborate with others in different situations; accept differences of people and their value judgements and consider these in communication;.
- **Cultural and value competence** mentions ability to evaluate human relationships and actions from the viewpoint of generally accepted moral norms; to perceive and value one's interconnectedness with other people, society, one's country and other countries and nations' cultural heritage and with the events of contemporary culture.
- **Digital competence** mentions the ability to use new digital technology to cope in the fast-changing society both when learning, acting as a citizen as well as for communicating in communities; to find and preserve information with the help of digital tools, and to assess the relevance and reliability of this information; participate in digital content creation, including using and creating texts, photos, and multimedia, to communicate and collaborate in different digital spaces; to be aware of the dangers in digital spaces and know how to protect ones' privacy, personal data and digital identity; also to follow moral and value-based principles in the digital environment as in everyday life.

- **Communication competence** – ability to express oneself clearly, appropriately, politely both in the mother tongue an in foreign languages, considering the situations and understanding the communication partners and the safety of the communication; to present oneself, one's standpoints and to explain one's position.
- **The cross-curricular topic of "civic initiative and entrepreneurship"** aims to help the learner become active and responsible member of community and the society, who understand the principles and mechanisms of how the society works, and why civic / citizens', perceives themself as a member of the society and bases their action on the cultural traditions and the development trends of the state.
- The school environment should also support openness of freedom of expression, including allowing criticism, and create opportunities for students to show initiatives, participate in decision-making and act individually as well as with peers.
- For the high school level, there is additional citizenship related instructions regarding learning process: "In the learning process an important place is for inquiry methods through which students attain skills for defining problems, wording hypotheses, planning and organizing work, critical thinking and interpreting and presenting results. They can present materials both in writing and orally and by exemplifying these with various visual forms; and also if possible, put these into practice, e.g. democracy in schools, citizenship initiative, volunteering in community etc".
- And an explanation that **"being an active citizen means also the wider engagement of citizens, not just voting during elections.** This expands the practical opportunities for youth during civic lessons when they are not yet able to vote (e.g. within means organizing the life in school, how they consume, taking civic action)." This part offers a clear connection to the competence area of participation.

There would be more examples to bring, however, it can be concluded that the national curricula as it is for the basic and high school do support EfD and are by and large in alignment with the four competencies proposed by DEMOCRAT project. Somewhat more specific emphasis could be placed perhaps on problem-solving also at the basic school level. The Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2016) guided the 2019 revision of curriculum (understanding multiculturalism and practicing intercultural dialogue were brought into focus) and the OECD's Learning Framework 2030 has also influenced the national curriculum policy (e.g. more focus on environment, human rights, thinking globally and acting locally) according to Oja & Toots (2021).

In terms of civic studies as a subject, this is covered under the 'social sciences' section together with history, personal, social, and health education. Civics curriculum articulates a number of general and more specific goals, which align with EfD, such as the student "respects democracy and human rights, knows one's rights and responsibilities/duties, is law-abiding, regards general humane values accepted norms of behaviour; forms one's own opinion and is a responsible and active member of the society".

However, the number of actual compulsory civics courses and lessons for Estonian students is rather low. There is usually a civics course in the 6th (35 hours), 8th or 9th (70 hours) and 12th grade (Oja & Toots, 2021). While the recently updated social sciences curriculum places more emphasis on practical action and opportunities for participation (there is a recommendation to conduct approximately ⅓ of the course as a practical activity), researchers have previously noted that the civics education has been too theoretical and abstract for students (Malleus, 2015; Oja, 2018; Ministry of Education and Research). This could explain why the International Civic and Citizenship Studies carried out in 2016 and 2022 also demonstrated that students have a good level of theoretical knowledge, but below average participation or intention to participate in the future (Oja & Toots, 2021; Ümarik & Tinn, 2023).

It is important to note that Estonia's teachers have high autonomy, meaning that they can interpret and adapt the learning goals, materials, process and assessment principles themselves within the limits of the curriculum (Erss, 2018); often this is also done at the school level, giving schools the freedom to choose their curricular emphasis. For example, a relatively new state high school PERG defines their priority as "/---/ solving societal problems that have a great impact. We focus on the environmental and climate topics and how to create a strong democratic Estonia and civic society" according to the school's website (https://perg.ee/meie-kool/). There are other similar examples, which shows it really is up to the school leaders and teachers how much they want to make developing EfD a priority. However, one could also argue that subject areas descriptions were very detailed until the changes made in 2023, which has made the teachers feel like they have to cover all content without much flexibility to decide on the focus or give opportunities for students to give input to their learning goals based on their interests (Lukas, 2023).

When it comes to policies related to EfD outside of national curriculum, the Estonia's Education Strategy 2021-2035 highlights key issues that need addressing in or via education and proposes recommendations. Social cohesion is a significant theme in the strategy as it is considered important for national security (p. 31). Cooperation, alignment, quality of life in Estonia and contributing to global sustainable development (both socially and environmentally sustainable development is a guiding principle for the whole strategy) are also mentioned frequently. All major EU strategies as well as the UN sustainable development goals are considered aligned and linked to the strategy. 'Democracy' as a term is mentioned once and 'democratic' 3 times. 'Citizen(s)' is mentioned 3 times and 'citizenship' once, in the list of general competences.

The strategy highlights the need to cope with a rapidly changing world, including crisis situations, and the aim of learners is becoming responsible and proactive members of a democratic society. To that end, the strategy calls for:

- educational institutions having a caring, value-based, democratic and inclusive organisational culture that supports the development of self-management and cooperation skills and attitudes (p. 18-19);
- increased attention to the development of **general and future competences**, including the development of self-directed learners and **citizens** (p. 20).
- increase the use of **practical learning** (e.g. problem solving and project-based learning) to make assignments more meaningful for learners and to develop the **capacity to solve any issues** related to personal life, learning, local community and society in a creative, **collaborative and innovative way** (p. 20-21).
- providing more opportunities for civic participation already during the course of their studies /…/ including by linking formal and non-formal learning (p. 21).
- promoting the development of a **shared space of culture and values** in the course of the learning process in order to increase the **cohesiveness of society** (p. 21).
- raising awareness of the opportunities and risks of the information society and developing digital skills in all age groups for **the purpose of digital involvement** (p.27).

Unsurprisingly, the expert interviews and discussions within DEMOCRAT Living Lab settings also revealed that a lack of practical know-how and willingness to participate actively in civic and political spheres is a critical shortcoming of our youth (and thus education). Lack of ability to communicate and express oneself, and to hold a civil dialogue or debate, including in online settings, were also mentioned as one the key issues that needs to be addressed.

Interviews with educators reveal several challenges hindering the implementation of participatory pedagogical approaches. Firstly, inadequate pre-service training fails to equip teachers with interactive, student-centred teaching methods for citizenship education. Citizenship education receives very little attention compared to history-related subjects during the studies for 'history and civics teacher'. Secondly, the sporadic integration of civics lessons throughout the school years hampers the continuous development of citizenship competencies. Thirdly, teachers face high workloads, limiting their capacity to engage in creative, time-consuming activities. Lastly, a prevailing lack of democratic culture in schools (while it can vary greatly) inhibits students' ability to influence decision-making processes. While the ICCS studies have revealed a significant gap between boys and girls in their attitudes towards gender equality and there are some differences in civic skills and attitudes between Estonian and Russian-speaking students, these topics were not the focus of the discussions and interviews at this time and would require further research.

Despite pockets of innovative practices among teachers and schools, such approaches remain peripheral and rely heavily on individual enthusiasm due to the high levels of autonomy within the Estonian education system. However, opportunities for improvement exist. Elective courses, subject integration, and compulsory 'research and creative projects' offer avenues for developing citizenship competencies. Collaboration with NGOs, universities, ministries, and municipalities could help mainstream innovative practices. NGOs already offer elective courses and initiatives such as school participatory budgeting, while some schools operate on democratic principles, involving students and parents in decision-making processes.

As already mentioned, efforts are underway to enhance citizenship education in Estonia. The Ministry of Education has renewed the social subject's curricula and is providing supportive materials, including practical examples and resources from NGOs. Additionally, discussions are ongoing regarding improvements to pre- and in-service teacher training in citizenship education. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on available opportunities, Estonia aims to cultivate a more active and engaged citizenry, grounded in democratic values.

2.3.2. Country Brief: Finland

Finland's education system is widely regarded as a global benchmark for equality, democratic values, and community-based learning. These principles are deeply embedded in national curricula, teacher training, and various education policies. The Finnish model emphasizes active citizenship, participation, and critical thinking, aiming to prepare students to be thoughtful and engaged members of society. However, while Finland's commitment to democracy and human rights education (HRE) is evident in its frameworks and rhetoric, significant challenges persist in its practical implementation. This comprehensive analysis explores the state of democracy education in Finland, examining its curricular foundations, teacher training, research, societal attitudes, and ongoing projects while identifying strengths and areas for improvement. As Mikko Tujula, the Finnish Parliament's democracy education specialist, highlights in a recent report (Hannuksela et al., 2024), the state of democracy education in Finland has been a source of concern despite the country's strong legislative and institutional foundations. Significant efforts have been made to address these concerns and improve democracy education, supported by Finland's legal framework, international agreements, and curricular mandates.

The National Core Curriculum

The Finnish National Core Curriculum emphasizes transversal competencies, including "Participation, active citizenship, and building a sustainable future" (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020). This focus encourages students to understand societal values, engage in critical thinking, and participate actively in their

communities. These values are integrated across multidisciplinary subjects such as social studies, history, and geography, supported by reforms like the 2019 curriculum update for upper secondary schools, which reinforced democratic participation, ethical responsibility, and societal awareness (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019).

The inclusion of democracy education in elementary schools began with the introduction of social studies as a subject (Valtioneuvosto 422/2012). Participation in student councils was mandated in comprehensive schools by the Basic Education Act (628/1998), reflecting the importance of involving students in decision-making. Moreover, the Finnish Constitution (731/1999) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child require providing children with opportunities to influence decisions affecting them.

However, the practical implementation of these provisions often varies. Research shows that democratic values are realized in classrooms to differing extents, largely depending on teachers' priorities and expertise (Männistö, Rautiainen & Vanhanen-Nuutinen, 2017). Open classroom climates where societal issues are discussed correlate with higher levels of students' civic engagement and confidence in their ability to influence society (Hannuksela, Korventausta & Sipinen, 2022). Yet, disparities in students' family environments, such as parental engagement in political discussions, significantly influence their initial understanding of democracy and politics (Kestilä-Kekkonen, Sipinen & Söderlund, 2023b).

Additionally, schools' roles extend beyond explicit curricula. Values and norms are often transmitted implicitly through what Meighan and Harber (2007) term the "hidden curriculum." This transmission, combined with an increasing polarization of societal issues, creates unique challenges for teachers navigating democracy education (Männistö & Fornaciari, 2017).

Teacher Education

Finnish teachers are among the most highly qualified in the world, with all educators required to hold a Master's degree. Teacher training programs emphasize research-based pedagogy and critical thinking, providing educators with a strong theoretical foundation. However, democracy education within teacher training remains inconsistent, and in many cases depend on individual teacher educators (Rautiainen & Vetter, 2024).

According to a study conducted by Tampere University (2024), only 25% of teachers in Finland feel well-prepared to teach democracy and human rights education. While most teachers express positive attitudes toward civic education, viewing it as a valuable tool for encouraging political participation among youth, and believe they foster an open classroom climate, a significant number report lacking sufficient resources and training during their education to effectively implement these principles in practice (Hannuksela et al., 2024). Teachers also express a need for more practical tools to implement democracy education effectively in their classrooms (Gretschel et al., 2023). While some teacher training institutions, such as the University of Helsinki and the University of Jyväskylä, offer dedicated courses on democracy and human rights, these topics are often addressed minimally or tangentially in other teacher training programs (Rautiainen & Vetter, 2024).

The availability and emphasis on democracy and human rights education vary significantly across universities. Some institutions, such as the University of Helsinki, offer a dedicated online course titled Democracy and Human Rights in Educational Practice (5 ECTS), which explores the role of these topics in teaching and educational work. The course has been highly popular and is available as an elective at both the University of Helsinki and the University of Eastern Finland. Meanwhile, the University of Eastern Finland integrates democracy education into its physical education curriculum, with a strong focus on critical pedagogy in courses such as Movement as a Societal and Cultural Phenomenon (5 ECTS). Other institutions, such as the University

of Lapland, embed democracy and human rights education into interdisciplinary courses in history and civics, while the University of Oulu's SCOPe research center promotes educational research from philosophical and societal perspectives, which informs teacher education curricula. Tampere University has developed critical environmental education studies connected to global education themes like migration and political agency, often in collaboration with societal actors (Gretschel et al., 2023).

In order to address these gaps, Jyväskylä University's Department of Teacher Education has systematically implemented education for democracy (EfD) in its curriculum through the Derby study group (since 2020). In this model, democracy education themes are incorporated into nearly all first-year courses, aiming to establish democracy education as a way of life. Although subsequent years place less emphasis on these themes, the approach seeks to instill a strong foundational understanding of democratic principles.

Teacher training often emphasizes interpersonal skills like communication and conflict resolution without explicitly linking these to democratic engagement (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). Societal polarization and reluctance to engage with controversial topics further hinder educators' confidence in addressing sensitive issues such as race, gender, and politics (Gretschel et al., 2023). Professional development programs must therefore provide teachers with strategies for fostering open discussions and addressing these topics respectfully (Hannuksela et al., 2024). The lack of a systematic approach means that democracy education continues to rely heavily on the initiative of individual educators, leading to significant variation in implementation across institutions (Männistö, Rautiainen & Vanhanen-Nuutinen, 2017).

Efforts to address these gaps include also notable initiatives like Hyvän lähteillä (Männistö et al., 2017), a national project funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This project responded to research indicating that many teachers felt ill-equipped to incorporate democracy and human rights themes into their teaching. The program engaged participants from 11 universities and five vocational teacher training institutions to develop and test innovative pedagogical methods. The resulting publication offered theoretical frameworks, case studies, and practical tools, such as role-playing and collaborative projects, to foster critical thinking and active participation. While the project raised awareness and provided valuable resources, its implementation remains uneven, highlighting the challenge of achieving systematic integration across teacher training programs.

Also Jyväskylä University's Derby group program in teacher training represents a promising step toward systematically embedding democracy education into teacher training. However, broader collaboration between universities, policymakers, and schools is essential to ensure consistent and comprehensive integration of these critical themes (Gretschel et al., 2023).

Support and other projects

Finland's strong research culture supports democracy education through numerous projects and international collaborations. Examples include **DIOK Norden** (2022–2023), focusing on democracy education in Nordic contexts, and **Edu4Democracy** (2020–2023), a European Commission-funded initiative promoting democratic culture in schools. Domestic projects like **Osallistuva opiskelija – Parempi demokratia** (2020–2023) emphasize student participation in democratic processes.

NGOs also play a significant role in supporting schools through materials and training sessions. Despite these efforts, the short-term nature of many projects limits their lasting impact (Brunila & Kallioniemi, 2017). Long-term strategies are needed to ensure sustainable integration of democratic practices into educational frameworks.

Opportunities, experiences and challenges

Although Finland has achieved significant progress, challenges remain. Teachers often struggle with balancing curriculum demands with the need to address sensitive societal issues (Hannuksela et al., 2024). Democracy education has also been criticized for prioritizing representative democracy, which may narrow students' engagement opportunities (Männistö, 2020). This focus risks excluding broader forms of participation, contributing to uneven societal engagement among youth (Pekkarinen & Myllyniemi, 2019).

Research highlights that Finnish youth possess strong civic knowledge and growing interest in politics. However, they often lack confidence in their ability to influence society and express limited interest in political participation (Borg & Vadén, 2022). Schools must play a central role in bridging these gaps by fostering active citizenship through inclusive pedagogy.

In interviews conducted during the fieldwork, educational representatives highlighted similar themes that align with findings from recent national research and reports. They acknowledged that while the foundational principles for Education for Democracy (EfD) are in place, much depends on individual teachers, who bear significant responsibility for its implementation. Issues such as sensitivity, equality, and resource allocation were recurrently mentioned in discussions among teachers. Both teachers and students often expressed that democratic values are familiar concepts through various contexts, but the content is frequently confined to civics education or limited to thematic weeks. Echoing the research findings, many participants emphasized the need for a more systematic approach and organization of EfD both in schools and in teacher education programs.

Some Recommendations for future could entail:

1. **Systematic Integration into Teacher Training**
   Democracy and human rights education should be embedded into all teacher training programs, including subject-specific methodologies. Existing initiatives like **Hyvän lähteillä** provide a valuable foundation for scaling these efforts (Männistö et al., 2017).
2. **Addressing Sensitive** Topics
   Teachers need structured professional development to confidently address controversial topics, fostering open and respectful discussions (Hannuksela et al., 2024).
3. **Adopting Democratic Pedagogy**
   Beyond teaching democratic “facts,” educators should use participatory methods to involve students in decision-making processes, fostering empowerment and agency (Männistö & Fornaciari, 2017).
4. **Expanding Collaboration**
   Partnerships between universities, NGOs, and policymakers can enhance the consistency and reach of democracy education initiatives (Gretschel et al., 2023).
5. **Broadening the Scope of Engagement**
   Democracy education must transcend its focus on representative systems, encouraging students to engage in diverse societal activities and fostering comprehensive civic skills (Pekkarinen & Myllyniemi, 2019).

2.3.3. Country Brief: Poland

In Poland, the supervision of the education system is carried out by the Ministry of Education (MEN) and local educational administration bodies, such as regional education boards (*kuratoria oświaty*). The competencies of these institutions are defined by legal acts, including the *Education System Act* and the *Educational Law*. The Ministry is responsible for shaping national educational policy, including developing curricula, core educational standards, and regulations governing the education system. The core curriculum outlines the minimum content that students with average abilities should master in various subjects at each educational stage. It defines the scope of knowledge and skills in a clear and structured manner.

Teachers have the option to create their own preschool education programs, general education curricula, vocational education programs, or profile-specific teaching plans. However, developing such programs requires fulfilling specific conditions:

- Analysis of the core curriculum – the program must align with the requirements and educational goals outlined in the core curriculum.
- Addressing students' needs and abilities – the program should be tailored to the specific group of students and consistent with other implemented teaching programs.
- Methodological reflection – it is essential to answer the questions: *What to teach? Why teach it? How do students acquire knowledge and skills?* (Komorowska, 1999).

The objectives of education and upbringing are defined at different educational levels. In primary schools, seven key objectives are outlined, while in secondary schools, there are eight:

1. Developing reading comprehension skills.
2. Cultivating mathematical thinking.
3. Promoting scientific reasoning.
4. Enhancing communication skills in speech and writing.
5. Mastering the use of information and communication technologies.
6. Developing the ability to search for, select, and critically analyze information.
7. Identifying personal educational needs and fostering learning skills.
8. Strengthening teamwork skills (specific to secondary education).

In Poland, teaching models have been in use for years, defining approaches to the educational process: - Analytical model (teaching to acquire knowledge) – the focus is on knowledge acquisition and content mastery:

- Hermeneutic model (learning to find answers) – the key element is communication and the ability to seek solutions.
- Critical model (teaching to enact change) – the emphasis is on change driven by critical thinking and action.

The Polish educational system is divided into several stages. In early childhood education (classes 1-3), students study integrated subjects. From classes 4-8, the curriculum is divided into specific subjects, including Polish, English (with a second foreign language starting in grade 7), mathematics, history, knowledge of society, security education, physical education, computer science, religion or ethics (optional), physics,

chemistry, geography, nature/biology, art, music, formation hour, and education for family life (optional). In secondary schools, additional subjects such as History and Modernity (HIT) and entrepreneurship are introduced. Education for Democracy (EfD) is integrated across these subjects, with democratic principles embedded in the core curriculum. The Polish school system does not have a single subject dedicated to the education of democracy. This knowledge is dispersed across various subjects. Generally, it is assumed that the school equips students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for active participation in a democratic society. This includes developing an understanding of democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law. In ministerial documentation, civic education is perceived as a way to educate responsible and engaged citizens who are able to contribute to the democratic functioning of society. In the process of education, Polish schools aim to cultivate in students attitudes conducive to their individual and social development, such as: honesty, reliability, responsibility, perseverance, self-esteem, respect for others, cognitive curiosity, creativity, entrepreneurship, personal culture, readiness to participate in culture, initiative-taking, and teamwork. A slightly different picture emerges in the case of documents related to the curriculum framework and selected preschool education programs. These lead to the conclusion that, in the official discourse—determined by the binding legal acts and documents outlining the directions for preschool work—the issues related to developing children's competencies as active citizens of a democratic society are not prioritized. This is most clearly evidenced by the absence of the term 'democracy.' It also remains ambiguous to what extent, within the depictions of the child emerging from the analysed documents, one can recognize a citizen (Gawlowicz 2013).

Analyses and studies conducted by Śliwerski indicate that in Poland, education is primarily focused on teaching about democracy and for democracy, but not in democracy (Śliwerski, 2011). In the Polish education system, where changes, dialogue, co-decision-making, and engagement are declared, conservatism and attachment to the traditional model of school are still evident. A cursory analysis of educational everyday life reveals how far the relationships in various contexts—director-teacher, teacher-child, teacher-parents—are from democratic principles. It is also apparent how little attention is given to democratic values in educational processes, and to what extent other stakeholders (children, parents) have the opportunity to participate in decision-making regarding the functioning of the school (Olczak, 2013). This is further confirmed by other studies (Olczak, 2010), which point to social resistance (including among teachers) to proposals for democratizing the adult-child relationship, respecting the rights of both parties, authentic dialogue, and co-decision-making. The challenge lies in recognizing that a child has the right to co-decide, to freedom, and not only the duty to submit to the will of the adult (Olczak, A., 2005). In Polish education, there are too few opportunities for students to make decisions and learn to take responsibility for their choices, as emphasized in interviews conducted with Polish teachers.

Poland's educational system faces financial constraints impacting the implementation of programs supporting emotional intelligence, potentially hindering the development of resilience strategies essential for addressing democratic competencies within the curriculum. This challenge resonates with Cohen's discussion (1999) on the pivotal role of financial resources in educational reform and program implementation, reflecting broader systemic issues impacting educational initiatives.

There is a significant number of educational resources (including digital resources) on Education for Democracy (EfD) developed by various associations and institutions in Poland, such as the Centre for Education Development (ORE). A potential issue is their dispersion and the difficulty teachers have in accessing them. Teachers often lack the time to evaluate these materials for their usefulness and suitability for specific age groups or topics. Creating some sort of repository (a library of EfD materials) would be helpful.

As noted by Alison Gopnik, Andrew N. Meltzoff, and Patricia K. Kuhl, questions about how we can transform children into fully-fledged adults are constantly resonating in political and social debates (Gopnik, Meltzoff, Kuhl, 2004). Teachers in Poland identify critical thinking, communication, and participation as key skills essential for fostering democratic competencies among students. They employ various approaches to incorporate elements of education for democracy into their teaching, including facilitating lessons within subject areas like Civic Education, History, or English, using interactive teaching methods aimed at fostering critical thinking, and organizing independent projects or collaborations with non-governmental organizations to address democratic issues.

Moreover, teachers encourage student engagement by supporting student councils and advocating for more democratic school governance, empowering students to make decisions regarding lesson content and format or introducing participatory budgeting within the school.

Students' understanding of democracy is initially limited to political processes such as voting, with a focus on participation by adults. However, their experiences of democratic engagement primarily revolve around elections for school council positions. Despite recognizing the importance of critical thinking, students often struggle to apply it effectively, relying on memorized slogans rather than independent analysis. Democracy, as indicated by M. Karwowska-Struczyk (2012), is more than a system of governance, elections, or the practice of following the will of the majority. It is a moral ideal, a way of individual and collective life, taking responsibility for others who are in the minority, negotiation, tolerance, and above all, participation in creating good for all, not just for the dominant majority, listening to others. Current teaching methods in Polish schools predominantly involve conveying theoretical knowledge through lectures and utilising multimedia resources to illustrate concepts such as conformity. Students express a desire for more interactive and practical teaching methods, including debates, presentations, historical comparisons, and excursions to relevant institutions like the parliament.

Despite the challenges posed by financial constraints and limited teaching resources, Poland's educators and students demonstrate a commitment to nurturing democratic competencies within the educational system. By adopting innovative teaching methods and encouraging active student participation, Poland seeks to empower future generations with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for meaningful civic engagement and democratic participation.

Based on the collected material (interviews with teachers and discussion in the Living Lab), attention should be paid to key issues related to the gaps observed by both sides of the educational process (teachers and students).

Firstly, teachers observe that students often lack the ability to engage in *critical thinking*. While students may be able to recite information, they struggle to ask probing questions, form independent opinions, and seek diverse resources to understand different perspectives. Secondly, *effective communication* is essential for educational and personal growth, but teachers note that students frequently exhibit difficulties in expressing their thoughts clearly and engaging in meaningful deliberations and conflict resolution. Thirdly, there is a noticeable gap in students' sense of responsibility and agency. Teachers find that students often do not see themselves as active *participants capable of influencing their environment*. This lack of engagement can lead to a diminished sense of community and responsibility.

Students, on the other hand, provide valuable insights into their educational experiences and the gaps they perceive. One significant gap is their limited understanding of democracy, which is often confined to political aspects such as voting. Students tend to overlook the broader implications of democratic principles in

everyday life, including the importance of active citizenship and participation in various forms. Another gap is the prevalence of surface-level knowledge among students. They frequently repeat slogans and ideas heard at school or home without truly comprehending the underlying concepts, indicating a need for deeper, more reflective learning experiences. Additionally, while students participate in voluntary activities, their involvement is often driven by personal benefits, such as gaining extra points on their certificates, rather than a genuine commitment to social causes. However, the participation in voluntary activities often changes their approach and they begin to engage also for the sake of greater (common) good. Nevertheless, this highlights a gap in fostering intrinsic motivation for community service and leadership.

Addressing these gaps requires a multifaceted approach. Enhancing critical thinking can be achieved by incorporating creative and interactive teaching methods. Teachers can use group work, simulation games, and other engaging activities to encourage students to analyse issues from multiple perspectives and develop independent opinions. Improving communication skills is essential, and creating opportunities for students to practice effective communication is crucial. Debates, discussions, and collaborative projects can help students articulate their thoughts clearly and learn to navigate different viewpoints constructively. Promoting active participation can be facilitated by encouraging student engagement through initiatives like student councils and participatory budgeting, empowering students to take on leadership roles and make decisions that impact their school environment. This can cultivate a sense of responsibility and agency.

Deepening the understanding of democracy can be achieved by integrating lessons on democracy across various subjects, emphasizing its relevance in everyday life. Practical experiences, such as mock elections and community projects, can help students grasp the significance of democratic values beyond the political realm. To inspire genuine commitment to social causes, schools can emphasize the intrinsic value of volunteering and community service. Projects that address real-world issues and involve student-led initiatives can encourage a deeper connection to community engagement.

2.3.4. Country brief: Germany

The German educational system is traditionally divided into three main tracks (the Gymnasium, Realschule, and Hauptschule), with several states introducing the Comprehensive School (Gesamtschule) as an alternative or addition to the existing system which often has been criticized for being too hierarchical, selective and benefitting pupils and students from high- und middle-class background. After compulsory education, those who don't continue to full-time general schools at the upper secondary level, but learn a skilled occupation, must still attend part-time schooling (compulsory Berufsschule attendance - Berufsschulpflicht), which typically lasts three years. In order to ensure quality and educational standards, the German education system has a meta-framework of qualification (DQR = Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen/German Qualification Fraemwork) across all types of schools. The DQR focuses on the acquisition of competencies, which guide the allocation of qualifications to be acquired in general education, higher education and vocational education and training. The levels have a uniform structure. The DQR distinguishes between two categories of competencies. Professional competence' is subdivided into "knowledge" and "skills", and "personal competence" is divided into "social competence" and "autonomy". While only mentioning two categories, the paper states: "Notwithstanding this, aspects such as reliability, precision, stamina and attentiveness, intercultural and interreligious competence, active tolerance and democratic patterns of behaviour and normative, ethical and religious reflectiveness act as constitutive elements for the development of action skills" (AK DQR 2011, p. 4).

The German education system is characterized by the fact that there is no national curriculum, but one in each federal state (Bundesland). The federal authorities determine many aspects of education, including curricula, teacher qualifications, authorization of schoolbooks, and school organization (Köhler 1996). School-based learning in Germany focuses not only on the acquisition of knowledge and cultural competencies, i.e. the skills and competencies needed to master new media, but also aims to foster the constructive collaboration of the individual in learning groups. Work-based learning in the company includes the development of quality awareness and customer orientation. Higher education aims to train for independent academic work subject to professional standards. Additional attention is currently given to issues such as threats to democracy; antisemitism, racism and antidiscrimination, but also regarding questions such as climate change and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or digital media competencies.

While the federal states are ultimately responsible for education policy and the implementation of education for democracy, the joint body - the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states - has also provided agreements for democracy education (KMK 2018). It starts from the ”insight that it is not enough to invoke the will of a majority in order to legitimize democracy as a form of government”, but that ”the commitment to human rights and human dignity, the separation of powers and the protection of minorities, as well as the procedures of the constitutional state, even if these sometimes appear lengthy and laborious” (p 2) is decisive. The paper further states that ”exclusionary, anti-human and anti-democratic basic positions are a particular challenge for schools”, that it ”is also important to oppose historical revisionism and actively confront simplistic images of society” and addresses to ”strengthening social cohesion, the participation of all members and the coexistence of different ethnicities and cultures, especially in an age of migration and other global interdependencies” (ibid.) as a special task for schools. The paper also makes several suggestions for structural and content-related implementation of educations for democracy. However, a recent critical review came to the conclusion that the agreement can be read as a commitment to this cross-cutting task of schools, but that it does not give an indication of the necessary investments, relief or direct support that schools need to implement such a task (Beutel 2024).

Teachers are generally asked to foster issues of democracy in their teaching and education activities, while curricula are sometimes more general. Teachers in Germany mark as a great challenge the growing influence of fake news, formal consent to democracy, debates about freedom of speech, and interethnic conflict. They employ a broad range of approaches in different subjects (e.g. History, Social Studies, German language, Religion) to bring democratic competencies into their teaching. They employ interactive teaching methods to foster critical thinking and organize independent projects or collaborations with non-governmental organizations to tackle democratic issues, sometimes collaborating internationally.

A very important area of democratic school development is reflected in terms that refer to basic forms of democratic speech (‘debate’, ‘deliberation’) on the one hand and incorporate the idea of participation (‘participation’, ‘co-determination’, ‘involvement’) on the other. Frequent instruments of democratic school development are ‘class council’, ‘student council’, and ‘school assembly’ institutionalized in many schools.

The actual opportunities for participation are perceived quite differently: Only 15% of the 14,400 children and adolescents surveyed by Fatke and Schneider stated that the level of participation/codetermination in school is ‚high‘ or ‚very high‘; (Coelen 2010, pp. 42-43). In more detail: While teachers saw a very high level of participation in seating arrangements in the classroom (99%) and in classroom design (97%), pupils‘ rates stood at 77% and 73% respectively. Pupils were significantly less involved in the form of lessons (54% 'high' or 'very high'), the content of lessons (51%), dates for class tests (49%) and grading (39%). On the part of the teachers, at least 89% rated the different arenas of participation as ‚high‘ or ‚very high‘.

Regarding the participation if children, there is growing awareness that even younger kids are interested in shaping their immediate environments, such as the choice of play equipment in the school playground (Eberlein et al. 2021). A powerful reference here is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. If it comes to teacher training, there is a strong focus on professional training, but – depending on their particular subject – they are also prepared to integrate democratic values and principles in their teaching. This includes principles of democracy, human rights, civic participation, and inclusive teaching methods to promote critical thinking and political engagement among students. As Piontek et al. (2020, p. 63) found out in their investigation of training opportunities for teachers across Germany, there is a mixed picture regarding the level of institutionalisation and financial resources allocated to that task.

A major problem in German schools today is that there are too few teachers and that there is a high drop in teaching hours. This leads to a situation of high workloads which then tends to focus on the teaching of factual knowledge but restrict democratic experiments and learning projects. As a result, education for democracy might come along as pretty formal (what is the Bundestag? What is the chancellor allowed to decide?) instead of a lived experience.

With growing numbers of children from refugee and migrant families, several school classes are faced with the situation that only a – sometimes very small – minority comes from a household where German has been the first language. Also, there is a growing diversity in cultural contexts (Diel 2017; Pevec & Schachner 2019). This should bring additional financial and personal resources to the system, but it does not. As a result, many teachers in Germany complain about work overload and are not too ready to run additional projects, e.g. on education for democracy. Nevertheless, there are innovative approaches and activities on the part of very committed teachers. A more recent challenge for teachers is the question of freedom of speech. While this is in fact a basic human right, public discourse sometimes aims at silencing particular positions. Teachers are also unaware of how to address controversial issues and where to draw a line if statements turn into hate speech. Teachers are repeatedly faced with the question of the extent to which they are allowed to express themselves on political, religious, ideological or similar topics in school and in the classroom.

Teachers, but also students, claim that there is a structural contradiction between a hierarchical system (which school is) and the idea of practicing real participation which in fact is often limited to minor issues such as the menu in the school cafeteria. This might make students disappointed or even cynical leading to a distance on the democratic system (Klemm 2008). In some cases, teachers reported that their students agree on issues of democracy when in the classroom but follow other trajectories outside of it. There, the one with the strongest arms prevails and democracy is labelled as an idea for sissies. In fact, a relevant minority of students do not care about the state of democracy at all, according to teachers' statements.

The federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia follows a competence-oriented approach. In a recent (October 2024) published guideline of the educational principles for general education schools in North Rhine-Westphalia, the Ministry of Education and Schools emphasized that in "competence-oriented teaching, the focus is therefore on the learning outcomes - ultimately the underlying learning processes - of the pupils. The competence expectations set out in the curricula and core curricula are the reference standard for this and the content is the obligatory core. The subject-specific content comprises the objects, phenomena and concepts that are indispensable for the acquisition of competencies and that are fundamentally relevant or representative of the subject. Teachers plan and organize lessons based on the learning outcomes to be achieved by the students. The curricula and core curricula give teachers the leeway to design lessons that are methodologically and didactically appropriate and goal-oriented to the requirements of the learning group and the learning location" (Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2024a, p. 17).

In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), democracy education is a central educational goal that is anchored in various subjects and educational plans. The curricula for schools emphasize the promotion of democratic skills, the development of critical judgment and the teaching of values in order to educate pupils to become responsible and responsible citizens. Guidelines suggest an approach across disciplines such as social sciences/politics making EfD a core content of the education plans for politics and social sciences with a focus on topics such as the Basic Law, political participation, freedom of opinion and the importance of elections; history with a particular emphasis on the examination of historical events such as the Weimar Republic, the Nazi era and the emergence of democracy in Germany intending to sensitize pupils to the importance of democratic values; religion/ethics to foster intercultural dialog and reflection on values, rights and duties, and German in order to enhance discussion and argumentation skills to represent opinions and engage in controversial discussions. Details are fixed in so called Core Curricula covering the different school types and a particular discipline; related to the issue of practical philosophy the curriculum addresses the 'professional competence' which means that students are able to "explain the importance of a culture of dialog and debate for responsible participation in a democratic society, and can explain the opportunities and challenges of different possibilities of participation in a democratic society (e.g. artificial intelligence, social media)" (Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2024b, p 27). In regard to the competence of judging the paper states as the aim that "students assess the use of artificial intelligence in the context of participation in a democratic society" (ibid., p. 28). In the curriculum on informatics in secondary schools, education for democracy is mentioned only very unspecific (Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2023, p 28).

The state of North-Rhine Westphalia runs the Qualitäts- und UnterstützungsAgentur – Landesinstitut für Schule (Quality and Support Agency - State Institute for Schools) in order to support schools and teachers in covering democracy as a subject in school. The Agency is running an annual 'Day of Democracy' offering an opportunity for teachers and pupils alike to connect and exchange ideas and experiences regarding democracy in general, but also in school particularly. Web-pages run by the federal state or by agencies on the regional level offer highly structured information on continuing education; of the eight programs just one is explicitly related to 'Intercultural school development - shaping democracy'. The menu item 'Shaping democracy' on the education portal offers numerous valuable tips and information and links to important European documents, in particular the competence descriptions of the Council of Europe ("Competences for democratic culture").

The regional Agency of Civic Education also supports schools who want to organize projects on democracy; a program run under the headline "Schools Without Racism" is supported by a lot of schools, and a broad range of NGOs offer continuing education as well.

2.3.5. Country brief: Ireland

Education for Democracy seeks to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and values for democratic participation (CoE, n.d.). Within the Irish context, there are several educational approaches which address elements of democratic participation, such as citizenship education, human rights education and global citizenship education (e.g. IHRC, 2011; Jeffers, 2008; Kerr, McCarthy & Smith, 2002), and more recently Education for Sustainable Development, yet no overarching policy for EfD exists.

A 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development – ESD to 2030 – was published by the Government of Ireland in June 2022. The aim of ESD to 2030 is to "ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote Sustainable Development", with the concept of 'democracy'

recognised as a key component of the 'social' pillar of ESD, and 'active democratic citizenship' named as a key principle (p. 6). Interestingly, the policy makes explicit the broader international policy context within which the strategy is situated, recognising the European Green Deal, the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture, and the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050: The Dublin Declaration. In terms of the national context, the strategy names several national policies including the Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy for schools, Successor to the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, National Skills Strategy 2025, and the Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025. The latter strategy lays out the strategy for the enactment of GCE, including the 'Code of Good Practice for Development Education'.

In its fullest form in the Irish context, Education for Democracy is recognised as a cross-curricular concern, however, it is also noted, from desk-based research and fieldwork, that certain curricular spaces provide excellent opportunities for deeper engagement with EfD. Reference to 'democracy' can be found across the Irish educational curriculum, beginning within the Early Childhood Education curriculum, Aistear, which recognises children as citizens:

"Children are citizens with rights and responsibilities. They have opinions that are worth listening to, and have the right to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect them. In this way, they have a right to experience democracy. From this experience they learn that, as well as having rights, they also have a responsibility to respect and help others, and to care for their environment." (p. 8)

In the Irish Primary Curriculum, concepts such as democracy, justice and inclusiveness are perceived to frame classroom and school practices, with Social, Personal and Health Education having a more specific focus, with a broad objective being that children "become aware of some of the individual and community rights and responsibilities that come from living in a democracy" (p. 10), with senior primary classes "begin to explore the concept of democracy" which might include "*the role of the President, the Oireachtas and the Constitution, role of elections, equal rights*" (p. 65). Curricular reform, including the forthcoming Irish Primary Curriculum, may provide an excellent opportunity to reinforce EfD, particularly considering that 'Active Citizenship' is a key competence in the new curriculum framework.

At post-primary level Within the Junior Cycle, 'Civic, Social and Political Education' provides an important window for EfD, and seeks to foster "an awareness of what it means to live responsibly in a democracy", with 'Exploring Democracy', along with 'Global Citizenship' and 'Rights and Responsibilities' as key strands. At the Senior Cycle of post-primary level, both Transition Year and the subject of 'Politics and Society' represent important spaces for EfD.

Although there may be particular spaces for the promotion of Children's Rights Education across primary and post-primary levels, there remains questions as to the extent to which this focus is enacted in general classrooms, especially when particular subjects have moved from a core to an optional provision (Jerome et al., 2015).

Fieldwork recognises in particular the need for educational approaches which prepare children and young people with the democratic knowledge and skills to actively participate in democratic processes. Approaches gathered in the desk-based research are predominantly active participatory approaches, providing opportunities for children and young people to learn about and through democratic processes. There are a significant number of educational resources (including digital resources) concerning EfD in the Irish context, including children's rights resources developed by the Ombudsman for Children, human rights resources developed by Amnesty International in collaboration with teaching unions, and specific Democracy resources

developed by the House of the Oireachtas. Many of these are helpfully catalogued through repositories such as developmenteducation.ie and Scoilnet, although the extent to which resources are used in primary and post-primary classrooms is uncertain.

The centrality of curriculum is clearly identified, and the need for specific pedagogical approaches to complement this, but also the development of schools and educational establishments as democratic spaces themselves. There are interesting examples of whole school programmes, such as UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools, An Taisce Green Schools, and the Yellow Flag Programme. Furthermore, there is an increasing focus on the development of student councils and committees to inform school decision-making. Within wider society, the Children's Parliament (Dáil na nÓg) is recognised, and the first Children and Young People's Assembly (on biodiversity loss) represents a development in broader deliberative democracy. There is a recognition of the importance of contextualised approaches to EfD, given the range of contexts participants are practising within (e.g. primary, post-primary, teacher education) and the areas of socio-economic disadvantage that schools may be operating in.

Regarding teacher education in the Irish context, there are significant foundations to build upon. At Primary level, the Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) Project is a national education initiative, across four universities which promotes the integration of development education and intercultural education in Initial Teacher Education at Primary level in Ireland. Also at Primary level, but this time concerning in-service teacher education, the Global Village programme "aims to support primary school pupils to become active global citizens committed to building a fairer and more sustainable world". Mirroring these developments, at post-primary level, the Ubuntu Network involves a community of educators in post-primary Initial Teacher Education, working to develop Global Citizenship Education (GCE); WorldWise Global Schools, is Ireland's Global Citizenship Education (GCE) programme for post-primary schools. A national survey of Irish Primary teachers found that whilst teachers rate GCE as extremely important for children's learning their levels of confidence, knowledge and pedagogical skills are considerably lower (Barry, Mallon, Bourke & Usher, 2023) pointing at the need for professional development which supports the development of knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Considering the literature regarding children's participation, themes of inclusion and exclusion are clearly apparent. Mallon and Martinez-Sainz (2021) undertook an analysis of periodic national reports from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to consider the status of children's education rights in Ireland. Reports such as those from 1998, 2006 and 2016 include contributions from children as individuals and collectives, as well as non-governmental bodies advocating on their behalf, and serve as a valuable insight into the standing of children's rights in the state. This analysis revealed that access to and exclusion from formal education remains a significant issue for many children, particularly those in disadvantaged groups, such as children belonging to the Traveller community, children seeking international protection as refugees or those seeking asylum, and children with disabilities. As such, this highlights that many children may not receive the opportunity of Education for Democracy simply because they do not have access to schooling. Whilst the threats to democracy are noted within the broader literature within WP2 of this project, the analysis also recognises that children and young people experience the direct impact of these actions, for example, as experiences of racism, discrimination, issues of wellbeing, and violence were also noted as challenges faced by children and young people in the Irish context. Of particular interest to this report, the analysis revealed the invisibility of children within decision-making processes, particularly those marginalised or considered vulnerable. Each of these factors was in turn exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Qualitative participatory research in the Irish context found that although young people value the opportunity to participate in school,

they find the provision inadequate (Forde, Horgan, Martin and Parkes, 2018). This research highlighted how young people recognised the undemocratic nature of schools (and student councils), the importance of strong relationships with teachers, and the need for more positive school environments, grounded in "holistic participatory approaches and strategies that address and encompass all parties to the educational system, including students, principals, teachers and parents/guardians" (p. 506). This research highlights that children's experiences of EfD and of democratic education itself may be highly varied, and open to influence by border societal factors. It also highlights that certain groups of children and young people may have less access to schooling, and thus EfD, than their peers. It also points to the potential of a holistic approach to EfD in order to support inclusive education which serves all children and young people within the Irish context.

Other research highlights variances in levels of democratic participation between different groups. Quantitative research in Ireland focused on the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study found that boys have lower levels of civic participation than girls, and also boys' civic participation varied depending on the perceived influence on decision-making (Gilleece and Cosgrove, 2012). Machowska-Kosiack and Barry (2022) undertook a critical scoping literature review and online focus groups with 20 second-generation ethnic minority young people to explore their experiences of inclusion and exclusion within spaces including schools. This study noted significant barriers to education faced by participants, including a lack of or problematic representation of school curricula, discrimination, and racism. The research calls for educational interventions to support the inclusion of ethnic minority children and young people. In an important piece of research, Flynn (2018) found that young people who were at risk of exclusion from formal education, including those with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, valued the opportunity to participate through the expression of ideas and perspectives, however, acts of silencing had negative impacts, recognising the importance of including the voices of all young people in their school as imperative to inclusive education.

Within the Irish context, there is an increasing body of research which considers children and young people's involvement in broader democratic practices. Research into such processes suggests that whilst youth councils, as participative spaces for children and young people, provide participants with skills and influence local decision-making, less certain is the impact on broader institutional and societal processes (Forde and Martin, 2016). Despite their own shortcomings, these spaces may provide important opportunities to make connections between formal education and border democratic processes.

Fieldwork from the Irish context, and more specifically the analysis of NW1 and NW2 as part of Phase One of the Irish element of the DEMOCRAT Project has revealed five key themes which are summarized in Table 6 below.

These themes, derived from an analysis of data gathered from NW1 and NW2 as part of the WP4 fieldwork identify some of the important spaces for EfD within the Irish context, and the factors which influence the efficacy of EfD in these contexts. This recognises the need for educational approaches which prepare children and young people with the democratic knowledge and skills to actively participate in democratic processes. There is a recognition of the importance of contextualised approaches to EfD, given the range of contexts participants are practicing within (e.g. primary, post-primary, teacher education). The centrality of curriculum is clearly identified, and the need for specific pedagogical approaches to complement this, but also the development of schools and educational establishments as democratic spaces themselves. Finally, the opportunities for EfD, as gaps in existing provision, are noted. However, these are recognised alongside threats to democracy within an Irish and European context. A focus on research which explores children and young people's experiences of education and EfD within the Irish context reveals that exclusion from education remains a significant issue for many children, with certain groups disproportionately affected. This literature

also recognises the need for holistic and inclusive approaches to EfD, where legislative and curricular opportunities can be maximised, and democratic experiences in classrooms, schools and societies developed for all children and young people.

Theme	Description
Empowering democratic education	Education prepares young people with essential knowledge and skills to actively participate in democratic processes.
Promoting democratic initiatives	Promoting initiatives which advance democratic principles and practices, but which are tailored to specific contexts, recognising the diverse socio-political environments in which democracy functions.
Democratic education and curriculum development	Core elements (e.g. pedagogical approaches and curricular frameworks) required to instil democratic values in education systems.
Empowering educators and students through participation and dialogue	Creation of educational environments that engage and empower both teachers and students.
Challenges and opportunities in democratic education	Various challenges and opportunities within the realm of democratic education. Existing resources, current gaps, and emerging issues that pose threats to democracy.

Table 6 Five key themes

2.3.6. Country brief: Spain

The following description is the result of desk research revising official documents and literature, two national workshops, and fieldwork including individual interviews and focus groups based on established guidelines. The fieldwork was conducted from February to March 2024.

There is no subject called "democracy" In the Catalan/Spanish education system. However, the most recent education reform (2022) established a transversal competence (citizenship competence) which, throughout primary and secondary education, aims to help pupils to become responsible citizens. In other words, they should be able to participate in social and civic life. This competence is not linked to any specific subject but should permeate everything from the first year of primary school to the fourth year of secondary school.

This new curriculum in Spain emphasises cross-curricular work and endeavours to instil a democratic culture across all areas of education. Under the vector of Democratic Citizenship and Global Awareness, various subjects, and themes such as civic and ethical values, geography and history, political citizenship and law, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are integrated to develop democratic competencies. The curriculum architecture underscores the assessment and grading of democratic values as foundational to citizenship competence. In this sense, there is already a curricular architecture that develops the transversal citizenship competence. This competence is based on democratic values that need to be assessed and graded. As it is customary that the change of the political colour of the Central Government implies the preparation of a new

education reform, the education community remains sceptical about the real scope of the education reform and the intention to strengthen civic education or education for democracy.

According to the Spanish legislation, the central government established 50% of the contents of the curricula and the regional governments the other 50% in the case that the Autonomous Community has a co-official language as Catalan, Gallego or Basque language. It is relevant noteworthy that the act adapts the scheme of key competences for lifelong learning defined 8 key competence areas:

- Literacy competence
- Multilingual Competence
- Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering
- Digital competence
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence
- Citizenship competence
- Entrepreneurship competence
- Cultural awareness and expression competence

Within these areas, the citizenship competences are of special interest. It is defined as follows: “Citizenship competence contributes to enabling pupils to exercise responsible citizenship and participate fully in social and civic life, based on an understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as knowledge of world events and active engagement in sustainability and the achievement of global citizenship. It includes civic literacy, the conscious adoption of the values of a democratic culture based on respect for human rights, critical reflection on the major ethical issues of our time and the development of a sustainable lifestyle in line with the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.”

The curriculum defines for each education level descriptors, here given the example of primary/ compulsory secondary and non-compulsory secondary education taken as reference the Catalan Curriculum. The following table shows the high degree of coincidence between the competences defined by the DEMOCRAT project and the Catalan/Spanish curriculum of Global Citizenship. As the DEMOCRAT project focus more on democracy as a form of living together instead on the formal political system, in both primary and compulsory secondary education, the operational descriptors CC2 and CC3 fits with DEMOCRAT’s competence framework.

The description CC2 is focused on participation in democratic processes at different levels of the school community and the society. The requirements of participation increase by grade level. This fits in the competences of solidary participation and deliberation.

The description of CC3 is more focused on the social and cultural diversity of the actual society. Therefor it is nearer to DEMOCRAT’s competence of democratic resilience, which emphasised the defence of democratic principles such as human right, minority rights in adverse environments. According to the grade level, the requirements of active implication increased.

Global Citizenship education: Operational Descriptors
Primary Education
CC1. To understand the most relevant historical and social processes related to his/her own identity and culture, reflects on the rules of coexistence, and to apply them in a constructive, dialogic and inclusive manner in any context.
CC2. To participate in community activities, in decision-making and in the resolution of conflicts in a dialogic and respectful way with democratic procedures, the principles and values of the European Union and the Spanish Constitution, human and children's rights, the value of diversity, and the achievement of gender equality, social cohesion and the Sustainable Development Goals.
CC3. to reflect and discuss current values and ethical issues, understanding the need to respect different cultures and beliefs, to care for the environment, to reject prejudices and stereotypes, and to oppose any form of discrimination or violence.
CC4. to understand the systemic relationships between human actions and the environment, and to start adopting sustainable lifestyles, in order to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity from both a local and global perspective.
Compulsory Secondary Education
CC1. To analyse and understand ideas related to the social and civic dimension of his/her own identity, as well as the cultural, historical and normative facts that determine it, showing respect for the rules, empathy, fairness and constructive spirit in interaction with others in any context.
CC2. To analyse and assume the principles and values that emanate from the European integration process, the Spanish Constitution and human and children's rights, participating in community activities, such as decision-making or conflict resolution, with a democratic attitude, respect for diversity, and commitment to gender equality, social cohesion, sustainable development and the achievement of global citizenship.
CC3. To understand and analyse fundamental and current ethical problems, critically considering own and other people's values, and developing own judgements to face moral controversy with a dialogic, argumentative, respectful attitude, and opposed to any kind of discrimination or violence.
CC4. To understand the systemic relationships of interdependence, eco-dependence and interconnectedness between local and global actions, and to adopt, in a conscious and motivated way, a sustainable and eco-socially responsible lifestyle.

Table 7. Global Citizenship education: Operational Descriptors
Source: Own translation of the parts of the Curriculum of Global Citizenship Primary Education (https://xtec.gencat.cat/web/.content/curriculum/Competencies_CC.pdf) and Secondary education (https://xtec.gencat.cat/web/.content/curriculum/Competencies_CC.pdf)

The curriculum of digital competence covers aspects of judging information as defined in DEMOCRAT's competences framework. It is overall the first descriptor DC1, which shows a nearness to the competence of judgement of information, however, the aspect of sharing information or not sharing mis- and disinformation is not covered by this descriptor nor any other descriptor. Therefore, DEMOCRAT's framework provides a complementary aspect to the digital competences as defined by the Catalan government.

Digital competence: Operational Descriptors
Primary education
CD1. Carry out guided searches on the Internet and use simple strategies for the digital processing of information (keywords, selection of relevant information, organization of data, etc.) with a critical attitude about the contents obtained.
CD2. Create, integrate and rework digital content in different formats (text, table, image, audio, video, computer program, etc.) through the use of different digital tools to express ideas, feelings and knowledge, respecting the intellectual property and copyright of the contents that are reused.
CD3. Participate in school activities or projects through the use of virtual tools or platforms that allow new knowledge to be built, communicate, work collaboratively, share data and content in restricted and supervised digital environments safely and with an open and responsible attitude towards their use.
CD4. Know the risks and adopt, with the guidance of the teacher, preventive measures in the use of digital technologies to protect devices, personal data, health and the environment, and initiate the adoption of habits of critical, safe, healthy and sustainable use of these technologies.
CD5. Start developing simple and sustainable digital solutions (reuse of technological materials, block computer programming, educational robotics, etc.) to creatively solve specific problems or challenges and request help if necessary.
Compulsory Secondary Education
CD1. Perform advanced searches on the Internet according to criteria of validity, quality, timeliness and reliability, selecting them critically and archiving them to retrieve, reference and reuse these searches regarding intellectual property.
CD2. Manage and use one's own personal digital lifelong learning environment to build new knowledge and create digital content, through information processing strategies and the use of different digital tools, selecting and configuring the most appropriate according to the task and needs on each occasion.
CD3. Participate, collaborate and interact through virtual tools or platforms to communicate, work collaboratively and share content, data and information, responsibly managing their own actions, presence and visibility on the network and exercising an active, civic and reflective digital citizenship.
CD4. Identify risks and adopt measures in the use of digital technologies to protect devices, personal data, health and the environment and to become aware of the importance and need for critical, legal, safe, healthy and sustainable use of these technologies
CD5. Develop simple computer applications and creative and sustainable technological solutions to solve specific problems or respond to proposed challenges, and show interest and curiosity about the evolution of digital technologies and their sustainable development and ethical use.

Table 8. Digital competence: Operational Descriptors
Source: Own translation of the parts of the Curriculum of Digital Conpetence of Primary Education (https://xtec.gencat.cat/web/.content/curriculum/Competencies_CD.pdf) and Secondary education (https://xtec.gencat.cat/web/.content/curriculum/Competencies_CD.pdf)

The analysis shows a high compatibility of the EpD competences framework with the new curricula as it is defined by the Catalan government. Nevertheless, it is not only the curriculum itself that is essential for the development of democratic competencies but above all the strategies employed in the classroom. Within

existing curricula, teachers and schools can develop innovative and transformative learning approaches that will, in the best case, lead to change in the schools and subsequently in the education system as a whole.

Historical examples are the grassroots initiatives associated by the movement of pedagogical renewal during the period of democratic transitions defending democratic principles in schools and society. At some point, more than 50,000 teachers were active in this very active and heterogeneous movement to overcome the Franquist education system and support the democratic transition. In the 1990 with the consolidation of the democratic system and the implementation of the educational reform promoted by the socialist government as well as other socio-economic and cultural factors, the relevance of the movement declined but it is still alive.

The main road to promote democratic attitudes and ideals is to link knowledge and practice inside and outside the schools. There are examples in the Catalan and Spanish education systems, but they depend on the attitudes and approaches of the teachers and school leaders. Methodological approaches should prioritise respectful and inclusive interactions, thereby imbuing democratic principles into daily classroom practices. Bringing local social issues into the classroom and collaborating with community organizations enhance education for democracy, making it more effective and relevant.

Spain distinguishes itself by integrating emotional intelligence into digital competence education, emphasizing the importance of democratic values even amidst crises. This commitment to upholding democratic principles aligns with Salovey and Mayer's conceptualization of emotional intelligence as crucial for learning and social interaction. Despite the absence of a dedicated "democracy" subject in the Catalan/Spanish education system, a transversal competence known as citizenship competence permeates primary and secondary education, aiming to cultivate responsible citizenship and social participation.

Several challenges and considerations have emerged from discussions on integrating democracy into education: Firstly, there's a recognized need to prepare teacher for education for citizenship and democracy, which requires a shift in the role of teachers towards promoting student participation within established frameworks. Even older teachers, who are working intensively on citizenship education for years, recognise that they have not learnt through formal teacher education, but by mutual learning with other teachers at workshop, seminars and in other opportunities to sharing experience. Secondly, there's a lack of spaces within and outside the schools for teachers to share experiences and discuss strategies for transmitting democratic values effectively. In other words, the spaces for informal and mutual learning among teachers have diminished over time. Finally, the emergence of extreme political positions among students poses challenges, requiring teachers to navigate such conflicts adeptly and maintain constructive classroom dynamics. This, in turn requires special training programmes for teachers to deal with such conflicts.

In summary, Spanish educational framework underscores the importance of democratic values and active citizenship. Through a transversal competence approach, cross-curricular integration, and strategic learning methodologies, Spain aims to cultivate a generation of responsible, empowered citizens capable of participating meaningfully in democratic society. Efforts to address challenges such as teacher training and managing classroom dynamics will further enhance the effectiveness of democratic education initiatives.

2.4. Commonalities, Contrasts and Gaps: From research to RDC

In our analysis of democratic competencies across various educational systems, we have observed notable commonalities, gaps, and contrasts. The universal commitment to nurturing democratic values such as participation, deliberation, judgment, and resilience is evident in curricula worldwide. Yet, each country applies unique perspectives and methods to promote these competencies, showcasing both their strengths and areas that need further development.

The democratic competencies analysed are Participation/Solidarity (e.g. active citizenship and inclusion); Deliberation (e.g. respectful discussion and conflict resolution; Judgment (e.g. media literacy and critical thinking); and Democratic Resilience (e.g. upholding democratic values during crises). By delving into these commonalities, gaps, and contrasts, we gain a comprehensive understanding of how educational systems nations over prepare students for responsible and engaged citizenship. This analysis not only highlights best practices but also identifies areas where educational strategies can be improved to better foster democratic competence.

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Reflecting the comparative analysis back onto the RDC framework (Table 7) reveals important insight into the current situation within the LL countries.

Democratic Competence	Commonalities	Contrasts	Gaps
Participation/ Solidarity	- All countries emphasise the importance of fostering active citizenship, promoting inclusion, collaboration, and participation within their national curricula. - Curricula include elements aimed at developing students' sense of belonging, agency, and responsibility towards society. - Various learning approaches and methods are employed, including inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and experiential learning. - NGOs and informal learning organizations play a significant role in supplementing formal education in this area.	- Ireland and Catalonia focus on global citizenship education as a framework for participation, while Finland and Estonia prioritise student participation and active citizenship within and outside of schools. - Ireland places significant focus on global citizenship education with collaborative and active learning methods integrated throughout the curriculum. - Finland encourages multidisciplinary approaches through projects like PALO and Global Meal. Estonia emphasizes collaboration as part of active citizenship, providing opportunities for students to participate in decision-making. Poland focuses more on prevention and education, including engagement in volunteer activities.	- Accessibility and availability of resources and initiatives promoting collaboration and inclusion, particularly in informal learning settings, is uneven. - Disparities in how effectively values of collaboration and inclusion are integrated into classroom practices. - Need for addressing barriers to participation and ensuring equal opportunities for all students, regardless of background.

Democratic Competence	Commonalities	Contrasts	Gaps
Deliberation	- Common focus on respectful discussion, collective decision-making, conflict resolution, and embracing diverse perspectives. - Learning methods include drama activities, debates, role plays, and group work. - Emphasis on skills like discussion, decision-making, and conflict resolution across countries.	- Ireland incorporates restorative practices and dedicated teacher training programs. - Germany involves students in decision-making committees and daily activities like lunch menu debates. - Finland focuses on practical applications within school communities, enhancing community feelings and building trust. - Estonia emphasizes argumentation and debate. - Poland includes school self-government and peer mediation, supported by specific pedagogical materials and teacher training programs. - Spain includes deliberation in its Curriculum on Global citizenship	- - Variability in the extent of imple-menttation across different countries and educational contexts. - Some countries may overlook other essential dimen-sions of collabo-ration and delibera-tion, focusing predominantly on argumentation and debate. - Need for institu-tional support structures and policy frameworks to foster a culture of collaboration and deliberation.

Democratic Competence	Commonalities	Contrasts	Gaps
Judgment	- Commonly found under digital competence and media use, emphasizing the ability to discern reliable information, behaviour, and intentions, especially in the digital age of misinformation. - Various countries integrate media literacy and critical thinking into their curricula.	- Germany offers supplementary courses to train students as mediators in conflicts. - Finland focuses on critical use of information, analysing media culture, and reflecting on the effects of media. - Poland employs methods like PBL and Interactive Learning. - Estonia's curriculum includes judgment of trustworthiness but highlights the need for greater emphasis. - Ireland includes some references to accessing reliable information, with a JC Short Course on Digital Media Literacy. - In Spain, the new Education Act includes in the field of key competences a curriculum entitled digital competence, which also deals with the issue of desinformation. On a practical level, e.g. Catalonia this topic is addressed by the promotion of innovation project in the field of digitalisation and desinformation.	- Limited focus on digital literacy starting from primary school, including misinformmation, AI, and cybersecurity. - Inconsistent emphasis on critical analysis of information and media literacy across different educational levels. - Need for more explicit references to 'Misinformation,' 'Media Literacy,' and 'Scientific Literacy' starting at an earlier educational stage.

Democratic Competence	Commonalities	Contrasts	Gaps
Democratic Resilience	- Emphasis on maintaining democratic values and effective collaboration during crises. - Focus on personal peace, balance, and problem-solving skills. - Shared understanding of the importance of collaboration during crises and encouraging a growth mindset. - Teaching students to set healthy boundaries and individual survival skills in some contexts.	- Irish curriculum includes personal peace and balance, focusing on psychological well-being and individual survival skills. - Polish approach may include psychological and pedagogical care but lacks detailed strategies. - Estonia includes aspects of resilience with an emphasis on collaboration and collective problem-solving. - Finland emphasizes community and trust, everyday skills, and collective well-being and safety. - Spain stresses maintaining democratic values during crises. - Germany involves supplementary courses and initiatives like student mediators in conflicts.	- Limited focus on broader global challenges like climate change, pandemics, and technological disruption. - Sparse direct references to mental health education and emotional intelligence. - Inconsistent teaching of resilience across regions and schools within the same country. - Lack of clear connections between skills taught and their application in real-world scenarios. - Need for explicit teacher training and support in teaching resilience.

Table 7 comparative analysis into RDC framework

3. Principles of the proposed EfD Curriculum

3.1. Outlining framework

3.1.1. Backround and context

As outlined in the DEMOCRAT conceptual paper (D2.1), European democracies are facing several challenges such as the fragmentation of society, mediatisation and promotional democracy, as well as technocratisation and judicialization. This leads to a decline in the representative circuit (Papadopoulos 2013) and challenges political communication and knowledge democracy (Louw 2010). These and other factors contribute to citizens' disenchantment with politics (e.g. Hay 2007), increasing a sense of apathy and disappointment within pluralistic democracies. It is accompanied by an increase in bottom-up mobilisation and civic and political participation, which is not always positive and can often manifest itself as intolerance, disrespect for minorities and bigotry. Also, the need to combat various crises, often simultaneously, with the war in Ukraine as the latest example, has fostered securitisation and opened new spaces for top-down technocratic management.

These developments have been facilitated by the increasing digitalisation and automatisation that significantly increase the top down governing capacity of a limited number of key actors (see e.g. Susskind 2018, Bigo et al 2019). Not surprisingly, this impacts on democracy: its quality and mechanisms have been criticised for not being able to respond adequately to current political, economic, social and environmental challenges (e.g. Hammond, Dryzek, Pickering 2019). Moreover, distrust of scientific evidence (e.g. flat earth believers or climate change deniers) has increased, following esoteric and conspiratorial views, as demonstrated most recently by the pandemic crisis. This is amplified by the tendency of the media to seek news value via short and colourful coverage, facilitating polarisation and weakening political debate. The technical opportunities for producing vast quantities of false or misleading information have proliferated with further digitalisation, opening up windows of opportunity to achieve significant mass media coverage and distorting the public information space.

All in all, the tendencies result in simultaneous pressures of depoliticization and radicalization in the context of an increasing information noise. These feature importantly in the context where the citizens need to develop their autonomous and constructive responsible democratic agency. However, at the same time, there is a revitalised interest in the democratic regulation of key social sectors and areas. From these, there is a growing demand for inclusion, equality and redistributive justice, suggesting that democratic norms have not passed their "sell-by date" for everyone (Regelmann, 2022). Education, especially education for democracy, can mitigate these effects by reinforcing the role of citizens as agents of change improving the quality of democracy in the EU member states.

The educational strategies, pedagogies and tools need to address the above outlined pressures. For example, participation-oriented interventions should pay attention both to the spillovers of depoliticization and radicalization. Deliberative and judgement-oriented interventions should address the quality of information and presenting arguments as well as understanding and managing mediatization and digitalization. Resilience oriented interventions should include reflection and possibly redefinition of one’s role related to all these challenges, and additionally negotiating securitization and emergency governance related issues. The framework for this will emerge both from further work with operationalizing Democrat competencies, and the experiences accumulated within the educational interventions, also taking into account the contextual variations.

Based on work done in Work Package 2, with references to the UN and the RFCDC (Barrett et al. 2018), aligning with CoE's educational strategy 2024-2030 (CoE 2023), several key principles are emphasized in the educational approach. A fundamental respect for human dignity underscores the inherent worth and equality of every individual, fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment. The promotion of freedom, including freedom of expression, thought, and conscience, encourages students to explore diverse perspectives and exercise their rights responsibly. Equality is a central commitment, with efforts focused on promoting equal opportunities and challenging all forms of discrimination and social injustice. Justice is fostered through the encouragement of fairness, accountability, and adherence to the rule of law, instilling a sense of responsibility towards society.

Solidarity is promoted by nurturing mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation, which help build a sense of community engagement. Active citizenship is emphasized, empowering students to participate in democratic processes, develop critical thinking skills, and engage in civic responsibilities. The celebration of diversity and cultural pluralism promotes understanding, tolerance, and dialogue among individuals and communities. Principles of environmental sustainability and global citizenship are integrated into the curriculum, fostering a sense of responsibility towards future generations and the planet.

Furthermore, the cultivation of ethical leadership qualities, integrity, and ethical decision-making skills prepares students to contribute positively to society. An emphasis on continuous learning, critical inquiry, and reflection encourages intellectual curiosity and personal growth. These principles collectively aim to prepare students to be responsible, engaged, and ethical citizens, equipped to navigate in and contribute to a complex and interconnected world.

Initial reflections based on discussions and outcomes from the second national workshop and field work.

The reflections emphasise the need for a broad and inclusive approach to democratic education.

- PROPOSALS FOR NEW SUBJECTS SUCH AS 'DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE'
  Suggestions for introducing new subjects focused specifically on practical aspects of democracy to provide students with hands-on experience and understanding.
- IMPORTANCE OF A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION
  Advocating for an integrated approach that includes various aspects of democratic education across the curriculum. Collaboration with local institutions can significantly enhance the effectiveness of democratic education.
- BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL INSTITUTIONS
  Partnering with local organisations, government bodies, and community groups to provide students with real-world experiences and learning opportunities.
- CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL INTERDISCIPLINARY INITIATIVES:
  Detailed examples of successful partnerships and programs that have benefited from interdisciplinary and local collaborations.

It is important to identify and focus on the appropriate age groups for democratic education to maximize its impact.

- RATIONALE FOR FOCUSING ON APPROPRIATE AGE GROUPS
  Discussing why certain age groups, such as fifth and ninth graders, may be more suitable for specific aspects of democratic education.

- RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE AGE-SPECIFIC PROGRAMS
  Providing guidelines for developing age-appropriate democratic education programs that cater to the developmental stages and needs of different student groups.

Category	Description
Comprehensive Approach	Proposals for new subjects like 'Democracy in Practice'.
Interdisciplinary Programs	Suggestion for interdisciplinary programs and cooperation with local institutions.
Integration Across Subjects	Integration of democratic education across various subjects, targeting appropriate age groups. Current focus is on fifth and ninth grades, which are considered too early and too late.
Challenges	1. Superficial or sidelined treatment of democratic competencies in the existing curriculum. 2. Balancing the requirements of standard curricula (like final exams) with the incorporation of additional democratic education topics.
Development Suggestions	1. Diagnosis of needs and local environmental considerations. 2. Teacher remuneration for curriculum development efforts. 3. Suggestion for a team of teachers from different subjects to create an interdisciplinary program for each school. Teacher involvement is emphasized in all cases.

Table 8 Reflections and dimensions from NW2

- Core values such as equality, freedom, and pluralism, and their manifestation in daily life, are central to both democracy education and democratic living (Männistö, 2020)

Value	Definition and Application
Human Dignity	Respect for the inherent worth and equality of every individual, fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment.
Freedom	Promotion of freedom of expression, thought, and conscience, encouraging students to explore diverse perspectives and exercise their rights responsibly.

Equality	Commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and challenging discrimination and social injustice in all forms.
Justice	Encouragement of fairness, accountability, and the rule of law, fostering a sense of justice and responsibility towards society.
Solidarity	Promotion of mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation, nurturing a sense of solidarity and community engagement.
Active Citizenship	Empowerment of students to actively participate in democratic processes, fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and social responsibility.
Diversity and Inclusion	Celebration of diversity and cultural pluralism, promoting understanding, tolerance, and dialogue among individuals and communities.
Sustainability	Integration of principles of environmental sustainability and global citizenship, fostering a sense of responsibility towards future generations and the planet.
Ethical Leadership	Cultivation of ethical leadership qualities, integrity, and ethical decision-making skills, preparing students to contribute positively to society.
Continuous Learning	Emphasis on lifelong learning, critical inquiry, and reflection, encouraging intellectual curiosity and personal growth.
Responsibility	Ability to reflect on one's role as a democratic citizen, and to define and adjust the role accordingly.

Table 9 Values and definitions for the curriculum for EfD

3.1.2. Target groups

Education for democracy must encompass all levels of formal and non-formal education. For a society to function as a democracy, all its components must work towards a common goal and share a unified vision of democracy. This curriculum outline aims to provide insights and directions for teacher education and students from primary school through higher education, ensuring that everyone possesses the fundamental competencies needed to promote and actively engage in democratic processes.

At the primary education level, introducing democracy, rights, and responsibilities is facilitated through age-appropriate stories, interactive exercises, and engaging tasks. The aim is to lay the foundation for empathetic cooperation and an understanding of common values and rights. For example, children can learn about justice and fairness through stories from different cultures, followed by discussions and creative activities that help them identify and illustrate fairness in their own lives. Simple participatory activities, such as classroom voting on minor issues, introduce young learners to democratic processes, fostering an early appreciation for shared decision-making. This approach helps students understand basic democratic concepts and values, recognize

and respect rights and responsibilities, develop empathy and cooperation skills, and engage in participatory activities from an early age.

In secondary education, the focus shifts to a more detailed exploration of democratic processes, critical thinking, and media literacy. Students are taught to understand and evaluate their social responsibilities through comprehensive studies of legislative processes, the importance of elections, and the roles of various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Critical thinking skills are emphasized to help students assess media sources, understand the role of a free press, and identify bias and misinformation. Interactive elements like debates, model parliaments, and simulations of democratic processes, such as mock elections, are employed to deepen students' practical understanding of democratic principles and prepare them for active civic participation. This method ensures that students analyse democratic processes and institutions, develop critical thinking and media literacy, engage in practical democratic activities, and understand the importance of civic engagement.

At the higher education level, advanced courses delve into the complexities of democratic governance, the role of international institutions in democracy, and policy analysis. Students engage in extensive research projects, internships with democratic organizations, and case studies that illustrate the challenges of maintaining democracy in diverse cultural contexts. Seminars and workshops led by visiting academics and professionals provide various perspectives on contemporary democratic issues. The goal at this stage is to equip students not only to participate in democratic processes but also to lead and innovate in fields that support the development and maintenance of democratic institutions. Through this approach, students conduct advanced research on democratic governance, analyse the role of international democratic institutions, participate in practical experiences, and are prepared to lead and innovate in democratic fields.

Education for democracy should not be confined to formal education settings. Non-formal education, including community programs, workshops, and civic organizations, plays a crucial role in promoting democratic values across all age groups. These programs can provide lifelong learning opportunities, fostering an ongoing commitment to democratic principles and active citizenship. Non-formal education can be tailored to specific community needs, addressing local issues and encouraging grassroots participation. This aspect of education engages individuals in community-based democratic activities, promotes lifelong learning of democratic values, addresses local democratic issues, and encourages grassroots participation.

The framework of the curriculum is crafted to be flexible and adaptable across various educational levels. It highlights the significance of age-appropriate development and the careful consideration of target groups in both pedagogical practices and implementation. Although the core principles remain consistent, the methods and depth of content are adjusted to meet the distinct needs of participants in primary, secondary, higher education, and non-formal education settings.

The Outline for a European curriculum for EfD developed in DEMOCRAT aims to foster a shared understanding and commitment to democratic values across all levels of education. By doing so, it prepares individuals to actively contribute to democratic society, ensuring that all parts of the system work towards the common goal of sustaining and promoting democracy.

3.1.3. Organising

Drawing on the country-based and comparative elements of desk-based and fieldwork research, alongside existing reports stemming from WP2, this report proposes an organizing framework which may shape the development of an outline of EfD curricula. The desk-based and fieldwork research suggests that this provision

should be comprehensive (supporting interdisciplinarity and integration), contextualized (supporting context-specific enactment in light of local conditions and local curricula), responsive (open to changes/opportunities in curricula, e.g., new subjects, curricular reform), child-centered (e.g., age-focused and appropriate, Article 12 UNCRC, co-construction), and recognising teacher agency (e.g., co-construction, professional learning).

The aim of this Outline is to drive change that leads to fostering a generation of students who are not only academically proficient but also capable of engaging actively and responsibly in democratic processes. This principle is the foundation of the entire structure of the educational content and its implementation where democratic values and competencies are systematically incorporated and assessed throughout the schooling experience.

Effective implementation of democratic education requires a solid foundation in pedagogical principles that promote active participation and critical thinking. These include effective teaching approaches, participatory methods and the application of real-world examples of schools or programs that have successfully integrated democratic education.

Assessment and evaluation include tools and techniques for measuring students' understanding and application of democratic principles, the evaluation of program effectiveness, and criteria and methods for evaluating the overall success of the democratic education approach and initiatives, including student outcomes, teacher feedback, and community impact. Also, a loop for feedback mechanisms for continuing improvement should be in place.

As with any novel material being introduced into curricula, a challenge in implementing democratic education is balancing the requirements of standard curricula with the additional content of democratic education. There need to be strategies to integrate democracy topics into existing subjects. Also, understanding the specific needs of students and the community is both essential and demanding. Another critical dimension to keep in mind is the compensation strategies for teachers involved in developing curricula. One way to overcome isolationism is the formation of Teacher Teams or professional development communities (PDCs) from different subjects.

3.1.4. Multilayered framework for EfD

The organizing framework for the EfD curriculum consists of seven (to eight) interconnected layers, each playing a vital role in ensuring the effective delivery and integration of democratic education across various contexts. This multilayered approach ensures that the curriculum is adaptable, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners and their communities, illustrated in Figure 7.

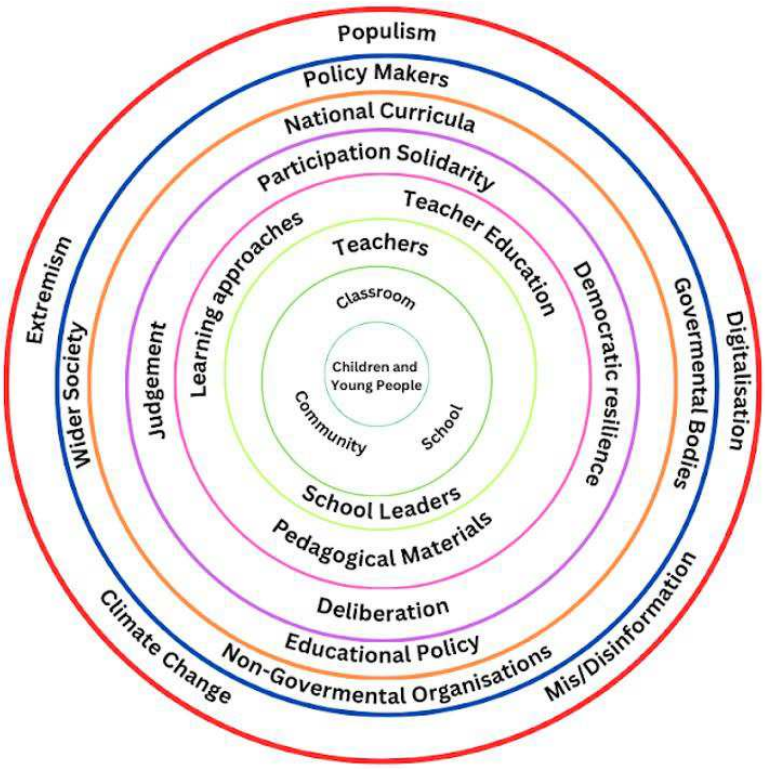


Figure 8. Organising framework for EfD curricula

1. Child-Centered Approach

At the core of the framework are the children and young people. This child-centered approach aligns with Article 12 of the UNCRC, emphasizing the child's right to freely express their views in all matters affecting them. Educational approaches must be age-appropriate and prioritize the best interests of the child. This central layer focuses on supporting children's rights to actively participate and experience holistic and inclusive education, placing their needs and voices at the heart of the initiative.

2. School, Class, and Community (+ Teachers and School leaders)

The next layer expands to the immediate educational environment, including the classroom, school, and local community. Teachers and school leaders are crucial in shaping students' learning experiences. This layer emphasizes creating a school culture that values democratic principles, implementing school-wide policies that promote inclusivity and participation, and fostering a classroom culture that encourages participation, critical thinking, and mutual respect. Additionally, engaging the local community, including parents and civic organizations, supports a broader understanding and practice of democratic values.

3. Learning Approaches, Pedagogical Materials, and Teacher Training

This layer focuses on the resources necessary to implement the EfD curriculum effectively. It includes innovative learning approaches, high-quality pedagogical materials, and comprehensive teacher training programs. Teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to facilitate democratic education, which involves ongoing professional development and access to resources that support interactive and

participatory teaching methods. This layer ensures that educators are well-prepared to deliver the curriculum and engage students in meaningful democratic learning experiences.

4. RDC Competencies

The RDC framework, which includes the core competencies of Resilience, Participation/Solidarity, Democratic Resilience, and Deliberation, is integral to the curriculum. These competencies must be implemented both in teacher training and within schools, as well as in broader contexts outside formal education. This layer ensures that students develop the skills necessary to navigate and contribute to democratic societies. Practical applications might include classroom discussions, participatory projects, and resilience-building activities that enhance students' understanding and practice of democracy.

5. National Organizing Level of Educational Policy and Curricula

The curriculum must align with national education policies and curricula, reflecting specific educational standards and requirements. This layer involves understanding and integrating with national education standards while incorporating democratic education elements. It is essential to consider local educational contexts and specific national challenges to democracy, such as populism or misinformation, to ensure the curriculum's relevance and effectiveness. National education policies must support the integration of democratic education to create a coherent and supportive framework for schools.

6. Political and Societal Context

The broader political and societal context forms the penultimate layer of the framework. This includes the roles of policymakers, governmental and non-governmental bodies, and the wider society in shaping democratic education. This layer acknowledges the diverse forms of democracy practiced across different contexts and the influence these practices have on educational approaches. It highlights the importance of supportive policies and societal engagement in fostering a democratic culture within educational systems.

7. Global Context

The outermost layer addresses the global dimension of democratic education. This includes global issues such as climate change, international cooperation, and global citizenship. It is crucial for students to understand their role in the global community and the importance of sustainability and environmental stewardship in a democratic context. This layer ensures that students are prepared to engage with and address global challenges, fostering a sense of global responsibility and interconnectedness.

This framework presents a potential avenue for the development of Local Projects. Teachers practice within the context of their national curriculum, broader education policy, and specific national environments, which include threats to democracy such as populism. Teachers in different contexts, whether by country or educational level, can find connections and harmony between the DEMOCRAT RDC framework (Judgement, Participation/Solidarity, Democratic Resilience, Deliberation) and their national curricula.

Through teacher education, engagement with pedagogical materials, and specialized learning approaches—potentially facilitated by the DEMOCRAT project—teachers can transform specific elements of the DEMOCRAT RDC into classroom, whole school, and community-based education practices, both within and beyond the curriculum. As children and young people learn about, through, and for democracy, they will deepen their democratic competencies. Their participation in the DEMOCRAT project is expected to support the strengthening of EfD in their national contexts and across Europe.

The multilayered framework for the EfD curriculum ensures a comprehensive, inclusive, and adaptable approach to democratic education. By considering the interactions and influences of various levels—from the individual child to the global community—the curriculum supports the development of democratic values and competencies across diverse educational contexts. This structured approach lays the foundation for a robust and effective EfD curriculum, preparing individuals to actively contribute to and sustain democratic societies.

3.2. RDC Framework as core content

Based on our research, national contexts, and insights gained during the project, we propose that the curriculum should consist of these RDC competencies alongside a general understanding of civic education and how society functions, typically part of civic education, history, or social studies, already integrated into most countries' curricula, providing the foundational knowledge necessary for understanding how democratic societies function, including the principles of democracy, the role of government, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. This aligns with most of the European curricula having these themes as both part of civic, social or history studies and cross-cutting themes within the curriculum.

3.2.1. RDC competences learning outcomes

The Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) framework aims to foster democratic agency among individuals by developing four key competencies: Solidary Participation, Deliberation, Judgement (and Critical Thinking), and Democratic Resilience. The competencies are dynamic and evolving, designed to work jointly, each supporting the other. Each competence is essential for nurturing active, informed, and resilient democratic citizens capable of participating in and contributing to democratic processes and institutions.

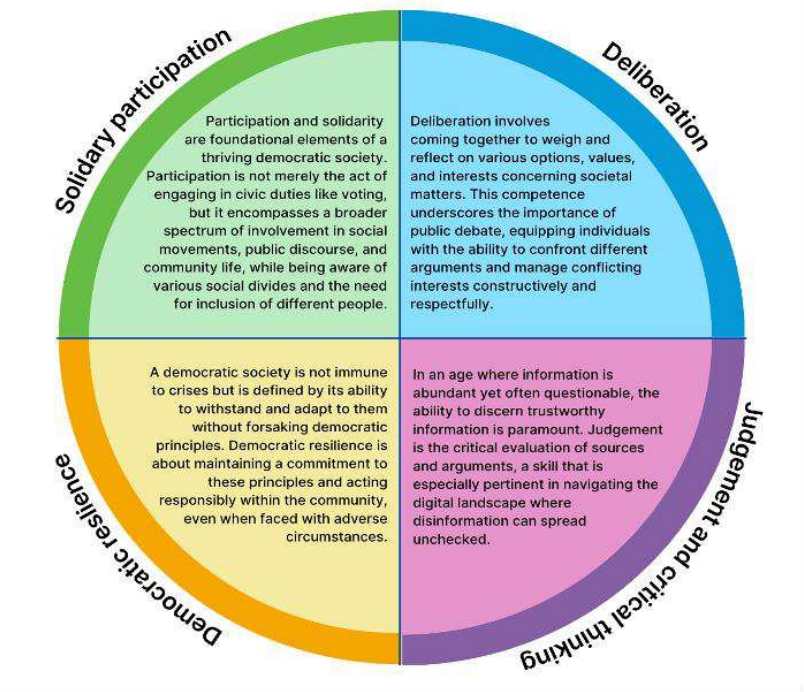


Figure 9. The four Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) competencies (Hytti, Hallik, Sandström & Kalev, 2024).

1. Solidary Participation

A fully competent individual in participation demonstrates a deep commitment to inclusivity and collaboration, understanding that active engagement in society is a shared responsibility. They work effectively within diverse groups, ensuring that marginalized voices are included and solidarity among communities is fostered. By addressing inequalities and promoting equity, they use their understanding of civic concepts like democracy, justice, and rights to drive meaningful societal change. Equipped with strong teamwork and conflict resolution skills, they foster constructive dialogue, build consensus, and take initiative in civic duties, community projects, and digital platforms. Their participation is

marked by an ability to lead collective efforts, creating opportunities for inclusive collaboration while championing democratic values with empathy and respect.

2. Deliberation

Deliberation, as the cornerstone of democratic discourse, requires respectful and reasoned engagement with diverse viewpoints. A competent individual excels in facilitating thoughtful debates and dialogues, ensuring that marginalized perspectives are included and valued. They construct and evaluate logical arguments with clarity, managing conflicting interests constructively, even in the absence of consensus. Through critical reflection on personal biases and emotional responses, they foster mutual understanding and empathy during discussions. In the digital realm, they engage responsibly, avoiding polarization and misinformation, and contributing to public discourse in ways that enhance democratic participation. Moreover, they lead deliberative processes in various contexts, from community forums to global discussions, using innovative communication strategies to drive ethical and impactful civic engagement.

3. Judgement & Critical Thinking

Judgment and critical thinking are vital for navigating the complexities of the digital age and ensuring informed decision-making. A competent individual critically evaluates information, discerning credibility and identifying biases, propaganda, and power dynamics in various media. Their advanced media literacy enables them to analyze and synthesize complex information, understanding its societal implications and reflecting on their ethical consequences. They adapt their viewpoints when presented with credible new evidence, fostering a mindset of intellectual openness and adaptability. In community settings, they lead initiatives to promote media literacy and ethical decision-making, helping others navigate misinformation and make thoughtful societal contributions. Their application of critical thinking extends to real-world challenges, using advanced reasoning and ethical judgment to inspire change and address pressing societal issues.

4. Democratic Resilience

Democratic resilience focuses on sustaining democratic values and principles, even in the face of adversity. A resilient individual understands the importance of emotional regulation, managing stress and strong emotions during crises or political debates. They reflect on their values and biases, fostering ethical decision-making and collective adaptability. By embracing setbacks as opportunities for growth, they support others through challenges, fostering a culture of mutual encouragement and compromise. Resilient individuals innovate solutions to societal challenges, ensuring inclusivity and equity while upholding democratic principles. They adapt democratic processes to evolving needs, leading efforts to sustain democratic values through creative problem-solving and ethical leadership. Their resilience inspires others, promoting collective well-being and protecting democratic practices in diverse and dynamic contexts.

3.2.2. Holistic Approach to Learning Outcomes

Each RDC competency is intricately linked, creating a comprehensive framework for preparing individuals to actively and responsibly engage in democratic societies. The competencies align with overarching learning outcomes that aim to:

- Develop informed, reflective, and active citizens.
- Foster a deep understanding of democratic values, principles, and practices.
- Equip individuals with the skills and resilience needed to navigate and address societal challenges collaboratively.

These competencies and their associated outcomes lay the foundation for structured assessment and evaluation methods, ensuring that RDC principles translate effectively into actionable and impactful learning experiences. This approach reflects the emphasis in the Council of Europe's *Learners First: Education Strategy 2024–2030*, which states the importance of fostering learner autonomy:

"Develop and implement approaches to curricula and teaching which foster learner autonomy, with the learner as social agent, able to make choices, take decisions, act on those decisions and evaluate their outcomes." (CoE, 2023: 7)

By aligning with this principle, RDC competencies empower learners to become proactive social agents. They are equipped not only to understand democratic values but also to apply them meaningfully, making informed choices, taking decisive actions, and critically evaluating the impact of those actions. This holistic approach ensures that learners are prepared to contribute constructively to democratic processes and to address societal challenges with empathy, resilience, and innovation.

3.2.3. Identified challenges

Across the analyed six European countries, several recurring challenges in implementing Education for Democracy (EfD) have been identified. These challenges often stem from insufficient structural support, inconsistent pedagogical approaches, and societal factors influencing educational practices. Addressing these issues is critical to fostering inclusivity, critical thinking, and democratic participation.

Inclusivity and Support for Marginalized Groups

Educational frameworks frequently fall short in comprehensively including and supporting marginalized groups. For instance, in Ireland, exclusion from education disproportionately affects disadvantaged groups such as children from the Traveller community, refugees, and children with disabilities (Mallon & Martinez-Sainz, 2021). Similarly, in Poland, research highlights resistance to democratizing the adult-child relationship and a lack of opportunities for students to engage in decision-making (Olczak, 2010, 2013). Enhancing inclusivity and providing equitable opportunities ensures that all individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities, feel valued and engaged in democratic processes. Emphasizing inclusivity in the highest levels of learning outcomes helps actively reduce social inequalities and strengthens solidarity within democratic systems.

Conflict Resolution and Democratic Dialogue

Conflict resolution, a cornerstone of democratic engagement, is often insufficiently emphasized in educational curricula. Findings from Estonia indicate that while the curriculum promotes values like democracy and tolerance, practical skills for dialogue and conflict resolution are less prioritized (Oja & Toots, 2021). In Germany, teachers have noted challenges in addressing controversial issues and facilitating discussions on polarizing topics, such as migration and freedom of speech (Beutel, 2024). Ensuring that students develop strategies for resolving conflicts constructively prepares them to navigate diverse opinions and build consensus in democratic settings. This aligns with fostering respectful democratic dialogue, a critical aspect of the RDC framework.

Digital Misinformation and Media Literacy

The rise of digital misinformation presents a significant challenge to democratic education. In Finland, teachers frequently report feeling underprepared to address critical media literacy and combat misinformation in the classroom (Gretschel et al., 2023). Estonia's curriculum includes digital competence, but practical applications

for discerning misinformation are less evident (Riigi Teataja, 2019). Emphasizing media literacy and critical thinking equips students to navigate the vast amount of information encountered online. This focus on responsible digital citizenship is essential in an era where digital platforms are the primary source of information, ensuring students can discern reliable information from falsehoods.

Resilience in Upholding Democratic Values During Crises

Maintaining democratic values during crises is essential but often overlooked in educational curricula. In Poland, democratic principles are often taught abstractly, with limited emphasis on how these values apply during societal challenges (Śliwerski, 2011). Similarly, in Ireland, students express dissatisfaction with inadequate opportunities to practice democratic engagement beyond theoretical learning (Forde et al., 2018). The RDC framework addresses this gap by emphasizing the importance of resilience strategies that prepare students to uphold democratic norms even during adverse situations. This focus helps sustain the integrity of democratic institutions while equipping students with the tools to act responsibly and ethically.

Teacher Preparation and Pedagogical Gaps

A significant barrier across countries is the lack of teacher preparation for implementing EfD effectively. In Finland, only 25% of teachers feel confident teaching democracy and human rights education, despite strong legislative and curricular frameworks (Hannuksela et al., 2024). Estonia also struggles with high teacher autonomy, which can lead to uneven emphasis on democratic education depending on individual educators' priorities (Erss, 2018). Addressing these gaps requires systematic teacher training programs and resources, such as Finland's "Hyvän lähteillä" project, which offers innovative pedagogical tools (Männistö et al., 2017). Structured professional development is essential for equipping educators with the skills to address controversial topics, foster open discussions, and implement participatory teaching methods effectively.

Opportunities for Active Student Participation

Students across countries often lack sufficient opportunities for meaningful participation in democratic processes. For example, while Estonia's curriculum includes participatory activities like school democracy initiatives, these practices are inconsistently implemented and rely heavily on individual teacher enthusiasm (Ümarik & Tinn, 2023). In Germany, formal structures for student participation, such as student councils, often address only minor issues like school cafeteria menus, which can lead to student cynicism about the democratic system (Fatke & Schneider, 2010). Providing more robust and meaningful opportunities for civic engagement, such as participatory budgeting or mock elections, fosters a sense of responsibility and agency among students.

Structural Constraints and Resource Allocation

Financial constraints and systemic challenges further impede the implementation of EfD. In Poland, a lack of funding impacts the availability of resources to support democratic education, particularly for emotional intelligence and resilience training (Cohen, 1999). Germany faces similar issues, with high teacher workloads limiting their capacity to implement innovative projects on democratic education (Beutel, 2024). Addressing these structural constraints requires increased investment in education systems and resources to support both teachers and students in promoting democratic competencies.

3.2.4. Implementing RDC into different country contexts:

The project aims to explore how RDC competencies can be integrated into local curricula, teaching practices, schools, and teacher education through various national pilot studies. The overarching goal is to assess the

current state of EfD across different countries and to design pilots tailored to specific needs and contexts. These pilots are intended to support the broader implementation of EfD and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the RDC Framework in diverse educational and societal settings.

The pilots have been collaboratively designed by researchers from the project's national teams, along with practitioners, teachers, educators, policymakers, and institutions. This collaborative approach ensures that the pilots are grounded in practical realities while addressing the theoretical goals of the RDC Framework. The following section presents descriptions of the pilots developed within WP5, which aim to test the framework's ideas and provide insights into its applicability and potential for fostering Education for Democracy.

Estonia

In Estonia, early pilots were conducted already during the 2023/24 school year, primarily to gain real life competence in designing the main phase of pilots and interventions. Eight teachers and groups of students from 9th to 12th grade from six different schools participated. Based on the interaction during the living labs and the assessment of the Democrat country team and participating teachers the interventions had two foci:

1. those focusing on **communication skills, dialogue, and argumentation** - connected to DEMOCRAT's deliberation competence;
2. those emphasizing **active participation, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial skills** - connected to DEMOCRAT's solidary participation competence.

As an example, an intervention in Tallinn 32. Secondary School and Tallinn Kadriorg German High School focused on facilitating the argumentation skills and also used the opinion line or claims game (an adaptation from a theare-based methodology). They used the themes of human rights, migration, social relations and communication in society and comprised of five iterations:

1. Lesson 1: How to construct an argument.
2. Homework: Constructing arguments.
3. In-class activities lessons 2, 3, 4: Opinion line, constructing arguments and expressing personal viewpoints.
4. Argumentation also part of the test.
5. Feedback.

In the school year of 2024/25 the main round of interventions will be conducted focusing on all of the main Democrat competences and consisting of approximately ten interventions (several are planned to be conducted in spring and some of these are still being designed by teachers). The topics were developed in cooperation with the interested teachers. As a rule, the teacher selects a more targeted aspect of the competence(s) to be developed and designs the details of intervention in cooperation with the Democrat country team and with a view of the particular subject. As for now, several interventions are already ongoing. We present three examples of these.

"Local Initiatives by Narva Youth"

- **Instructor**: Kätlin Jürna
- **Grade**: 10th
- **Age Group**: 16–17 years
- **Participants**: 72 students
- **Competencies**: Participation, Decision-Making, and Critical Thinking
- **Timeline**: December 2024 – May 2025

- **Course**: Part of the "Narva Story" curriculum, held once a week for 70 minutes.

"Establishing Student Enterprises in School"

- **Instructors**: Andra and Kristi
- **Grade**: 5th and 6th
- **Age Group**: 11–12 years
- **Participants**: 11 students
- **Competencies**: Solidary Participation" possibly also Democratic Resilience.
- **Timeline**: Began in October 2024

"Global Education: Argumentation and Opinion Formation"

- **Instructor**: Maarit Jõemägi
- **Grade**: 12th
- **Age Group**: 17–18 years
- **Participants**: 26 students
- **Competencies**: Discussion Skills
- **Timeline**: October 31, 2024 – March 2025

These interventions are in line with the national curriculum and recommendations from the National Educational Strategy 2021-2035, which call for more use of interactive teaching and learning methods, such as project-based learning. There is previous research done of the effectiveness of project-based learning for teaching civic skill and competencies related to the RDC competencies in the Estonian context (e.g. Oja, 2018; Hallik, 2020; Valner, 2022). There is also an ongoing PhD project looking at the use of theater-based methods (Kunitsõn, 2023; Kunitsõn et al, 2022). Also, there are several potential ongoing projects run by NGOs in Estonia, e.g. Dialogue Academy, whose methods and approaches are very likely to support the development of RDC competencies. When possible, we encourage collaboration between teachers and these NGOs or even try to invite the NGOs to participate in the DEMOCRAT project so their methods could be tested using the RDC framework.

Finland

In Finland, there is a recognized need to make teacher education more systematic, particularly in fostering Education for Democracy (EfD). One of the pilot projects focuses on examining the possibilities and effectiveness of the RDC Framework within the teacher education program at the University of Jyväskylä. The aim is to explore how RDC competencies can be supported and integrated into teacher training curricula and practices, as well as to evaluate the framework's impact in practical contexts.

The second pilot targets the school environment, focusing on the development of children's RDC competencies and enhancing collaboration among various stakeholders. This pilot involves academia, researchers, teachers, schools, and societal actors, including policymakers. The project takes a holistic approach by integrating content from different subjects, scientific and artistic disciplines, and transversal competencies outlined in the Finnish National Core Curriculum. This approach also addresses the need for educators to adopt participatory methods that actively involve students in decision-making processes, fostering their empowerment and agency (Männistö & Fornaciari, 2017).

In the school-based pilot, students are active participants in the process, collaborating to create a book and a report to be submitted to the Finnish Parliament. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to engage directly with parliamentary representatives, gaining hands-on experience in civic engagement. The pilot aims

to comprehensively advance RDC competencies while promoting participatory education and strengthening the interaction between schools and broader society. By involving students in meaningful projects that connect learning with real-world outcomes, the initiative seeks to empower them as active citizens and contributors to democratic processes.

The project aims to explore how RDC competencies can be integrated into local curricula, teaching practices, schools, and teacher education through various national pilot studies. The overarching goal is to assess the current state of EfD across different countries and to design pilots tailored to specific needs and contexts. These pilots are intended to support the broader implementation of EfD and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the RDC Framework in diverse educational and societal settings.

The pilots have been collaboratively designed by researchers from the project's national teams, along with practitioners, teachers, educators, policymakers, and institutions. This collaborative approach ensures that the pilots are grounded in practical realities while addressing the theoretical goals of the RDC Framework. The following section presents descriptions of the pilots developed within WP5, which aim to test the framework's ideas and provide insights into its applicability and potential for fostering Education for Democracy.

Poland

The projects proposed by Polish teachers address pressing issues and challenges commonly observed in schools, such as students' passivity in engaging with school life, a lack of belief in their own agency, limited capacity for deliberation, and insufficient critical thinking skills. These projects aim to enhance key competencies essential for practicing democracy through a wide range of activities, including organizing expert talks, visiting exhibitions, conducting workshops, and hosting discussions.

In selecting their projects, teachers have correctly identified a gap in the current educational framework—a lack of cohesive strategies that align the needs of young people with the challenges of modern life, such as the rapid development of technology and the dominance of virtual reality in everyday life. Many students feel that they have little direct influence over their surroundings. The proposed projects are designed to empower them to take an active role in shaping their immediate environments. An integral part of these initiatives is introducing students to informal education through collaboration with external institutions, such as the Human Rights Institute, and participation in workshops, for example, "*Auschwitz Did Not Fall From the Sky: The Consequences of Failing to Defend Democracy*." These activities aim to shift students' perspectives and foster a deeper understanding of democratic principles.

Practicing democracy—or engaging in collective, solidaristic participation—will be emphasized through efforts to activate students in school self-government. This includes raising awareness of student rights, encouraging participation in school council elections, and promoting active involvement in initiatives benefiting the school community. The democratic process will be exemplified through realistic election practices, including campaign preparation, televised-style debates, and formal voting with ballot boxes. These activities aim to teach students the significance of elections and demonstrate how their participation can genuinely influence outcomes and drive changes within the school.

Some projects will also explore the role of women in society. Historically, educational programs (often through implicit content) have depicted women as passive participants in social life. However, democracy cannot exist without women, who represent half of the world's population. Research indicates that many girls and women lack belief in their own agency and abilities. Effective participation in democracy requires confidence—I can, I will, I want to act. Therefore, projects with a focus on history and "herstory" are particularly significant.

The proposed projects address a critical gap in the curriculum by fostering democratic competencies such as critical thinking, collective participation, deliberation, and perseverance. They serve as an excellent response to the need for education that prepares students for active and responsible citizenship in a democratic society.

Ireland

Through the desk-based research, fieldwork and the ongoing Living Lab process, DCU has explored the possible synergies between the existing educational frameworks and practices in the Irish context, and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RDC). Within the Living Lab, teachers have identified potential curricular sites for implementing the RDC in Irish primary and post-primary schools, such as 'Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE)' at primary level, and within Transition Year, 'Civic, Social, and Political Education (CSPE)' and 'Politics and Society' at post-primary level.

Participants in the Irish Living Lab co-designed two targeted pilot projects, "Empathy in Action" and "What's the Story with…?" Both projects align closely with the objectives of the above mentioned curricular areas, providing students with hands-on experiences to develop empathy and media literacy—key areas identified as critical in Irish living labs and within WP4 findings.

Citizenship Education – Developing empathy skills

The Irish education system emphasizes empathy through inclusive teaching practices and citizenship education. Research by Cullen (2015) highlights how inclusive education empowers students, particularly those with disabilities, by fostering an empathetic and welcoming environment. Empathy is also integrated across CSPE and SPHE curricula, which encourage civic engagement and democratic participation by helping students understand diverse perspectives and engage meaningfully in democratic processes (Silke et al., 2021).

Addressing Mis/Disinformation through Critical Judgment- developing media literacy skills

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) plays an important role in empowering individuals to evaluate information and identify falsehoods. Ireland reflects this need in its education system by integrating MIL into educational curricula, enhancing students' abilities to critically assess information. The Junior Cycle Short Course in Digital Media Literacy is an explicit attempt to address the growing need for media literacy in post-primary education (NCCA, 2016). This course equips students with the tools to "gather, record, organise, and evaluate information and data," aligning with the emphasis on fostering critical thinking and judgment (NCCA, 2012).

Pilot Projects

In alignment with these strategies, DCU Democrat team and Living Lab participants have developed and launched targeted local projects as a part of DEMOCRAT project that focus on implementing the RDC competencies through practical, locally embedded initiatives. These pilots aim to build a democratic culture by focusing on empathy-based learning and media literacy, addressing both national priorities and RDC goals. Both projects were developed in consultation with teachers, teacher educators, youth workers, curriculum experts, and stakeholders in Irish living labs in DCU. These collaborative sessions helped refine each project, ensuring they were not only aligned with RDC competencies but also practically applicable within Irish educational settings Both projects focus on interactive, student-led activities that bring democratic principles and media literacy to life in real-world situations. This approach makes these concepts easy to understand and engaging for students across various educational levels, helping them apply democratic skills and critical thinking in meaningful ways.

1. Empathy in Action

The "Empathy in Action" project was developed to provide students with hands-on experience that builds empathy and understanding of inclusive democratic practices. The idea for this project emerged from recognising the need for students to learn empathy in practical, applied ways that connect with real-life social and civic challenges.

2. What's the Story with…?

The "What's the Story with…?" project was developed to enhance students' media literacy and critical judgment skills, recognising the increasing importance of these skills in a digital age. It equips students to critically evaluate media, identify reliable sources, and make informed decisions—key skills for responsible, active citizenship.

Spain

In the context of the recent educational reform, the learning situation approach has gained significant relevance (for further details, please see section 3.3). In several Living Lab activities, including workshops, webinars, visits to educational centres and interviews, the potential for testing the proposed European Curriculum framework with primary and secondary education centres has been explored. The selected interventions are based on the learning situation approach, which promotes interactive and participatory learning focused on real-world challenges in the environment.

One of the key real-world challenges is to mitigate the negative impact of migration, which is not confined to major urban centres but is also affecting smaller towns and rural communities. The challenge is to establish harmonious coexistence without compromising cultural and religious differences within a context of democratic norms and values. Two primary schools will address this challenge from disparate perspectives: One primary school has initiated a joint initiative with the village council to establish a children's council. The village has a population of 500 and has experienced a notable increase in the number of immigrants, which has resulted in challenges related to coexistence with the native population. The intervention is proposed as a tool that facilitates integration, dialogue and coexistence between the families residing in the town. The initiative is based on a participatory approach that engages not only the children, but also their parents.

The second primary school employs the medium of reading to facilitate and reinforce the processes of learning democratic responsibility across the entire educational community, encompassing teachers, students, families and the wider environment. The integration of democratic values through reading and debate, with due consideration of the new curriculum of Catalonia and its own teaching and learning activities. The initial point of reference is the reading material itself. Group and small group work, as well as assemblies and cooperative and project work are all forms of activity that will be employed. Service-learning activities, democratic gatherings, and networking at the national and international levels will be employed, based on local networks and close entities. The institution in question cooperates with the city council, the foundation, the city library and bookshops. Both interventions are focusing on solidary participation and deliberation. The Children's council intervention add also democratic resilience.

A second area is the historical memory or culture of remembrance, which will be addressed by two secondary education centres. The challenge is to disseminate knowledge of the history of political persecution under the Francoist regime to younger generations, thereby demonstrating the continued relevance of democratic values and norms for the European Union and its member states. One intervention is interdisciplinary in nature and is concerned with the issue of discrimination and genocide. The objective is to gain an understanding of

the various instances of human cruelty that have occurred from the twentieth century to the present day. The objective is to foster a critical perspective on the diverse anti-democratic political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. It is expected that students will evaluate the information presented in the various media sources and formulate their own opinions based on this analysis. The learning programme encompasses the following disciplines: geography and history, foreign languages, the Catalan language, visual and plastic arts, and natural sciences. The project incorporates a series of fieldwork and excursion activities. Specific learning situations will be devised in order to promote participatory approaches and collaboration with other entities, as well as to facilitate work in the local community.

The second intervention on this subject situated it within the context of the optional course on 'Citizenship, Politics and Law'. The overarching objective is to instil an appreciation for democratic values within the context of historical memory, with a particular focus on fostering collaborative learning environments. Both are covering three competences: Solidary Participation, deliberation and judgment of information.

A third area of focus is the examination of democratic processes within the school environment. The first intervention concerns a secondary education centre that has established a system for assessing teachers and their pedagogical approaches through the lens of the students. The assessment procedure has several stages. At the first stage, students assessed the methodology and attitudes of the teaching staff of their classes. In parallel, each student makes a self-assessment of their attitudes and their learning process. At a second level of participation, students actively participate in the discussion of the assessment results. The results of the assessment will also be discussed in a teaching staff meeting by subject areas and finally at a trimestral meeting of all teaching staff. A case study will be conducted to evaluate the efficacy of this assessment procedure and other participatory mechanisms in place.

The second intervention focuses on a primary school that has set itself the objective of developing further the participation of pupils and parents in the school. Furthermore, it has sought to implement participatory methods in collaboration with a municipal ceramic museum, with the aim of enabling children to contribute to the museum's activities. The project is a long-term interplay between several micro-projects of the school with the goal of increasing the level of participation of the entire educational community. One micro-intervention, in collaboration with the city council, is entitled "Mayor in the Classroom." This is combined with two other micro-projects: "Voices in Action for a Fairer and More Sustainable Environment" and "Engaging Pupils in Ceramic Museum Activities." In summary, this is an education project to be sustainable in time. Its aim is to promote active participation of the whole educational community in the school and town, with a view to improving the environment and transforming municipal spaces to meet educational, social and cultural needs.

The third intervention concerns a secondary school where the intervention focuses on the class Green Delegates. The aim of the intervention is to raise awareness among students and the wider school community about the impact of the climate crisis and the importance of protecting the environment. This awareness brings with it a shared responsibility for implementing measures in the school, but also in the community. It is crucial to show students that they can play a role in addressing the climate crisis through their democratic attitudes and actions that promote sustainability within the school and the community. Based on reflection and consensus building with the wider educational community, activities should be developed at individual, family and school level to combat climate change. These activities should also spread the message of shared responsibility. One aim is to develop a proposal to be presented to the city council.

The first two interventions concern solidary participation and deliberation, while the third intervention focuses on deliberation and evaluation of information.

A fourth area of focus is the examination of democratic procedures. One secondary education centre based its intervention on the simulation of parliamentary procedures. Compared to the other interventions, this one is relatively short, lasting approximately six weeks. During this period, students engage in group work and role play, simulating the constitution of a new government through the simulation of negotiation between different political groups. The intervention aims to deepen the understanding of political organisation, focusing especially on the distinction between dictatorship and democracy, as well as on the various political ideologies and the impact of disinformation on public opinion and electoral processes. Using an active methodology, the parliamentary simulation is at the heart of the project, where students will be able to apply the acquired competences about politics and democracy, working on debate, negotiation and collective decision-making competences. The intervention focuses on judgement of information and deliberation. The intervention culminates in a presentation to the Catalan Parliament.

Another secondary education centre will conduct an intervention to transform the public space of the neighbourhood where the education centre is located. The project works in collaboration with local neighbourhood associations with the objective of recovering the historical memory of the area and designing an urbanistic intervention to reclaim public spaces. The starting point is the study of the access to the school in order to understand the difficulties of mobility in the urban environment of the school. The final objective is to elaborate a proposal for the design of a neighbourhood with more lively shared public spaces and a more sustainable, inclusive and friendly mobility for the city, to be presented to the public authorities of the city. The intervention is based on interactive group work with neighbourhood entities to learn responsible democratic competences in practice. This intervention covers solidary participation, deliberation and judgment of information.

3.3. Pedagogical approaches

The pedagogical approaches within the European Education for Democracy (EfD) curriculum will be further explored, studied, and developed in WP5, aiming to foster transformative educational experiences and promote democratic values across various domains of societal life. The concept of education for democracy extends beyond formal political systems. Instead, it encompasses a broader understanding of democracy as a means to make collective decisions in diverse social contexts. Within WP5, the pedagogical approaches will be examined, aiming to develop transformative educational experiences, content, and practices, aligning with the Council of Europe's "Learners First" strategy and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), which emphasize learner autonomy, inclusivity, and the integration of values-based education into everyday learning practices.

The initiatives will challenge traditional paradigms and encourage active participation in democratic processes. This may involve action learning, challenge-based learning, and other innovative pedagogies aimed at addressing complex societal issues (Sandström & Nenonen, 2018). For instance, strategies for building robust democracies and fostering sustainable and equitable societies will be collaboratively developed both within individual countries and across Europe. These efforts align with RFCDC's focus on fostering critical thinking, intercultural dialogue, and active citizenship, ensuring that learners are equipped with the skills to navigate and address societal challenges.

Drawing inspiration from the creative and cultural sector, innovative methodologies will be explored. Approaches such as forum theatre, theatre of the oppressed, multimedia creation, and game development offer exciting avenues for engaging learners and promoting critical thinking and dialogue. These methodologies resonate with the "Learners First" emphasis on using diverse and flexible pedagogical strategies to promote participatory and reflective learning experiences. While not all methods need to be implemented in each country, the incorporation of at least some of these approaches is encouraged to enrich the learning experiences and align with the RFCDC's goal of encouraging experiential and transformative education.

Central to the approach is the integration of educational initiatives within local democratic processes and environments. The Living Lab Pilot Projects (LPPs) will be connected with concrete political experiences related to sustainability, human rights, gender equality, and the non-discrimination of minorities. These initiatives extend beyond the classroom, actively involving students and educators in real-world democratic processes and civic activities. This approach mirrors the RFCDC's emphasis on linking education to societal contexts and promoting practical applications of democratic principles, such as community engagement and participatory governance.

Recognizing the potential of digital tools to enhance on-site learning experiences, technology will be leveraged. The aim is to address issues of inequality, promote inclusion, raise environmental awareness, and tackle gender-related challenges. This reflects both the RFCDC's focus on fostering digital citizenship and the "Learners First" strategy's commitment to integrating technology as a means of supporting ethical engagement and social responsibility in digital spaces. Teacher training and the establishment of professional learning communities are integral components of the strategy. As the project progresses, enhancing teachers' competencies will be a key focus area, aligning with the CoE's recommendation to provide educators with ongoing professional development to effectively address the demands of democratic education.

As the project moves forward, the pedagogical approaches will continue to be refined based on insights gained from research and LL pilot projects. The emphasis on collaboration, intercultural dialogue, and inclusive teaching strategies will ensure that these approaches remain dynamic and responsive to diverse educational contexts. The country contexts provided below are based on WP4 and the current situation in the Project's Living Lab countries.

Estonia

In Estonia, civic and citizenship education, its content and the pedagogical approaches have evolved significantly since the beginning of 1990ies when Estonia regained independence. The first turning point came in 1996 when the first national curriculum of the post-Soviet period was enacted as a binding government decree, and the first textbook was published to help teachers who lacked materials about civic education. Since then changes and updates to the curriculum were made in 2002, 2006-2007, 2011, 2014 and now most recently in 2023 with a process of curriculum revision that started already in 2016-2017 (Oja & Toots, 2021). The revisions have tackled various problems, such as curriculum overload, irrelevance or disconnect from "real life", too much focus on knowledge versus developing the learner's values and abilities to act as a responsible citizen.

One of the most significant improvements happened between 2009-2016 when the ICCS showed a significant increase in Estonian 14-year olds' understanding of the society-centered concept of citizenship, civic knowledge and interpretative skills (*ibid*). However, the curriculum overload as well as its rather theoretical

cognitive focus (albeit not in the wording of the curricula!) has remained a problem, which the new social sciences and civic education curriculum upgrade in 2023 aimed to address once more.

Nevertheless, there exist exemplary initiatives and very enthusiastic civics (and other subject) teachers who develop students' general competencies, including that of social and civics competence. In the DEMOCRAT Estonian Living Lab, we initiated a collaborative gathering of good examples via an electronic platform Padlet and mapped what we know as a DEMOCRAT country team. We had some of these good initiatives or examples be presented during the Living Lab meetings. While this overview is not comprehensive, the following examples offer some insight into what pedagogical EfD-related approaches are currently used or developed in Estonia.

School-based or school-led examples:

- **Suvemäe Democratic School** - it's the first of its kind in Estonia, a basic school as a branch, yet a separate organisation within another more mainstream school Tallinn Kopli Art Gymnasium. The school involves its students, parents and teachers in joint decision-making about various aspects of the school life, including the curricular requirements, organisation of the timetable, conflict resolution and others. It has developed specific mechanisms for these joint meetings. Students have a lot of freedom to design their own learning journey, thus taking responsibility and making decisions early on. At the same time the students are supported by mentors and teachers. A short documentary about the school is available on Youtube.
- **Pelgulinna Riigigümnaasium (PERG or Pelgulinna state high school)** - a school that has taken as its mission to solve wicked problems of our time. PERG has adapted and made NGO Mondo's elective course on globalization as one of their compulsory courses starting from 10th grade when new students arrive at this school. The students choose one societal problem in relation to climate, environment or democracy and develop a solution either individually or as a group. At the end of the school year there is global education conference during which the students present their ideas to the local community, experts and other students. In 11th grade the students develop their initial projects further as a research project, which is a compulsory part in the high school curriculum nationally. In 12th grade, as part of the school exam, the students look back on their journey as a learner in the school and what they learned from the global education project(s). They reflect on how they have grown and developed as a person and as a learner.
- **Avatud Kool** - this school was one of the first ones to embrace project-based learning in Estonia at such a large scale encompassing all grades and several projects per year since primary grade 1. While the topics of the projects are not all necessarily to do with democracy or citizenship, they do aim to develop skills like collaboration, self-expression and communication. Some examples of democracy-related projects: in 5th grade there is a project with the guiding question "How to develop a settlement, where everyone likes to live?" The students develop a proposal on how to make urban space better and take into consideration the needs of various inhabitants. In 6th grade, there is a project on school democracy, where students prepare the school parliament's elections and discuss how to be an active citizen.
- Many more schools use various approaches that develop school democracy, often by integration of democratic principles (such as solving a local problem via civic activism) or topics into compulsory research and creative projects that students have to do towards the end of basic school and in high school; there are also more examples of project-based learning as well as debates. One example of a bigger role play / debate took place in Rakvere state high school in where students tried to anser a

societally relevant question “Nuclear energy factory - a way out of energy crisis or a way to destruction?” (see an article here).

NGO-led or private initiatives that are implemented in formal education:

Some NGOs collaborate with schools to offer courses in debate, negotiation, global education, and simulations of the EU Parliament and Model UN. For example, one NGO has been piloting participatory budgeting with schools, providing resources such as practicing e-voting and signing petitions with e-signatures. A non-comprehensive list of NGO-based initiatives can be found here:

- Elective course called ‘project writing’ by Erasmus+ and European Solidary Corps Estonian Agency, https://euroopanoored.eu/kvaliteet/projektiope/projektiope-koolides/
- Elective course called ‘globalizing world’ by NGO Mondo and other materials and initiatives by NGO Mondo that focuses on various global education topics and methods that support EfD
- Elective course on democracy called “Who governs in democracy?” by DD Academy, https://school.edumus.ee/courses/kes-valitseb-demokraatias-112 & https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAbOMsiF1OY&t=5s
- Kooli kaasav eelarve (school’s participatory budgeting) and democracy exercise book by Estonian Cooperation Assembly and Corruption Free Estonia - they have developed a school democracy and participatory budgeting voting tool. The use of this participatory budgeting and voting tool is often combined with project-based learning in the participating Estonian schools and the NGO running the programme has conducted surveys showing positive results on student’s attitudes, e.g. 15% rise in students who actively participate in school life, and more awareness of an reported desire to decide over the school budget (as reported in the NGO’s Uudiskiri #36, 2024, and as per personal communication).
- Various simulations (Parliament, local gov, UN etc) organised by different actors
- Proovikivi as an NGO-university hybrid initiative has been promoting and researching ‘glocally transformative project-based learning’ , here a teacher describes his experience of conducting a project in Paide high school
- Kogukonnapraktika
- Väitlusselts
- Georg Merilo Läbirääkimiste Kool
- Demokraatiatrenn
- Demokraatia Akadeemia
- Vivita’s initative Ilmapilk, https://www.vivita.ee/ilmapilk
- Ettevõtlik Kool - develops an entrepreneurial mindset in schools and kindergartens
- CitizenOS project(s)
- Estonian Dialogue Academy
- Inimõiguste Keskus’ materials
- Materials for doing projects in civics lessons, developed during a pilot project led by Tallinn University
- Ethics Centre materials about ethics in school

State or municipality-led initiatives:

- GutsyGo - a scientifically proven programme adopted from Finland

- The Ministry of Education's efforts to renew social subjects' curricula and provide practical examples for teachers further support these initiatives.
- Various competitions, often sponsored by the state, e.g. “Koos suudame” initiatied by the Ministry of Interior Affairs
- Estonia’s Education and Youth Board (HARNO’s) focus on youth participation, projects like “New Power in Youth” which also included finding connections between formal and non-formal education to support youth participation and becoming an active citizen

Finland

There have been many pilots and projects conducted in schools promoting Education for Democracy (see Finnish National Agency for Education, 2023) Especially, various projects and pilot initiatives aimed at fostering student participation and democratic engagement in schools. These initiatives reflect diverse approaches to implementing democratic values and active participation within educational settings. They are key factors as, although most Finnish students possess good knowledge about society, their participation in civic activities and decision-making remains limited (Mehtäläinen et al., 2017).

One prominent practice involves establishing and actively supporting student councils, which serve as platforms for students to influence school decisions and events. These councils allow students to develop leadership, negotiation, and collaborative skills, fostering a sense of agency and ownership within their school communities. Similarly, classrooms have adopted structured discussion and deliberation practices, enabling students to engage with societal issues, express their opinions, and listen to diverse perspectives. These discussions are designed to create inclusive environments where every student can contribute their voice. However, continuous work on discussions and open debate and participation is needed, as it is also the case that students and teachers sometimes perceive student council activities as symbolic more so than driving change (Manninen, 2008; Tujula, 2012). To overcome this obstacle, regular class meetings and discussions should be held to address classroom issues, plan activities, and gather student feedback. These forums encourage open communication between students and teachers, ensuring that student voices are heard and considered in school-based decisions.

Inclusive pedagogy involves children working together in groups to solve problems, promoting cooperation and mutual understanding. Role-playing games and simulations are used effectively to allow students to practice understanding and defending different views. Inquiry-based learning and student-led projects guide students towards independent, autonomous thinking and decision-making. For example, some teachers form stable groups of four students to work together throughout the school year, providing a safe and collaborative environment that enhances democratic learning.

Project-based learning has been utilized as a core strategy, involving students in addressing real-world challenges and promoting teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking. These projects often align with democratic values, focusing on themes such as sustainability, community engagement, and cultural awareness. For instance, schools have encouraged students to design and execute initiatives addressing environmental concerns or improving their local communities, fostering both practical skills and civic responsibility.

Another approach has been the integration of participation and democratic themes across various subjects in the curriculum. Cross-curricular methods link democratic principles with everyday learning, embedding values

such as equality, environmental responsibility, and human rights into diverse academic contexts. This approach helps students understand the relevance of democratic ideals in multiple facets of life.

Schools have also explored digital platforms to broaden participation. Tools like online surveys and digital voting systems enable students to express their opinions and contribute ideas beyond face-to-face meetings, ensuring that participation is accessible to all, including those who may feel less comfortable speaking in traditional forums.

Inclusivity has been a key consideration in these projects. Efforts have been made to ensure that students with special needs or language barriers can participate meaningfully. Strategies include using visual aids, simplified language, and other tailored methods to support diverse learners. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating these initiatives, receiving training to guide participation processes and foster an inclusive atmosphere.

Moreover, some schools have involved students in the development of school policies and curricula. For example, working groups comprising students, teachers, and other stakeholders collaborate on creating or revising school rules and events. This practice enhances students' understanding of democratic processes and instills a sense of responsibility and engagement.

Below is a summarized table in English about the pedagogical approaches related to L7, Participation, Influence, and Building a Sustainable Future, of the Pori area schools:

Broad Learning Goals	Grades 1–2	Grades 3–6	Grades 7–9	Implementation in Schools	Monitoring and Evaluation
Opportunities for decision-making according to age and development	Students discuss and vote in class meetings under teacher guidance.	Students elect class representatives for student councils and participate in discussions and decisions at school level.	Students actively participate in school council meetings, planning school projects, and contributing to school governance.	Class and school-wide voting systems, student councils, and collaborative planning of class rules, activities, and school events.	Evaluation of student participation through council logs, class documentation, and student feedback discussions.
Learning through experience about influence, decision-making, and responsibility	Students practice expressing opinions constructively and respecting others' views.	Students design and implement projects addressing environmental, societal, or school-related issues collaboratively.	Students reflect on societal roles and responsibilities through experiential projects, volunteer activities, and discussions.	Peer mentoring programs, cross-grade collaboration groups, and thematic projects encouraging responsibility and participation.	Documentation of class projects and school council activities; student self-assessments on decision-making and responsibilities.

Broad Learning Goals	Grades 1–2	Grades 3–6	Grades 7–9	Implementation in Schools	Monitoring and Evaluation
Understanding societal systems and collaborative work beyond school	Students are introduced to societal rules through practical examples and discussions.	Students learn about media literacy and use its tools for advocacy while participating in environmental or civic projects.	Students collaborate with external organizations and explore broader civic systems, such as local government, NGOs, and media outlets.	Collaboration with local organizations (e.g., daycare centers, elderly homes), environmental programs, and community outreach projects.	Monitoring participation in external collaborations, surveys on student learning outcomes, and feedback from external partners.
Media literacy and its influence	Students are guided to use simple media tools and recognize their role in communication.	Students critically evaluate media content and its societal implications, practicing media creation and advocacy skills.	Students analyse media critically and explore its role in influencing societal change, engaging in media-related projects and campaigns.	Media literacy weeks, workshops with external experts, and integration of media literacy into class projects.	Monitoring student participation in media-related projects and evaluating their critical thinking through presentations or portfolios.
Expressing views constructively and solving conflicts collaboratively	Students practice conflict resolution in classroom settings through role-playing and guided discussions.	Students engage in conflict resolution and decision-making activities in class and school-wide contexts.	Students lead group projects and initiatives, practicing negotiation, mediation, and critical discussion skills.	Use of collaborative learning methods, peer-led group activities, and classroom discussions focusing on problem-solving and teamwork.	Observation of group dynamics during projects and self-assessments by students on collaborative skills.

Broad Learning Goals	Grades 1–2	Grades 3–6	Grades 7–9	Implementation in Schools	Monitoring and Evaluation
Encouragement to consider equality, justice, and sustainable practices	Students discuss basic fairness and equality concepts in classroom activities.	Students reflect on proposals from equality, justice, and sustainability perspectives during group projects.	Students critically assess societal practices and explore how to advocate for sustainable well-being and equity in broader contexts.	Thematic days, school council-led initiatives, and integration of sustainability topics into class discussions and projects.	Evaluation of thematic days and projects through student feedback and teacher observations.
Planning and assessing their learning environment and work	Students help design and arrange their classroom and choose some aspects of their studies.	Students are involved in planning, implementing, and assessing group activities and schoolwide events.	Students contribute to school-wide planning, from event organization to evaluating the learning environment's functionality.	Encouragement for students to suggest changes in their learning environments; collaborative planning of events and projects with teachers.	Self-assessments and teacher-student evaluation discussions focusing on students' roles in planning and decision-making.
Understanding the impact of personal choices on self, community, and environment	Students explore the concept of environmental responsibility through hands-on nature experiences.	Students deepen their understanding of sustainability through recycling projects, environmental clubs, and outdoor learning activities.	Students analyse the global impact of sustainability through projects, debates, and collaborative work with external stakeholders.	Nature trips, school environmental programs, recycling initiatives, and inclusion of sustainability themes in class projects.	Monitoring through yearly environmental program reviews, project logs, and evaluations by students and staff.

Table Pedagogical approaches related to L7, Participation, Influence, and Building a Sustainable Futureof the Pori area schools

This table outlines how pedagogical approaches are implemented at different grade levels in Pori schools to meet the L7 objectives while ensuring a progression of skills and experiences across age groups. The monitoring and evaluation column reflects how these efforts are tracked and assessed.

Teacher education examples

Pedagogical approaches in teacher education for democracy emphasize holistic and integrative methods that prepare future educators to promote democratic values and practices in their teaching. Rautiainen, Hiljanen, and Tallavaara (2024) highlight the significance of inquiry-based learning, where teacher candidates engage actively in reflective and investigative practices to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of democracy as a dynamic process and empowers students to take an active role in shaping democratic learning environments.

Additionally, phenomenon-based learning, as discussed by Rautiainen et al. (2024), provides a framework for exploring democracy as a multifaceted phenomenon. By organizing studies around broad themes such as "education, society, and change," this approach enables teacher candidates to develop a comprehensive and interdisciplinary understanding of democracy's role in education. Emotional engagement, particularly through discussions on societal inequalities and cultural issues, further supports students' personal commitment to democratic principles.

Rautiainen et al. (2024) also explore transcurricular approaches, which embed democratic principles across the entire curriculum and school culture, transcending traditional subject boundaries. This perspective promotes democracy as a way of life rather than a discrete topic. Through team teaching, instructors model democratic collaboration and co-learning, challenging traditional notions of teacher authority and fostering a shared responsibility for democratic education.

Critical reflection is a cornerstone of these pedagogical approaches, enabling students to examine their own beliefs, values, and practices in relation to democratic education. Rautiainen et al. (2024) note that addressing challenges and crises within educational contexts provides opportunities for growth, encouraging adaptability and resilience among teacher candidates. Furthermore, the emphasis on living democratic values in practice, as seen in the Derby group experiment, underscores the importance of creating inclusive and participatory learning environments where equality and diversity are not only taught but also experienced in everyday interactions.

These approaches collectively highlight the transformative potential of teacher education in cultivating active and reflective democratic educators. By integrating inquiry-based, phenomenon-based, and transcurricular strategies with critical reflection and collaboration, teacher education programs can foster the skills, attitudes, and values necessary for promoting democracy in both classrooms and broader society.

In other pilots and studies, pedagogical approaches identified as effective for education for democracy (EfD) in teacher training emphasize critical thinking, participation, and interdisciplinary methods. **Philosophy for children** (Alisaari et al., 2017) promotes critical reflection and empathy through open-ended, Socratic questioning. It engages quieter students and fosters active dialogue. Similarly, **crafts and physical education** offer avenues for addressing democracy and human rights by critically examining global labor practices and societal inequalities, encouraging moral reflection and inclusivity (Heikkinen-Jokilahti & Kuusinen, 2017).

Drama-based methods (Heikkinen-Jokilahti & Kuusinen, 2017) effectively engage learners by exploring societal norms and fostering collaborative analysis of values and justice. Cross-disciplinary approaches, such as integrating democratic themes across curricula, help teacher candidates see democracy as a holistic, lived practice (Rautiainen et al., 2014). Inquiry-based learning, collaborative projects, and real-world applications deepen theoretical and practical understanding of democratic education.

Challenges include the need for more time and support for these methods, but their transformative potential in fostering active democratic engagement in schools is evident (Alisaari et al., 2017; Heikkinen-Jokilahti & Kuusinen, 2017).

Ireland

In Ireland, innovative pedagogical approaches are shaping the landscape of education both within the context of Living Labs and traditional classroom settings.The Irish Living Labs adopt a variety of pedagogical approaches designed to foster Education for Democracy (EfD) through experiential learning, participatory methods, active learning, and design-based learning. These labs function on the principles of co-creation and communities of practice, involving stakeholders from various educational sectors—such as teacher educators, youth sector workers, and teachers—in the collaborative design and implementation of educational interventions.

The workshop sessions in the Living Labs, (such as NW1 on November 13, 2023, NW2 on January 24, 2024, and NW3a on April 17, 2024), focused on practical, real-world scenarios. For instance, participants explored challenges to democracy through a walking gallery in NW2 and designed pilot projects to address these challenges in NW3. These activities allowed participants to engage deeply with the material, sharing existing practices, discussing development avenues, and reflecting on their experiences.

Design-based learning played a significant role, especially in later sessions like NW3, where participants used design thinking principles to brainstorm and outline intervention plans tailored to specific needs. This approach promoted continuous improvement and ensured that interventions were well-aligned with EfD goals. Overall, the Living Labs emphasised collaboration, reflection, and hands-on engagement in learning processes.

Separately, Irish classrooms use a variety of engaging and dynamic pedagogical strategies to promote critical thinking, democratic participation, and ethical understanding among students. In Irish classrooms, educators employ active and collaborative pedagogies to foster critical thinking, democratic participation, and ethical awareness. The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, for example, emphasises active learning approaches, such as role-play, cooperative games, and group discussions, which are shown to enhance democratic skills (PDST, n.d.). These methods create interactive, inclusive learning environments where students build essential social and civic skills, like empathy and collaboration. According to the SPHE guidelines (1999), engaging students in practical, reflective activities fosters a sense of responsibility and shared understanding that contributes to democratic development.

Building on this foundation, critical inquiry is encouraged across disciplines, with a particular focus on asking questions, collecting data, and drawing conclusions, which is integrated through activities like mind-mapping and interdisciplinary studies. Irish educational guidelines emphasize that “pupils will participate in learning strategies which are active and experiential and which help them to develop a range of transferable critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills” (Senior Cycle, Transition Year Guidelines). Similarly, primary guidelines support inquiry-based learning by encouraging students to “identify their own problems for investigation and to suggest ways in which experiments might be carried out” (Primary Geography Teacher Guidelines). National studies affirm that these inquiry-based approaches nurture adaptable, analytical skills essential for democratic participation, preparing students to approach problems critically and collaboratively (Connolly, Logue, & Calderon, 2023).

Creative methods such as drama, storytelling, and art are used not only to engage students but also to deepen their understanding and emotional connection to the material. Programmes like the Creative Ireland Programme’s Creative Youth initiative and Grow from Seeds emphasise that creativity is integral to learning,

supporting a holistic educational approach that nurtures students academically and as ethical, proactive members of their communities (Creative Ireland Programme, n.d.; Grow from Seeds, 2019.). According to the Primary Curriculum Framework, "as children develop this competency [Being Creative], they come to understand that creative activity involves enjoyment, effort, risk-taking, critical thinking, and reflection" (Primary Curriculum Framework). These approaches prioritise the development of the whole child and prepare them to contribute thoughtfully and creatively to society.

These strategies also include active participation in democratic processes through platforms like Student Councils and Green Schools Committees. These systems provide students with opportunities to engage in school governance, environmental advocacy, and collaborative decision-making. The Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) supports the development of Student Councils as a means for students to actively participate in their school communities and voice their concerns and ideas (ISSU, n.d.). Student Councils and Green Schools Committees exemplify democratic systems within schools, aligning with national policy frameworks that emphasise the importance of student voice in fostering democratic engagement and responsibility (Fleming, 2015; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2021).

Additionally, whole-school approaches such as the Yellow Flag Programme foster cultural awareness and promote inclusion, while restorative practices help build a respectful school environment where students learn vital conflict resolution skills. Resources like *My Identity – Who I Am* (NGGE), *Spotlight on Stereotyping* (Equality Authority), *Show Racism the Red Card* (SRRC), and *Voice Our Concern* (Amnesty Ireland) support teachers in creating an inclusive classroom environment that encourages students to explore identity, confront stereotypes, and understand issues of equality (Ní Dhuinn & Keane, 2021). Restorative practices are also implemented in some schools to build respectful environments where students learn vital conflict resolution skills, further supporting a positive school culture grounded in empathy and inclusivity.

As previously discussed in section 2.3.5 (p. 44), there is a deepening body of research which recognises the impact of inequalities in EfD learning.The Growing Up in Ireland study (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2022.) highlights the persistent challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Similarly, the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, 2017) programme notes how these inequalities impact students' educational engagement and democratic development. For instance, research during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns showed how disparities in access to resources negatively impacted primary school children's emotional engagement with remote learning, especially in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (Chzhen et al., 2022). Studies from Trinity College Dublin and the Centre for School Leadership further indicate that school closures exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, affecting students' academic progress and engagement in democratic processes within the classroom (Trinity College Dublin, 2022.; Symonds et.al., 2020.)

Poland

Polish pedagogical methodology demonstrates limited experience in conducting research on effective teaching methods. As a result, it is challenging to identify studies that unequivocally confirm the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of specific methods. In practice, Polish schools largely rely on dominant lecture-based methods, such as direct instruction, working with texts, and completing exercises. The use of alternative methods depends on their popularity within a given school or the preferences of individual teachers. It is ultimately the teacher who decides which method to employ for specific content. More engaged teachers tend to use a variety of methods, while those experiencing professional burnout often limit themselves to basic knowledge transmission.

Polish teachers are familiar with a number of teaching methods, the choice of which should depend on the specifics of the subject, the age of the students, the objectives of the educational programme or the teaching resources. Teaching programs are generally organized in the following ways:Subject-based – focusing on individual fields of knowledge. Block-based – integrating content from various subjects into larger thematic blocks. Thematic – centered around specific topics or issues. The fundamental questions of the teaching process are: Why teach? What to teach? How to teach? How to evaluate?

In Poland, teachers employ a variety of methods to incorporate Education for Democracy. Facilitating lessons on topics related to democracy within subjects like Civic Education, History, or English is common. Teachers use creative and interactive teaching methods such as working groups, simulation games, and coloured hats to foster critical thinking. They also organize project-based learning initiatives, sometimes in collaboration with NGOs, where students design and implement interventions like community fridges to discuss sustainability or anti-bullying campaigns. Schools also encourage student councils and strive for more democratic governance by giving students decision-making power, including introducing participatory budgeting in schools. Despite these efforts, students often have a limited understanding of democracy, associating it mainly with political participation and lacking awareness of their agency.

To address these challenges, there could be a greater emphasis on experiential learning and community involvement. Schools could expand community-based projects that require students to engage with local issues and stakeholders. Enhanced teacher training can provide educators with innovative and effective strategies for teaching democracy. Additionally, fostering international collaborations with schools and organizations in other countries can help exchange best practices and broaden students' perspectives on democracy. By implementing these strategies, Polish education can continue to strengthen its commitment to fostering democratic principles and practices among students, preparing them for active and informed citizenship.

Contemporary pedagogy places particular emphasis on creating opportunities to address the challenges faced by students through the implementation of inclusive education principles. For the past two years, Polish educators have been intensively developing their competencies in the field of inclusive education, which is a result of the implementation of the Integrated Skills Strategy 2030. This issue aligns with the fundamental right of every citizen to high-quality inclusive education (teaching and training) and lifelong learning. The aim of this approach is to ensure opportunities for acquiring and enhancing skills that enable full participation in social life and effective adaptation to changes in the labor market (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, European Commission, 2017, p. 11). Changes in schools resulting from the implementation of the idea of Education for All require addressing the question of what schools for all genuinely need under the current conditions of the educational system. Creating an environment for students to "be together" and experience the complex interactions that occur there necessitates a reassessment of existing goals and a creative approach to the provisions outlined in the current curriculum framework (Rola, 2021). The modern world, with the pace and fundamental nature of the changes occurring within it, necessitates a reevaluation, reorganization, and often a redefinition of educational institutions. One area of change involves designing the educational and upbringing process in a way that allows as many individuals as possible to participate, regardless of various developmental challenges or learning difficulties (Olechowska, 2021).

Spain

The Spanish education system was still adapting to the competence approach in 2006, but with limited results. Academic literature suggests that the competence approach has not been adequately explained or

implemented and has not led to the expected changes in the education system, especially in secondary education. In line with the competence approach as a fundamental principle of the curricula, the Catalan education system promotes the methodology. Another main approach is service learning, which has been widely implemented by schools since the 2010s.

- The learning situation, a new figure in the Spanish and Catalan educational systems, is fundamental because it already implies a competence perspective. It is very suitable for the implementation of methodological strategies, evaluation and basic knowledge, as it offers the possibility of integrating a democratic perspective in the whole learning process.

  Learning situations are defined and regulated in the curriculum as scenarios that students encounter in real life and that schools can use as a starting point to develop learning (see Domènech Casal 2022). The Spanish Ministry of Education has defined them as situations and activities in which students carry out actions related to key and specific competences, thereby facilitating the acquisition and development of these competences, and they are included as a pedagogical method in the new education legislation through several royal decrees.

  Adapting a definition of learning situation from Gonzalez et al (2011) learning situations are educational activities designed by the teacher with the aim of promoting the autonomous and responsible construction of key competences in the student, steered by effective and ethical performance of the teachers in a participatory and dialogical environment. This concept is close to the situated learning approach proposed by Lave & Wenger (1991) but is not linked to the concept of learning communities. According to Feo (2018); Piraval, Morales & Gutiérrez (2013) and Moya & Luengo (2023), learning situation approach considers the students as agents of their learning process, actively seeking solutions for the challenges exposed in the simulated or real situations. Students accept the challenges, learn to work collaboratively and are spontaneous and diligent participants in the individual and group construction of competences.

  Learning situations present current, past or foreseeable future challenging situations, which need to be analysed and understood to give a solution or in which action needs to be taken to resolve the challenge.

  This approach is strongly supported by the pedagogical literature, which describes that learning is most effective when it takes place in context and can be transferred between contexts (Blanco, España & Rodríguez, 2012). In addition, there is a clear need, as described by cognitive psychology, to facilitate the learners' ability to establish connections between what is already known and what is new, within the context of an activity with a meaning and relevance for the real world (Ruiz, 2020).

  The learning situation approach (Astolfi, 1993) represents an effort to find a didactic format that is aligned with the established knowledge base regarding effective learning practices. A learning situation comprises the following elements:

  1. The demand: The problem or challenge which are presented to the learner for resolution.
  2. The scenario is the real or plausible virtual context in which the learning dynamics occur.
  3. The content: are defined by what is expected the students to learn. According to the new Catalan curriculum, this is linked to one or more competences, compromising knowledge, skills and attitude.

  In so far, learning situations or situational learning are closely linked to problem-based learning, challenge-based learning or dialogue learning. These facilitate interactions in the classroom and promote collective knowledge or competence construction.

The prescriptions of the official curriculum suggest that learning situations must promote cognitively active participation of students, autonomous, responsible and cooperative work, as well as critical thinking. A variety of resources will also be needed, including instrumental (e.g., ICT, games, kits for school experiments), spatial (e.g., laboratory, museums, outdoor spaces), and informational (e.g., history of science, press reports, documentaries) (see Feo 2018; Piraval, Morales y Gutiérrez 2013 and Moya 2021). Learning situations are student-centred. The students are the protagonist participating actively in the development of simulated or real situations for which they propose solutions or alternatives. In this way, students accept challenges, know how to work in collaborative teams and are spontaneous and diligent participants in the individual and group construction of knowledge. Interactive groups are also highly effective in involving families (particularly in primary schools and less in secondary schools) and the community in order to achieve educational or competence goals. In so far, learning situation contributes to open the school to the neighbourhoods.

- Service-learning is a tool that enables the development of participatory processes with a social impact on the local environment. The concept was introduced in Catalonia in 2003 (Rubio Serrano 2011) as a promising way to combine pedagogy and social transformation. Its implementation in Catalonia started in 2010 through pilot experience promoted by the Catalan Government. In 2015, the Catalan Government approved a decree so that service learning became mandatory for the third or fourth years of compulsory secondary education.

  Marti I Garcia et al. (2006) defined it as “an educational proposal that combines learning processes and community service in a single well-articulated project in which participants are learning by working on real needs of the environment with the aim of improving it.” In its best case, it is transformative learning as the students learns through concrete actions in community service that they can contribute to helping the community. It should be based on an informed reading of reality, and principles of active citizenship. Through the service activity, the student acquires knowledge, developed skills and new attitudes. It should integrate reflection on the service practice and its context (see Ballve Martró). It is, therefore, a reflexive learning.

  According to Martinez & Puig (2011) and Rubio i Serrano 2011), its conceptual origins lay in the works of Dewey 1926), James (1982), Makarenko (2006) and Baden Powell (2008) who laid the foundations of the service learning approach.

  One of its fundamental characteristics is the constitution of local collaboration between education centres and other types of entities of the local community that have identified social needs and are interested in such collaboration (see Grup de Recerca d'Educació Moral [GREM], 2014, also Sotelino, Mella, & Rodríguez, 2019; Campo, López & Puig, 2013).

  The objective is to ensure that students carry out civic participation activities and acquire competences for an active citizenship, utilising these to the benefit of the community. This allows for the combination of classroom learning (ten hours) with social activities in the community (ten hours at least), thus providing a comprehensive learning experience.

  Service learning encompasses a diverse range of activities such as citizens’ participation, intergenerational exchange, the local community, heritage preservation, sustainable initiatives, health promotion, etc. There is numerous studies aimed to improve the impact of service learning in the civic competences of the students (e.g. Simó-Gila & Tort-Bardolet 2019) and analysis of good practices, but there is, to the best of our knowledge, a lack of comprehensive research on the implementation of service learning and its associated outcomes (see Bär Kwast et al 2021). Nevertheless, the

implementation of Service learning contribute to the formation of new local educational ecosystems (see Collet y Subirats, 2016; Bär et al. 2020).

One element of learning democracy in practice is the school council, which is a mandatory requirement for all schools. The school councils are constituted by the head of school, head of studies, representative of the teaching staff, representatives of students and parents, and the administrative staff. In essence, the school council provides students and pupils with a valuable opportunity to shape the various aspects of school life through their representatives. In public schools, the primary function of the school council is to debate and approve all matters pertaining to the operation and organisation of the school, including the educational project, the school's annual plan and report, and the budget. In the case of state-subsidised private schools, the school council debates and approves the issues at the proposal of the owner of the centre. To the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of school councils in promoting democratic or civic learning outcomes.

Within this pedagogical context, the selection of intervention to test the European Curriculum outlined in this document was focused on the definition of concrete learning situations in relation to real world challenges. One of the real-world challenges was the increasing migration, which does not affect only great cities, but overall small and very small towns. The challenge is how to establish good living together without neglecting cultural and religious differences within a context of democratic norms and values. A second real world challenge is to establish or maintain a culture of historical memory in an increasing adverse political and societal environment. The challenge is to bring the history of political persecution of the Franquist regime to the knowledge of younger generations showing the relevance of the democratic values and norms which are constituent for the European Union and its member states. A third challenge is to reinforce the democracy in schools and the students' participation in the local community. Examples for such practices that could form part of the interventions are the evaluation of teachers' attitude and pedagogical methods by the students, green delegates in school or the exercise of democracy in school and outside the school by the cooperation with cultural institutions in the town.

Germany

Post-WW II education in Germany had a strong focus on civic education in general. Encouraged by the 2002 UNDP-Report (UNDP 2002) that had emphasized the importance of democratic structures as a motor for sustainable humane development and delared education as an essential component of democratic culture, 'learning democracy' and 'democracy education' got more attention and created a lively debate (see e.g. Breit & Schiele 2002; Himmelmann 2001; Beutel & Fauser 2007). Curriculum development in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia is a steady process with a strong focus on competences (Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2024, p 16).

In Germany, within the framework and in the specific design of the core curriculum requirements, teachers make use of a wide range of methodological and didactic approaches to make students of different ages aware of the basic idea and procedures of democracy (e.g. structures; processes; majority-minority; human rights; protection of minorities). Pedagogical and didactic approaches include:

1. *Lifeworld orientation.* This rests on the basic idea that EfD should be linked to the experiences and realities of pupils' lives. Methods include discussions on current political and social issues that are relevant to the students' lives, such as climate change, social justice or digital communication (Schroeder 2019).

2. *Participatory approach* which aims at involving pupils in school decision-making processes, e.g. in the student council. A nation-wide approach which is widely implemented in schools in North Rhine-Westphalia are the formats "Youth debates" ('Jugend debattiert') and "Model United Nations". "Youth debates" is a competition in which pupils of different age cohorts compete for quality in democratic debating (https://www.jugend-debattiert.de). The format went international based on a micro curriculum (Goethe Institut 2009).
3. The *problem-oriented approach* focuses on immediate political and social problems as the starting point for learning. It deals with real conflicts and dilemmas in class and aims at promoting critical thinking and the ability to make judgments through multi-perspective discussions. It is often interdisciplinary and demands a high degree of initiative and motivation from the students and promotes the creative application of previously acquired knowledge to unfamiliar situations (Reusser 2005). One disadvantage of problem-based learning is the amount of time required for this type of learning. Another problem arises when a group is very heterogeneous, as different levels of prior knowledge can lead to less effective discussions. However, if it can rest on socially shared knowledge in specific learning groups and this knowledge is exchanged through social transactions, this has an important significance for discursive quality of teaching-learning dialogs (ibid., p. 162).
4. Learning through personal action and commitment is key to the *action-oriented approach*. It is a holistic approach with a strong focus on interaction and problem solving and integrates reflections on the learning process and the outcome of the action students initiated or became part of. Practically, it can involve the planning and implementation of social or political projects, e.g. organization of demonstrations, school campaigns or involvement in local politics. In North Rhine-Westphalia, teaching ecological sustainability in schools is systematically connected to an action-oriented approach, in which multi-perspectivity, systemic thinking and networked knowledge are key to self-responsible processes of learning (Ministerium für Schule und Bildung 2019).
2. The *value-oriented approach* adds a strong emphasis on democratic values such as justice, solidarity, tolerance and human dignity. It integrates reflections on one's attitudes and positions through role plays or literary texts, might integrate arts and theater plays or is implemented in cooperation with museums as places of learning (Schmieding 2022). Often, such school activities are based on participation and personal responsibility, e.g. "fair trade school" or "sustainability in everyday school life". In North Rhein-Westphalia, the program "School of the Future - Education for Sustainability" is sponsored by the Nature and Environmental Protection Academy of this federal state and is jointly funded by the Ministry of Schools and Further Education and the Ministry of the Environment, Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Consumer Protection. It has existed in its current form since 2008 and is leading the way in ESD with over 600 participating schools and over 30 active networks. It recognizes schools and networks that put ESD into practice in the classroom and in the school curriculum, in their extracurricular activities and collaborations and make it their mission statement. Other pioneering schools in the field of ESD are the FairTrade schools, the UNESCO project schools, and the Eifel National Park schools and the emerging consumer schools.

Finally, a basic didactical approach often used is the *principle of controversy* which is a core structural dimension and procedure in democracy. Controversial debates in class that shed light on different points of view on political or social issues, probably by invited guest speakers (politicians or activists), aim at enhancing competences of deliberation, but also the analysis and evaluation of media reports and fake news in cases that such sources are used.

In addition to this normative approach, teachers foster pedagogical conditions and activities in extracurricular, school and classroom contexts to promote the competencies that people need in order to participate in democracy as a way of life and to actively shape it in community with others. A growing number of schools can rely on school social workers who have greater flexibility to carry out projects outside the current curriculum and to take up suggestions from pupils.

There are a number of schools who have developed a very particular profile regarding Education for democracy or have become part of particular programs. A North Rhine-Westphalian example for the first is the Wunderschule in the city of Oberhausen (https://wunderstrasse-ob.de). The school is a primary school in which active participation from the pupils is key and covers many issues substantially related to school affairs. It's activities are also related to political procedures in the city, e.g. when pupils of the Wunderschule hold the meeting of the kids parliament in the town hall.

A total of 22 UNESCO project schools are working in North Rhine-Westphalia resulting from the insight after WW II that education can contribute to world peace by fostering mutual understanding and respect between peoples. Accordingly, the four central objectives to which the UNESCO project schools are committed are education for democracy on the basis of human rights, promotion of global learning, acquisition of intercultural competence through diverse encounters, and environmental education in the spirit of Agenda 21. Key elements of the concrete work at the schools are interdisciplinary, project-based activities, local activities within the framework of the four central objectives and a wide range of opportunities for national and international encounters.

Finally, the regional office for civic education is offering schools additional resources and programs to organize day- or week-long projects dealing, for example, with issues of diversity, deliberation, and anti-discrimination (often held in cooperation with NGOs); trips to memorials and places of remembrance (mostly regarding the Holocaust/Shoah) in the spirit of historical and political education. With the support of this institution, across the state of North-Rhine Westphalia there also projects addressing different challenges of the current political situation (e.g. segregation and exclusion, falling voter turnout and dwindling trust in representative democracy) using a holistic approach by connecting schools, NGOs, neighborhood committees, local business, and migrant self-help organizations (Demokratiewerkstätten im Quartier # https://www.politische-bildung.nrw.de/wir-partner/projekte/demokratiewerkstaetten-im-quartier). In many cases, the projects are run in disadvantaged parts of the cities involved. In early summer 2024, the Ministry of Schools and Education NRW and the German Children and Youth Foundation (DKJS) started a new program in which the question how schools as a good place to live and learn shall be discussed making the pupils' perspective (age 12-14) center stage. "The aim of the process to strengthen democratic competence is to install new democratic forums in schools by 2026, which go far beyond the teaching of specialist knowledge about forms of government in the classroom and the organization of student parliaments." (https://www.schulministerium.nrw/presse/pressemitteilungen/demokratie-erleben-jungen-jahren-15-01-2024)

3.4. Teacher education

Teacher education and training play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of the EfD curriculum. Teachers act as the primary conduits through which democratic values, principles, and practices are transmitted to students. Therefore, equipping educators with the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and competencies is essential for fostering democratic citizenship and active participation in society. So the

teachers should learn first about the EfD concepts, and understand and learn the key competencies themselves, and also the pathway for developing them with students in educational contexts.

Teacher education is an integral part of the EfD curriculum, ensuring that educators are prepared to deliver EfD-related content in the classroom. Across Europe, there is a recognized need to prioritize teacher education, focusing on integrating EfD principles into existing teacher training programs. Bolstering democracy education demands a wider societal engagement and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including educational institutions, teacher training entities, parents, and civil organizations. It is imperative to acknowledge the significance of democracy education and ensure it is afforded ample space and resources within educational curricula.

Despite universal agreement on the importance of democratic values, integrating democracy education into teacher training is complex. Recent studies have highlighted the deficiency of democracy education within the Finnish educational system, extending from primary school to university and teacher training (Ministry of Education and Culture 2014; Männistö et al. 2017; Rautiainen et al. 2020). Democracy education theorist Gert Biesta (2007; 2011) emphasizes the critical inquiry into the relationship between education and democracy, underscoring the need for educators to elucidate the meaning of democracy within educational contexts (Biesta 2011, p. 45; Virta 2017).

A study by the University of Tampere, commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, reveals significant impediments to the effective delivery of democracy education in schools. This research indicates that although the critical role of teachers as facilitators of democratic values is well acknowledged, only 25% of educators feel adequately equipped by their initial teacher training programs to facilitate democratic values, highlighting the need for an overhaul and enhancement of curricula and resources for teacher education (Hannuksela et al. 2024). This discrepancy underscores an immediate need for an overhaul and enhancement of the curricula and resources allocated for teacher education, particularly with a focus on democracy education.

Understanding democracy varies across different educational systems within Europe. Each country's form of democracy influences national curricula, learning approaches, pedagogical materials, and teacher education. For instance, the Finnish Social Science curriculum emphasizes understanding human rights agreements, while Ireland's curricula include numerous references to rights across various documents. In Catalonia, the competency-based curriculum includes democracy as part of broader educational policies. In this light, also the structure and needs for the teacher education vary across the countries.

In Poland, initial teacher education includes subjects like history, sociology, and political science, which address democratic education. Elsewhere, initial teacher education may include specific modules that address democratic education, such as module SG215 at DCU in Ireland, which focuses on children's rights and democratic understanding, whereas in some countries addressing these themes are not done under the name of education for democracy. It can also be that there is huge variation within the country alone. Efforts are underway to enhance citizenship education in Estonia, where the Ministry of Education is renewing social subjects' curricula and providing supportive materials and making improvements to pre- and in-service teacher training. The pre-service training of civics and history teachers in Estonia does not currently put a lot of emphasis in preparing civics teachers, only having a few theoretical subjects on it and no focus on civics related didactics - this is an issue highlighted by Estonian Living Lab participants, both in-service teachers as well as experts. These diverse approaches highlight the need for tailored teacher education programs that address the whole EfD concept and also unique democratic contexts of each country.

Given the evolving threats to democracy across Europe, it is essential to consider how EfD can be responsive to changes at national and European levels. Direct references to democracy, democratic values, principles, and practices within curricula are crucial for effective Education for Democracy., but the foundation to implement the curriculum starts from the teacher education. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the diverse approaches and promising practices across Europe, it is the aim to ensure that educators are well-equipped to foster democratic citizenship and active participation in society. Continuous support and professional development opportunities for teachers are essential for refreshing their knowledge and honing their skills pertinent to democracy education, in the changing world.

Across the six countries participating in the project, teacher training programs vary significantly in their incorporation of RDC and EfD principles. While innovative practices and projects are emerging, systemic challenges, such as inconsistent implementation and limited professional development, highlight the need for more cohesive frameworks. Strengthening teacher preparation, fostering collaborative learning environments, and embedding EfD principles systematically are critical for cultivating democratic competencies in diverse educational contexts.

For the participants, the situation can be summarised as follows:

Estonia

Teacher education in Estonia emphasizes autonomy, enabling educators to interpret curricula and develop tailored approaches. While the RDC framework aligns with national goals, practical EfD integration relies heavily on individual teacher initiative. National strategies emphasize dialogue and collaboration, aligning with RDC competencies like deliberation and participation. However, the sporadic application of participatory methods and limited focus on real-world problem-solving highlight gaps in teacher education. Current initiatives are exploring the use of for instance theater-based methodologies and collaborative learning to foster democratic skills.

Finland

Finnish teacher education is robust, requiring principally that educators hold Master's degrees and emphasizing research-based pedagogy. Yet, democracy education is inconsistently addressed in teacher education programs. Recent reforms have sought to integrate EfD and RDC competencies, such as participation and resilience, into the curriculum through project-based approaches. Notable initiatives include student-led publications and direct parliamentary engagement. These aim to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical democratic participation. Efforts are ongoing to systematically embed EfD principles across all teacher education programs.

Poland

Poland's education system offers significant autonomy for teachers to design curricula, but democracy education remains fragmented across subjects. Teacher training rarely prioritizes participatory or deliberative methods, leading to a traditional, top-down classroom dynamic. However, innovative projects, such as realistic election simulations and workshops on historical accountability, are being introduced. These aim to activate student agency and align teaching with RDC principles, particularly in fostering critical thinking and deliberation.

Germany

Teacher education in Germany varies across federal states, many having a strong emphasis on professional training and interdisciplinary approaches. RDC principles like democratic resilience and deliberation are

integrated into subjects such as history, social sciences, and ethics. Programs promoting school councils and participatory governance aim to embed democratic practices in school culture. Challenges include high teacher workloads and limited support for implementing innovative, participatory projects, which can hinder the practical application of EfD principles.

Ireland

In Ireland, teacher education integrates EfD through initiatives like the Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) project for primary educators and the Ubuntu Network for post-primary teachers. However, EfD often relies on individual educator initiative, leading to inconsistent implementation. Current efforts focus on fostering empathy and critical media literacy, aligning with RDC competencies such as judgment and participation. Projects like “Empathy in Action” and “What’s the Story with…?” provide practical, student-led approaches to embedding democratic values in classrooms.

Spain

Spain’s teacher education incorporates EfD as a cross-curricular theme, with citizenship competencies embedded in various subjects. However, structured teacher training on democratic education is limited. Recent reforms promote a transversal competence framework emphasizing values like inclusion and sustainability. Localized initiatives, such as children’s councils and historical memory projects, focus on participatory and deliberative competencies. Challenges include the lack of spaces for teacher collaboration and addressing emerging extremist views in classrooms.

For all the 6 countries, while autonomy in curriculum interpretation is a common strength, practical implementation often hinges on individual teacher initiative, leading to inconsistencies.

Estonia lays emphasis on teacher autonomy and collaboration, with emerging methodologies like theater-based learning fostering democratic skills. Finland’s research-oriented model integrates project-based approaches, such as student-led publications, yet democracy education remains uneven across programs. On the other hand, Poland’s system offers curricular flexibility but retains traditional classroom dynamics, though innovative initiatives like election simulations are being applied increasingly.

Germany’s decentralised structure incorporates interdisciplinary training and school governance projects, but high workloads limit the broader application of participatory methods. Ireland, through networks like DICE and Ubuntu, promotes empathy and critical media literacy, though EfD implementation is inconsistent. Spain embeds citizenship competencies across subjects and fosters localized participatory initiatives, yet faces structural challenges, including limited teacher collaboration and rising extremism.

While diverse in structure, these systems collectively highlight the importance of institutional support, participatory methods, and innovative practices to strengthen democracy education.

3.5. Assessment and Evaluation

3.5.1. Framework and Strategies for Effective Evaluation and Assessment in EfD

The Evaluation and Assessment component within EfD is an important element of curriculum, and effectiveness and impact of various initiatives and practices aimed at promoting democratic citizenship education. A well-structured evaluation and assessment framework is essential for identifying best practices, measuring progress, and ensuring that the curriculum effectively fosters democratic competencies among students. As noted by Looney (2011), assessment frameworks in education play a pivotal role in linking curriculum goals with actionable learning outcomes. It not only validates the effectiveness of educational strategies but also provides actionable insights for iterative improvement and scaling. Furthermore, formative and summative evaluations, as described by Black & Wiliam (1998), provide a comprehensive mechanism to measure and enhance learning at both classroom and systemic levels.

The assessment and evaluation processes embedded within this outline are designed to provide feedback that helps refine and improve both the outline and its local implementations. This ongoing evaluation is crucial for ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant and effective in addressing the democratic needs of and worklife relevance for students across Europe (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017; Susskind & Susskind, 2015).

The processes are more inclined towards **feedforward** (Sandström et al., 2021). Feedforward refers to actions that influence the development and transformation of teaching and learning to deepen and enhance the learning process. Feedforward involves:

- providing opportunities,
- expanding future boundaries and successes,
- and offering precise observations aimed at creating the future rather than correcting the past.

Feedforward is also authentic and genuine. It is detailed enough for the recipient to understand its focus and inspiring enough to prompt in the learner the feeling, "Next, I will do this."

Comprehensive evaluation ensures that the goals of democratic citizenship education—such as active participation, critical thinking, and community engagement—are achieved in both local and broader contexts. To ensure a systematic approach, the assessment framework includes specific tools for evaluating various aspects of the curriculum and interventions (Creswell, 2014; Kallio et.al, 2016; Shadish et. al, 2002; Topping, 2009):

- **Observation Checklists:** Used by teachers to track and assess student engagement and the application of democratic skills during interventions.
- **Self-Assessment Tools:** Visual frames and rubrics for students to evaluate their progress in acquiring Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) competencies, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy.
- **Peer-to-Peer Assessment:** Optional tools that allow students to provide feedback on their peers' contributions and teamwork.
- **Control Case Analysis:** Comparative assessments conducted with intervention and non-intervention groups to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum.
- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with teachers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to gather qualitative insights about the interventions and identify areas for improvement.

The combination of these tools enables a multi-dimensional approach to evaluation, capturing both qualitative and quantitative data. These methods not only provide a holistic view of the interventions' impact but also align with established best practices in educational assessment frameworks (Looney, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 1998). This focus on evaluation and feedforward strategies further ensures that the assessment process is forward-thinking, actionable, and transformative, fostering iterative improvement in EfD practices.

The project will address these themes more in the forthcoming WP5 outside this Outline. The project aims to develop a comprehensive framework for designing local pilot projects (LLPs) and assessing their outcomes. This framework, guided by previous research outputs, will establish common criteria for LLP design, including educational objectives, learning approaches, and evaluation dimensions. Additionally, it will encompass both internal formative evaluation and external impact evaluation of LLPs on local democratic debate. Furthermore, a competence assessment framework will be developed (see concept paper Hytti & al. or D5.1) to evaluate the achievement of Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) competencies through the LLPs, including digital literacy competence related to identifying fake news. This framework will enable comparative evaluation across pilot projects and ensure a standardized approach to assessing RDC competencies.

Throughout the project cycle, national living labs will play a pivotal role in implementing and evaluating LLPs, fostering mutual learning, reflection, and knowledge sharing at both national and transnational levels. Monitoring and self-assessment, guided by the developed frameworks, will be conducted to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

External formative and summative evaluation will be carried out to assess the impact of LLPs on democratic debates and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders will provide valuable insights into the prospects for sustainability and scaling up of EfD initiatives.

Additionally, alongside LLPs, an EfD learning unit focusing on human geography will be developed to further enrich the project's educational offerings. Feedback and cross-fertilization between LLPs and the learning unit are expected to enhance their design and contents, contributing to ongoing reflection and improvement.

Overall, the project's evaluation and assessment efforts aim to ensure the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of EfD initiatives, ultimately advancing democratic citizenship education across Europe and beyond.

Category	Objective	Method
Teachers' Assessment	Assess specific competence aspects in interventions.	Observation; development of adjusted outlines for targeted aspects.
Students' Assessment	Self-evaluation of learning and competencies.	Self-assessment via visual frame; optional peer-to-peer assessment
Control Case Assessment	Comparative analysis for intervention impact.	Comparative analysis with and without intervention groups.
Practitioners' Assessment	Evaluate interventions from external collaborators' perspective.	Based on competence outlines and additional agreed criteria.
At-large Assessment	Evaluate overall effectiveness of local pilots.	Assessment by country teams, supported by national workshops
Scaling Up Potential	Determine scalability and impact of interventions.	Collective assessment via workshops and discussions.

Table 11 Draft of the General framework for assessing the competencies (in WP5)

3.5.2. RDC Competence assessment tool with descriptors

As part of the project, an assessment tool for Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) competencies was developed, grounded in relevant literature and research on competencies and their evaluation. This tool employs descriptors that provide clear descriptions of the mastery levels for each competency, ranging from minimum proficiency to advanced expertise, across four distinct levels. These descriptors allow for nuanced assessment and help track progress in students' development of RDC competencies.

Competence assessment is conducted at two critical stages—at the beginning and end of interventions—to evaluate growth and impact. The assessment framework categorizes competencies into four key dimensions (Figures 9 and 10): **Perspective and Values** (how students perceive and interpret ideas and principles), **Knowledge and Conceptual Understanding** (the depth and breadth of students' knowledge), **Agency and Self-Direction** (students' ability to take initiative and make informed decisions), and **Learning Environment and Application** (contexts where competencies are applied and practiced).

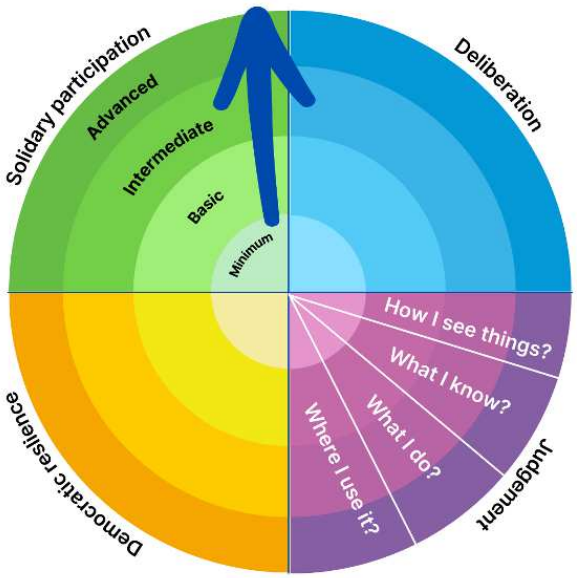


Figure 10. The levels of competencies and the aspects of the competencies: perspective, knowledge / conceptual understanding, agency / self-direction, and learning environment/application (Hytti et al. 2024).

These competencies are assessed with increasing complexity and depth, drawing from established frameworks such as Bloom's taxonomy and SOLO taxonomy, which focus on the progression from foundational understanding to more sophisticated application and critical thinking. This structured approach ensures that the assessment process is robust, comprehensive, and aligned with the project's broader goals of fostering democratic citizenship

Competence	Competence level and descriptors		Assessment in the beginning of intervention		Adjusting the original assessment (if in the end of the intervention you think that the beginning level was different)		Assessment in the end of intervention	
	Level	Descriptors	Achieved	Comment (with a view on the learning outcomes)	Achieved	Comment (with a view on the learning outcomes)	Achieved	Comment (with a view on the learning outcomes)
Participation	Minimal	1. Focuses on own viewpoint, little awareness of personal responsibility and lacks empathy for marginalized groups. Struggles to understand diversity.						
		2. Has minimal knowledge of civic activities like voting or basic concepts of participation, democracy, rights, and justice, solidarity and diversity.						
		3. Relies heavily on teacher guidance, struggles with following instructions, doesn't take actions/expresses own opinion; lacks initiative						
		4. Confines learning and participation to familiar environments (e.g., classroom), with no application to real-world or societal contexts. Shows limited understanding of the need for inclusion and solidarity.						
	Basic	1. Understands own responsibilities and rights within a community/classroom; own identity, usually thinks from own viewpoints only. Can name other's feelings						
		2. Can name and tell something about basic civic activities like voting and concepts like democracy, society, and human rights.						
		3. Needs frequent guidance; can follow instructions but avoids taking independent action; hesitant to express personal views or take initiative in civic or social activities.						
		4. Participation is largely confined to the classroom. Limited awareness of how diverse voices and inclusive practices play out in civic engagement.						
	Intermediate	1. Reflects on own participation, motivations, and can think of other's perspectives, including marginalized groups; shows empathy and starts to understand the importance of solidarity.						
		2. Shows understanding for more complex civic concepts, such as social justice and the role of diversity in society; recognizes broader societal influences on participation, like social movements and global trends.						
		3. Begins to take initiative in collaborative group projects and civic engagement activities; can reflect on the role of their participation and contribute ideas to collective decision-making.						
		4. Applies learning in broader community initiatives; starts to connect classroom knowledge to real-world civic activities and community engagement, with occasional global awareness. Recognizes the importance of equity and inclusion in participation.						
	Adavnced	1. Consistently takes into account diverse perspectives in thinking and decision making, including marginalized groups; shows deep empathy and respect for others' experiences. Demonstrates a strong sense of solidarity.						
		2. Critically reflects on global trends, public initiatives, and complex societal issues; shows understanding of interconnection between civic participation, global movements, and societal impact, power dynamics and marginalization.						
		3. Independently takes action, collaborates on collective projects that promote human rights, diversity, and inclusion; takes (or even leads) initiatives that foster civic engagement, solidarity, and social justice.						
		4. Actively seeks and creates opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in real-world up to global contexts, driving impactful participation in civic matters. Demonstrates leadership.						

Figure 10. Section on solidary participation from the RDC assessment table for teachers (Hytti et al. 2024).

4. Conclusions

The development of a European Curriculum for Education for Democracy (EfD) is a complex yet essential endeavor. The outlined curriculum aims to integrate democratic values into the educational frameworks of diverse national contexts, fostering active citizenship and democratic engagement. This document, a draft in progress, builds upon the comprehensive research and collaborative efforts of the research consortium DEMOCRAT. The outcomes build on content by the various stakeholders involved. The insights are built upon all the material used in the project: workshops, interviews, previous work packages, desktop research, and so forth. The document is a foundational step towards creating a robust, adaptable, and impactful curriculum that addresses both global and local educational needs.

There are already several key findings that stem from desk research, fieldwork including interviews, workshops and other activities, and from the overall work that has gone into the making of this outline and the relevant literature working as the backbone of the document. The most important ones, combined with future directions, are presented in what follows.

Ø Commonalities across countries

The research reveals a shared commitment among European countries to promote democratic values through education. Common themes include the importance of active citizenship, the integration of democratic principles into curricula, and the role of educators in fostering these values. Many countries emphasize the need for inclusive and participatory pedagogical approaches, highlighting the importance of collaboration, critical thinking, and ethical decision-making.

Ø Unique national approaches

Despite these commonalities, each country has its unique methods and focuses. For instance, Ireland and Catalonia prioritize global citizenship education, whereas Finland and Estonia emphasize student participation within and outside schools. Germany incorporates deliberation into daily school activities, such as decision-making committees, while Poland focuses on practical engagement through volunteer activities.

Ø Gaps in implementation

The research identifies significant gaps that need addressing to ensure effective democratic education. These include uneven accessibility and availability of resources, inconsistencies in how democratic values are integrated into classroom practices, and the need for more explicit focus on digital literacy and critical thinking from an early age. Additionally, there are disparities in teacher training and support, which are crucial for implementing democratic education effectively.

The project has, similarly, already identified challenges and opportunities.

Ø Balancing standard curricula with democratic education

One of the primary challenges is balancing the requirements of standard curricula with the integration of democratic education topics. This balancing act requires innovative strategies to ensure that democratic principles are not sidelined but are instead embedded into the core educational experience.

Ø Teacher involvement and training

Effective implementation of the EfD curriculum hinges on the active involvement and proper training of teachers. Teachers need adequate compensation and support to develop and deliver democratic education

content. Collaborative efforts, such as interdisciplinary programs and partnerships with NGOs, can enhance the impact and reach of democratic education.

Ø Local context and customisation

Adapting the curriculum to local contexts is essential for its success. Each country's unique social, cultural, and political environment must be considered to make the curriculum relevant and effective. This requires ongoing research, pilot projects, and feedback mechanisms to continuously refine and adapt the curriculum.

Future Directions

Ø Enhanced focus on digital and media literacy

In an era of misinformation and digital media proliferation, there is a critical need to enhance focus on digital literacy and media literacy. Starting from primary education, students should be equipped with the skills to critically evaluate information and navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

Ø Promoting sustainable development and global citizenship

Integrating principles of sustainability and global citizenship into the curriculum is essential for preparing students to tackle global challenges. This includes fostering a sense of responsibility towards the environment and future generations, which aligns with broader educational goals.

Ø Institutional support and policy frameworks

Developing strong institutional support structures and policy frameworks is crucial for fostering a culture of democratic education. This includes providing resources, training, and support for teachers, as well as establishing policies that encourage and sustain democratic education practices.

The proposed European EfD curriculum represents a significant step towards a more unified and solid framework for fostering democratic values and active citizenship across Europe. By addressing the identified commonalities, contrasts, and gaps, and by leveraging the unique strengths of each national context, the curriculum aims to create a more inclusive, participatory, and democratic educational environment. Ongoing research, collaboration, and innovation will be key to refining and implementing this curriculum effectively, ensuring that it meets the needs of diverse educational contexts and prepares students to be informed, engaged, and responsible citizens in an ever-evolving global landscape.

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6. Annex

Each of the 'aspects' were analysed within each national context, then a comparative analysis was undertaken. The findings of this comparative analysis are detailed below, taking each 'aspect' in turn, with a particular focus on the commonalities across contexts, the differences across contexts and finally potential gaps and avenues for exploration. This subsection finishes with a conclusion on how this comparative analysis can inform the RDC.

Understanding Democracy Basics

ASPECT	Description
Understanding democracy basics	- What does democracy mean (for everyone), which areas of personal life are open for democracy, which are closed - what is society, how does it work - what is democratic political and governing system, how does it work - democratic societies: rights and responsibilities - decision-making processes: politics, elections etc. - infrastructure - - what are the roles and expectations for citizens in a democratic society

Appendix figure 1 Understanding Democracy Basics

Understanding Democracy: Commonalities

There are a series of commonalities related to understanding of democracy which are recognised across partner countries, namely curricular scope, learning approaches and pedagogical materials.

There is a perception that understanding the basics of democracy is found on many, and in some cases almost all levels of the education systems in Germany, Catalonia, Finland, Estonia, Poland and Ireland. However, across countries, there was a recognition that certain subject areas, in particular those focused on social education and those focused on political education.

In Germany, the "Kernlehrpläne" (core curricula) across each education level (Realschule, Gymnasium, and Gesamtschule) identifies the importance of democratic content. The aspect is integrated across the subjects of politics, practical philosophy and social sciences. In Catalonia, this aspect is apparent through primary, secondary compulsory and secondary non-compulsory national curricula. Democratic understanding is central to the Global Citizenship competence which transverses the education system, developing a respect for democratic procedures at primary level, and nurturing democratic attitudes at secondary level.

In Estonia, this aspect is found within the national curriculum for basic school and gymnasium, and more specifically in subject area descriptions for social studies. School content is primarily focused on the theoretical knowledge of society, governance and democracy.

Similar to Poland and Finland, the Irish curriculum makes reference to this aspect at primary and secondary levels. There are 55 references to democracy across 26 curricular documents at primary and secondary levels in Ireland. Once again, there are clear references to this aspect within political and social education. At primary level, the Social, Personal and Health Education makes reference to the need for learners to:

“become aware of some of the individual and community rights and responsibilities that come from living in a democracy” (Primary; Social, personal and health education)

At secondary level, Civic, Social and Political Education:

“fosters an awareness of what it means to live responsibly in a democracy” (Junior Cycle; Civic, Social and Political Education - Short Course)

There are a range of learning approaches recognised as supporting understanding of democracy across each of the countries. learner centred approaches were noted. Active/interactive participatory approaches were explicitly named in Ireland and Finland. Potentially aligned with this conceptualisation, across contexts, play-based approaches, games-based approaches, project-based learning, and situation-based learning were all recognised. Dialogic approaches were also recognised, for example discussion (including listening) and debate. These were not always individual undertakings, as collective approaches were also recognised. A small number of teacher centred approaches (e.g. lectures) were noted in some contexts. There was also a reference to the need for content such as a focus on democratic rules and democratic agreements.

A diversity of pedagogical materials was listed across the different countries. These included textbooks, workbooks, books, lessons and lesson plans and general educational resources. Specific resources supporting the development of democratic understanding were highlighted, as well as organisations whose remit was the production of pedagogical materials. In Ireland and Catalonia, a several repositories for pedagogical materials were recognised. These included government websites regarding general pedagogical materials, but also more specialist websites focused on material closely related to Education for Democracy (e.g. FUHEM in Catalonia, or DevelopmentEducation.ie in Ireland).

Understanding Democracy: Contrasts

There are several differences regarding understanding democracy in each context. Each of the education systems within partner countries are unique. The forms of democracy within each country are also unique, therefore it is not surprising that national curricula, learning approaches, pedagogical materials, and teacher education all address this aspect to varying degrees and in different manners.

Within certain contexts, Human Rights were identified as a detail of the democratic framework. In Finland, Social Science curriculum makes reference to:

"In schoolwork, students learn to understand the significance of agreements concerning human rights in society and the world; in particular, emphasis is placed on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Students are guided to respect and defend human rights."

In Ireland there were 610 references to ‘rights’ across 70 different curricular documents.

Across each of the contexts, curricula were at different stages. Whilst some curriculum has been long standing, other curricula are much more recent (e.g. Spanish Education Act (2020)) or are currently undergoing reform (e.g. Irish Primary Curriculum Framework (2023); Estonian national curricula pending release).

In certain contexts (e.g. Catalonia) the curricula were based around a competency-based curriculum. Democracy was not always the overarching framework, as this sometimes-included citizenship and Global Citizenship. There were some examples of the inclusion of this aspect in wider governmental education policies (e.g. Estonia Education Strategy 2021-2035) as well as in more specific education policies (e.g. Government of Ireland Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, 2022).

In one example of promising practice, approaches focused on consideration of the different elements of young people's lives, such as community-based approaches (e.g. Educational Environment Plans (PEE) in Catalonia). Such an approach was tied to specific educational theory (e.g. situated learning theory). There are some examples of whole school approaches which seek to enable children and young people to experience democracy in their everyday schooling (e.g. school councils; Green School Committees).

Some pedagogical materials/approaches supported the development of understanding of democratic structures. Examples of these included global structures 'Model UN', and national structures such as Model Parliament, or a focus on the House of the Oireachtas in Ireland.

In some contexts, engagement with this aspect in initial teacher education depended on student engagement during an undergraduate degree. For example, in Poland, prior to pedagogical preparation, history, sociology, political science are taught this content. Elsewhere, Initial Teacher Education may include specific modules which address democratic education (e.g. In Ireland module SG215 in DCU addresses democratic understanding with a focus on children's rights). Educational qualifications for practicing teachers may include a focus on EfD. There are projects identified which provide teacher education in the area of EfD. There are also collectives of teachers addressing these ideas (e.g. communities of practice in Ireland). Some teachers in some contexts are deepening practice through action research.

Understanding Democracy: Gaps and avenues for exploration

Given the nature of the threats to democracy being experienced across Europe and to varying degrees within different countries, there remains a question as to what extent democracy is presented as a stable and universally agreed form of government and wider public participation. Whilst this desk-based research presents a snapshot of EfD, at a point in time, it is clear that the threats to, and status of democracy is constantly shifting. As such, it may be important to consider how EfD may be responsive to the changes in the status if and threats to democracy at a national and European level. The direct reference to democracy, democratic values, principles and practices within curricular and elsewhere would appear to be essential to Education for Democracy. For example, if democracy isn't named explicitly, how are children and young people, and teachers, supposed to make connections between other aspects of the competence framework and democracy itself?

At a theoretical level, it is also important to consider the extent to which democracy may feature within other similar educational approaches. For example, Global Citizenship Education; Children's/Human Rights Education; Education for Sustainability/Sustainable Development; Climate Change Education. The relationships between these approaches should be considered, and the practical and theoretical tensions between EfD and other similar forms of education should be explored. Indeed, there is existing pan-European research (which involves 5 of the DEMOCRAT partner countries) which considers the implementation of children's rights education, and the factors which support and hinder its provision. Jerome et al. (2015) identify

that literature reveals the importance of policy framework and teacher education, the opportunities for interdisciplinarity, the importance of networks, and the contextualized nature of CRE. Their research highlighted variances in curriculum entitlements, problematic conceptualisations of rights alongside responsibilities, and opportunities and threats in relation to curricular reform. The importance of teacher education, the need for monitoring and the potential of networks are recognised from this study (Jerome et al., 2015).

Understanding self: Identity and Culture

Understanding self: identity and culture	- be who you are, building identity in a safe environment (also ethnicity, culture, gender/sexuality etc.) - "we are products of our culture", the role of identity and culture in society - exposure to different ways of thinking, languages, cultures etc

Appendix figure 2 Understanding self: Identity and Culture

Understanding self: Identity and Culture - Commonalities

All countries underscore the importance of promoting inclusion, challenging stereotypes, and celebrating diversity. For instance, Poland engages in field trips and international exchanges to broaden students' perspectives, while Estonia emphasizes preserving national culture alongside global awareness. Both Ireland and Estonia emphasize identity, culture, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in aspects of their national curricula. In Germany, Catalonia, and Finland, there is less direct information available about the specific focus of the curriculum. However, it suggests that there is an emphasis on integrating responsible citizenship with the concepts of identity and diversity. In relation to the approaches employed, analysis from both Ireland and Estonia highlight active student-centred learning approaches such as group work and role play. Germany and Poland similarly employ diverse methods including project-based learning and experiential learning. Finland emphasises approaches focused on understanding one's regional identity, while Catalonia focuses on developing a global citizenship competence.

Initiatives across all countries involve community engagement, suggesting a broader collective responsibility in understanding identity and culture. For example, the Fundación Esplai in Catalonia provides pedagogical materials from an eco-social perspective, while Poland's Civis Foundation focuses on promoting civic education. NGOs and informal learning settings play a significant role across all countries, supplementing formal education with resources and programmes. Examples include the Yellow Flag Programme in Ireland, and NGO Mondo Maailmakool materials in Estonia. Previous research has revealed the potential of engagement with NGOs in the development of European teacher education programmes concerning Global Citizenship Education (Tarozzi & Mallon, 2019).

In relation to teacher education, Ireland stands out for its targeted modules like "Teacher as Person" and projects such as the INOVATE Project, focusing on integrating identity awareness into teacher education. Finland similarly emphasises understanding regional identity and cultural diversity within its teacher training curriculum. Estonia takes a comprehensive approach, providing training on self-determination, cultural competence, and the preservation of national heritage. Poland showcases various teacher training

programmes through institutions like the Centre for Education Development, emphasizing the integration of identity and cultural education across subjects. Germany and Catalonia stress citizenship education albeit without specific training examples.

Understanding self: Identity and Culture - Contrasts

Differences across countries in the approach to understanding self, identity, and culture are evident in several dimensions. Ireland, for instance, places a strong emphasis on integrating identity and cultural awareness into aspects of the curriculum, with specific attention given to ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. This is reflected in various initiatives such as the Yellow Flag Programme and pedagogical materials like "My Identity - Who I Am." In contrast, Germany's national curricula prioritize intertwining concepts of citizenship with identity and diversity. Catalonia highlights global citizenship competence in its curriculum. Finland emphasizes the importance of regional identity and human rights, as reflected in its curriculum. Estonia stands out for its national curriculum, focusing on self-determination and cultural competence, supported by active student-centered learning approaches and materials provided by organizations like NGO Mondo Maailmakool. Poland's curriculum emphasizes identity and culture across various subjects, supported by teacher training programmes offered by institutions like the Centre for Education Development. Overall, while all countries prioritize understanding self, identity, and culture in education, differences lie in the specific approaches, initiatives, and resources employed to achieve this goal.

Understanding self: Identity and Culture - Gaps and avenues for exploration

Across all countries, while there are references to the engagement with diversity, identity, and culture, there is an apparent lack of explicit discussion on how these aspects are addressed for individuals from minority backgrounds, such as immigrants, refugees, or ethnic minorities. Potentially, there could be more emphasis on the intersectionality of identity, particularly in relation to gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. Exploring how these various aspects of identity intersect and influence one another could provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity development and cultural diversity. Questions stemming from this comparative analysis include: how do schools or educational institutions actively engage with diverse communities to promote inclusivity, challenge stereotypes, and address issues of discrimination or inequality? How do educational institutions effectively integrate diversity and inclusion into everyday teaching practices? Are there particular challenges associated with the emphasis on identity, culture, and diversity in the education system of these countries?

Engagement and participation

Engagement and participation	- willingness/ desire to contribute/participate in society, 'active citizen' with agency - having the feeling that one belongs and can have an impact (politics, community, society) - participating and engaging in a time and energy adequate way - promote inclusion of others and collaboration - manage one's time, diverse obligations, plan, implement and achieve results - engage in community and political affairs in a time and energy adequate way, with an impact

Appendix figure 3 Engagement and participation

Engagement and participation - Commonalities

All countries emphasize the importance of fostering active citizenship, promoting inclusion, collaboration, and participation within their national curricula. Each country's curricula include elements aimed at developing students' sense of belonging, agency, and responsibility towards society. Global citizenship education is prominent in Ireland, Catalonia, and Estonia, indicating a shared focus on preparing students for active engagement in global issues. Examples from curricular documents highlight the integration of citizenship education across various subjects, such as geography, business studies, and politics. Engel (2014) undertook a qualitative content analysis of Spain's Education for Citizenship and Human Rights curriculum and textbooks in this area, finding that whilst educational reform has pursued engagement with "global citizenship, cultural diversity, co-existence, and human rights'', the curriculum and textbooks offer a thin and potentially acritical conceptualization of citizenship.

Various learning approaches and methods are employed across these countries, including inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and experiential learning. There is an emphasis on practical, hands-on activities and projects aimed at fostering students' engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Again, NGOs and informal learning organizations play a significant role in supplementing formal education in this area, by providing resources, materials, and training related to citizenship education. Beyond the classroom, students are encouraged to engage with their communities through volunteering, participatory voting programmes, and collaborative projects. Organizations such as Hub na nÓg in Ireland, Fundación Esplai in Catalonia, and the Center for Citizenship Education in Poland, provide resources, materials, and support for citizenship education both inside and outside the school environment. Initiatives like Gutsy-Go Tallinn in Estonia and the PALO project in Finland involve students in real-world activities aimed at promoting civic engagement and participation.

Programmes such as DICE Project, Global Village and UBUNTU Network in Ireland, and the Center for Citizenship Education in Poland offer initial teacher education and in-service teacher education opportunities for student teachers and teachers. Collaboration among teachers, educational institutions, and NGOs is emphasized in delivering effective citizenship education.

Engagement and participation - Contrasts

Ireland and Catalonia stand out for their focus on global citizenship education as a framework for participation, while Finland and Estonia prioritize student participation and active citizenship within and outside of schools. Ireland places a significant focus on global citizenship education, with a particular emphasis on young people's participation. The country integrates collaborative and active learning methods throughout the curriculum to foster skills in citizenship, research, reflection, and action. Like Ireland, Catalonia promotes collaboration and inclusion, along with active engagement in community and political affairs. The new Spanish Education Act emphasizes citizenship competence.

Finland encourages multidisciplinary approaches to collaboration and inclusion through projects like PALO and Global Meal. Estonia emphasizes collaboration as part of active citizenship and provides opportunities for students to participate in decision-making. Poland integrates collaboration and inclusion into school programmes but focuses more on prevention and education, including engagement in volunteer activities.

These differences highlight varying degrees of emphasis and implementation of collaborative and inclusive practices in fostering active citizenship and societal engagement across the countries.

Engagement and participation - Gaps and avenues for exploration

The accessibility and availability of resources and initiatives promoting collaboration and inclusion, particularly in informal learning settings, represents a particular gap in relation to engagement and participation. Even in countries where collaboration and inclusion are emphasized, such as Ireland and Catalonia, there may be disparities in how effectively these values are integrated into classroom practices. Some schools or teachers may prioritize these values more than others, resulting in unequal experiences for students. Countries need to address barriers to participation and ensure that all students, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to engage in collaborative and inclusive learning environments.

Questions stemming from these comparative analyses include: How do countries foster partnerships between schools, communities, and other stakeholders to promote collaboration and inclusion in education? To what extent are collaborative activities inclusive of marginalized or underrepresented groups, and how are these groups actively engaged in decision-making processes?

Commitment to ethics, norms, democratic values

Commitment to ethics, norms, democratic values	- personal responsibility as a democratic citizen - defending democracy - not compromising on ethical principles for short-term gain - being aware and addressing social inequalities in democratic processes, particularly during crises

Appendix figure 4 Commitment to ethics, norms, democratic values

Commitment to ethics, norms, democratic values - Commonalities

Each of the countries— Ireland, Germany, Catalonia, Finland, Estonia, and Poland— showcases a commitment to ethics within their educational systems. For instance, Germany emphasizes ethics through practical philosophy classes and discussions within religious frameworks. Similarly, in Ireland, ethical principles are explicitly integrated into certain national curricula, including spaces with a focus on responsible digital citizenship and addressing social inequalities. Catalonia's curriculum promotes reflection on values, ethical issues, and opposition to discrimination and violence. Finland's core curriculum is built upon democratic values, fostering responsible decision-making and trust. In Estonia, societal values, including democracy and human rights, are deeply embedded in the curriculum. Poland mentions and commits to ethical principles, promoting inquiry-based learning and active citizenship through NGOs like the Batory Foundation. These countries share a common dedication to upholding societal norms and values within their educational systems. Values such as human dignity, respect, and democracy are emphasized across curricula and educational initiatives, fostering inclusive and tolerant societies.

Defending democracy and addressing social inequalities within democratic processes are shared objectives across these countries. This is evident through Ireland's focus on democracy and inequality, Germany's promotion of democratic values in philosophy classes, and Catalonia's emphasis on active citizenship. Finland's

core curriculum fosters respect for societal rules, Estonia highlights democracy and human rights, and Poland mentions democracy in its curriculum while promoting active citizenship through NGOs.

Commitment to ethics, norms, democratic values - Contrasts

Differences are found in how values, ethics, and democratic principles are incorporated into curricula, implemented through learning approaches, and supported by external resources. For instance, some countries like Ireland emphasize global citizenship through structured curricular integration and pedagogical methods such as small group discussion. Meanwhile, Estonia highlights societal norms and human rights through references to international documents within their curriculum, complemented by diverse learning methods like discussions on equality and case studies. Moreover, the availability of external resources differs, with Ireland boasting NGOs providing programmes on creativity and resilience, while Estonia benefits from NGOs promoting democratic values and global education. Teacher training varies too, with Ireland offering specific modules on SPHE and ethics, while Poland focuses on thematic studies to prepare educators for imparting ethical education. These discrepancies reflect diverse approaches to fostering democratic values and social awareness in education systems.

Commitment to ethics, norms, democratic values - Gaps and avenues for exploration

Germany, Catalonia, Finland, Estonia, and Poland, show varying degrees of gaps in curriculum integration, standardized learning approaches, external resource utilization, teacher training, emphasis on global citizenship, specificity in addressing inequality, and promoting ethical principles and decision-making. Even in contexts where certain values may be clearly defined, not all children and young people may necessarily access this curriculum. For example, while Ireland exhibits a comprehensive and explicit approach to values education in certain curricula, this may be for one sector of the school system.

Questions stemming from the comparative analysis of this aspect include: What challenges arise in implementing values education across diverse cultural and educational contexts? Could literature on cross-cultural education and curriculum implementation provide insights? How are teachers trained to effectively deliver value education? To what extent are communities and parents involved in supporting values education initiatives? What is the long-term impact of values education on students' attitudes and behaviours? Are there any longitudinal studies?

Collaboration & deliberation

Collaboration & deliberation	- respectful discussion for collective decision-making, including conflict - resolution and dealing constructively/peacefully with diverse perspectives, arguments and interest in a public debate - - collaboration with the others getting things done

Appendix figure 5 Collaboration & deliberation

Collaboration & deliberation - Commonalities

Commonalities across the examined countries include a focus on respectful discussion, collective decision-making, conflict resolution, and embracing diverse perspectives. In Ireland, this is reflected in national curricula with emphasis on skills like discussion, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Various learning methods such as drama activities and debates are used, alongside initiatives like Restorative Practices.

Similarly, Germany encourages deliberation through activities like debating lunch menus and involving students in decision-making committees. In Catalonia, the emphasis lies on global citizenship and personal, social, and learning-to-learn competencies.

Finland incorporates collaboration and conflict resolution into its curricula, focusing on building a sense of community and equality. Estonia stresses dialogue and collaboration, using methods like discussions, role plays, and group work. Poland emphasizes project-based and interactive learning methods, along with initiatives like peer mediation.

Collaboration & deliberation - Contrasts

In line with the analysis of other aspects, 'Collaboration and Deliberation' is pursued through different theoretical and practical frameworks in different European contexts. The Irish analysis suggests an emphasis on skills like discussion, decision-making, and conflict resolution, notably incorporating restorative practices and dedicated teacher training programmes. Germany adopts an approach by fostering deliberation in daily activities like lunch menu debates and involving students in decision-making committees. Finland encourages collaboration and conflict resolution within school communities, supported by resources like the Beyond Borders method guide. Estonia emphasizes collaboration and dialogue but concentrates more on argumentation and debate. Poland incorporates aspects of respectful discussion and collective decision-making in its education law, complemented by initiatives like school self-government and peer mediation, supported by specific pedagogical materials and teacher training programmes.

Collaboration & deliberation - Gaps and avenues for exploration

Although certain countries have outlined collaboration and deliberation in their national curricula, the extent of implementation varies. Thus the gaps and avenues for exploration will vary from context to context. For instance, Estonia predominantly focuses on argumentation and debate, potentially overlooking other essential dimensions of this aspect. There are a number of questions which are prompted by this comparative analysis: What role do institutional support structures and policy frameworks play in fostering a culture of collaboration and deliberation within educational institutions? How effective are the collaboration and deliberation practices described in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills among students? Are there any assessments or evaluations conducted to measure their impact on student outcomes? Do collaboration and deliberation practices differ significantly across primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels within each country?

Respect and Empathy

Respect and empathy	- towards self and others

Appendix figure 6 Respect and Empathy

Respect and Empathy - Commonalities

All countries recognize the importance of respect and empathy as part of the educational curriculum, though the depth and methods of integration vary. There is a general focus on developing students' social and emotional skills, which are seen as integral to fostering respect and empathy. The curricula in these countries aim to help students understand and appreciate diverse perspectives, a key component of empathy. Activities and learning strategies are designed to enhance the feeling of community within schools, which is conducive

to fostering respect and empathy among students. The educational approaches in these countries encourage open-mindedness and caring attitudes towards others, which are foundational for respect and empathy. Several of these countries incorporate conflict resolution and decision-making skills into their curricula, which are closely linked to the development of empathy and respect.

Respect and Empathy - Contrasts

From the comparative analysis, it appears that there is a contrast in the extent to which 'Respect and Empathy' are integrated into education systems. For example, analysis suggests that Ireland and Estonia integrate these values more explicitly into their curricula. Whereas for Germany and Poland, instruction is more discretionary and less detailed. An example of this from the Estonian curriculum, is the emphasis on 'inimeseõpetus' for teaching respect and empathy. The Irish curriculum includes specific subjects, such as Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) and Senior Cycle Politics and Society, that explicitly focus on developing empathy and respect. This approach involves engaging with historical perspectives, expressing ideas and emotions respectfully, and developing empathy through understanding different viewpoints. Estonia has a notable focus on these values in the "inimeseõpetus" or human studies curriculum. The national curriculum emphasizes a caring and open-minded attitude towards diversity and fosters the development of students' social and emotional skills, specifically targeting respect and empathy. Finland promotes respect and empathy through collaborative activities, conflict resolution, and decision-making within the school community. This approach is more focused on practical applications within the school environment, enhancing community feelings and building trust. Spain encourages students to engage in community and political affairs as part of developing respect and empathy, which is a distinctive aspect that may not be as pronounced in the curricula of other countries.

The Polish approach to teaching respect and empathy appears to be less explicitly defined within their educational documentation. The methods and extent of integration into the curriculum are not as detailed as in some other countries. In Germany, the teaching of respect and empathy is more at the discretion of individual teachers rather than being explicitly detailed in the national curriculum. This approach indicates a more decentralized method of instilling these values.

Respect and Empathy - Gaps and avenues for exploration

There is a noticeable variation in how respect and empathy are incorporated into national curricula. Some countries like Germany leave it to the discretion of individual teachers, which might lead to inconsistencies in how these values are taught. While the importance of respect and empathy is recognized, there is often a lack of detailed, specific strategies or programs for effectively teaching these values, especially noted in the documentation from Poland.

There is limited information on how teaching methods for respect and empathy are adapted to diverse cultural and social contexts within classrooms. This is crucial for ensuring that the teaching of these skills is relevant and effective for students from varied backgrounds. There is a lack of explicit mention of specialized training and ongoing support for teachers in implementing these concepts effectively. Teacher preparedness is key to successfully imparting these values to students.

The documents do not extensively discuss methods for assessing or evaluating the effectiveness of teaching strategies related to respect and empathy. Without proper assessment, it's challenging to gauge impact and refine approaches for better outcomes.

The curricula could benefit from more explicitly linking respect and empathy education to broader social and global issues, such as social justice, diversity, inclusion, and anti-bullying efforts. Questions arising from this comparative analysis include: What are the best practices for teaching respect and empathy, especially in multicultural and diverse settings?

Problem-solving ability and solution-oriented mindset

Problem-solving ability and solution oriented mindset	- defining problems and analyzing their root causes, - applying critical thinking, systems thinking, design thinking etc, - generating solutions and deciding on courses of action, - - having a can-do attitude always seeking solutions

Appendix figure 7 Problem-solving ability and solution-oriented mindset

Problem-solving ability and solution-oriented mindset - Commonalities

Generally, this aspect is described as “ability to solve problems”. Three countries (Germany, Ireland, Finland) mention critical thinking, Ireland and Germany mention systems thinking.

Problem-solving ability and solution-oriented mindset - Contrasts

Germany had a very well-focused curricular description on problem-solving, e.g. analysing root causes, applying systems and critical thinking and having a can-do attitude. Finland’s curriculum is more generally noted to "guide the student to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills,” and to use scientific knowledge as a basis of teaching and develop critical thinking. Many methodological examples were discovered, e.g. play-based problem-solving, research tasks, promoting curiosity and inventiveness, using planning, setting goals, evaluation; and presenting own solutions in different ways; participation in discussions, practicing decision-making, problem-solving and small-scale project work. A number of examples from the Polish context were also noted including extra-curricular provision like “Circles of interest” (such as robotics classes).

In the Estonian context, this competence is mentioned in all documents, especially in reference to entrepreneurial competence. For example:

“ability to create and implement ideas using the knowledge and skills obtained in different areas; to see problems and opportunities, to help along with solving problems”;

“ability to understand global problems and take co-responsibility for solving these”

Several methods and non-formal programmes were mentioned. From the Irish context, there was a reference to problem solving in a variety of contexts through Mathematics Education, and through Geography “Students adopt a systems-thinking approach to understand complex components” (Junior Cycle, Geography).

One of the key contrasts concerned the way this competence is described within countries where problem solving and solution-orientation was recognised. For example, Ireland specifically mentioned systems and

design thinking; Finland mentioned critical thinking and scientific knowledge, Germany 'root causes' and can-do attitude, and Estonia's problem solving seemed more connected with entrepreneurship competence.

Problem-solving ability and solution oriented mindset - Gaps and avenues for exploration

As not all partner countries were able to identify problem-solving ability and solution oriented mindset within, this opportunity remains a significant gap. A question therefore, is how systems, design and critical thinking could be more emphasised in problem-solving-related aspects of the education system?

Judgment of trustworthiness

Judgement of trustworthiness	- discerning reliable information, behaviour and intentions of others, especially in the digital age of misinformation - - media literacy and also scientific literacy more broadly, such as being aware of algorithms, having healthy suspicion, double-checking, proof seeking, understanding data and how it is presented etc.

Appendix figure 8 Judgment of trustworthiness

Judgment of trustworthiness - Commonalities

Some countries had given very little or no information, but generally this can be found under 'digital competence' and in relation to media use.

Judgment of trustworthiness - Contrasts

In some schools in Germany, supplementary courses are offered to train certain students to act as mediators or peace attorneys in conflicts between other students. Within the Spanish context, this 'aspect' could be recognised as part of a transversal digital competence. From Finland, students have the opportunity to know how to use info critically. For example, analysing media culture and recognising and reflecting on the effects of media are important at certain grade levels. In schoolwork, the significance of agreements concerning human rights in society and the world is learned; in particular, emphasis is placed on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Students are guided to respect and defend human rights. Methods like discussions, inquiry and project-based learning, authenticity are apparent. From the Polish context, methods like PBL and Interactive Learning (Group Discussion/ Debates/Brainstorming Sessions) were recognised as supporting this aspect. From the Estonian context, this aspect was noted as present within the national curriculum, however the question of whether greater emphasis was required was raised, particularly considering the challenges of misinformation, fake news and AI within the digital realm. From the Irish context, there were examples of accessing information from across different levels of the curriculum, for example in Leaving Cycle Economics:

"Students will learn how to access up-to-date and reliable information" (Leaving Cycle, Economics)

However, less focus on analysis of information is apparent. Reference to 'Misinformation', 'Media Literacy' and 'Scientific Literacy' are limited and confined to post-primary curricula. There is an entire JC Short Course on Digital Media Literacy.

Judgment of trustworthiness - Gaps and avenues for exploration

This most significant gap in relation to this aspect concerns the digital realm. It seems more could be covered starting from primary school, about misinformation, AI, cybersecurity etc.

Reflection, learning to learn, emotions and readiness to change

Reflection, learning to learn, emotions and readiness to change	- critical reflection in order to learn and to have transformation. - embracing and working with emotions that are a strong factor in learning. - lifelong learning. - basics about psychological well-being, learning to self-regulate emotions, learning to learn, growth mindset, setting healthy boundaries etc.

Appendix figure 9 Reflection, learning to learn, emotions and readiness to change

Reflection, learning to learn, emotions and readiness to change - Commonalities

All countries emphasize critical reflection and emotional intelligence as key components of learning. Lifelong learning and psychological well-being are universally recognized, reflecting a consensus that education is not confined to the early years but is an ongoing process.

Similarly, all countries emphasize the importance of critical reflection as a key component of the learning process, suggesting that self-awareness and the ability to think about one's own thinking are integral to education. There is a consistent focus on the role of emotions in learning. The documents indicate an understanding that managing and working with emotions is crucial for personal development and transformation.

There's a shared recognition of the need for psychological well-being, with mentions of learning to self-regulate emotions and the importance of mental health. The documents from several countries mention the promotion of a growth mindset, which is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work.

The educational curricula seem to recognise the importance of students learning to regulate their own emotions and behaviours, as well as setting healthy boundaries, as part of their personal growth. These commonalities reflect a comprehensive approach to education that goes beyond academic skills, including the development of emotional and psychological competencies that are essential for adapting to change and for lifelong learning.

From the Irish context, examples include curricular documents emphasizes the importance of "embracing and working with emotions" as a significant factor in the learning process. It suggests that emotions play a crucial role in both learning and transformation, highlighting the need for students to understand and regulate their emotions as part of lifelong learning. Similar to the Irish context, the Polish analysis underscores the role of emotions in learning. It references "embracing and working with emotions," indicating that emotional intelligence is an integral part of the educational process. This includes the basics of psychological well-being and the development of a growth mindset.

The Estonian analysis also notes the importance of working with emotions in learning. While it does not provide detailed examples, it suggests that emotional aspects are considered in the curriculum, especially

under "human studies." This includes learning to self-regulate emotions and fostering a growth mindset. In Finland, the emphasis is on "critical reflection in order to learn and to have transformation," which includes embracing and working with emotions. The Finnish approach seems to integrate emotional aspects into the broader framework of thinking and learning skills, indicating a holistic approach to emotional intelligence in education.

The Spanish curriculum emphasizes the importance of "embracing and working with emotions" as a significant component of the learning process. It recognises that emotions are a strong factor in both learning and personal transformation. There is an acknowledgment that critical reflection is necessary for transformation and that this reflection includes an emotional dimension.

The curriculum encourages the development of personal and social competencies, which likely include emotional awareness and regulation skills as foundational aspects of these competences.

The German analysis acknowledges the role of emotions in learning but points out a lack of specific prescriptions in the general curriculum. It mentions the importance of learning to self-regulate emotions as part of lifelong learning, suggesting an awareness of emotional factors in education even if not explicitly detailed in the curriculum.

Reflection, learning to learn, emotions and readiness to change - Contrasts

Some of the points of contrast can be found within specific examples from each country context. Where Finland incorporates thinking and learning skills as core competencies, Germany lacks explicit curriculum guidelines. Poland faces financial constraints affecting resource availability regarding this aspect. In Ireland, there's a focus on media literacy as part of critical reflection.

This includes embracing and working with emotions, lifelong learning, and the basics of psychological well-being. Estonian educational strategies are found mostly under "human studies," with an emphasis on learner-centredness and becoming more self-directed. The curriculum includes aspects of emotional regulation and growth mindset but notes that it is not explicit enough, suggesting a potential for further development. Finland incorporates thinking and learning skills as foundational, with a focus on how students perceive themselves as learners and interact with their environment, which affects their learning and emotional growth. Spain's curriculum uniquely integrates emotional intelligence within digital competence, emphasising critical reflection on emotions as central to learning and personal transformation. Germany acknowledges the importance of learning to self-regulate emotions and fostering a growth mindset but lacks specific prescriptions in the general curriculum. The approach to teaching these concepts may not be as systematic as in other countries.

These differences suggest that while there is a shared understanding of the importance of these concepts, the methods and depth of integration into the educational system vary. Some countries have specific strategies and curricular content, while others have a more general or decentralized approach.

Reflection, learning to learn, emotions and readiness to change - Gaps and avenues for exploration

Some countries lack detailed integration of these concepts into their curriculum and there is variability in how these concepts are implemented across different educational systems.

There is often a lack of specificity in how the curricula address the development of emotional intelligence and readiness to change. While these concepts are acknowledged, detailed guidance on implementation is sometimes missing.

The degree to which these concepts are integrated into the curriculum varies, leading to potential inconsistency in how students across different regions or schools may experience learning in these areas. Documents may not provide enough information on teacher training and resources dedicated to these areas. Teachers need proper training and resources to effectively guide students in developing emotional intelligence and a growth mindset. There is a lack of clear assessment strategies to measure students' progress in areas such as emotional regulation, critical reflection, and lifelong learning skills.

Cultural and Contextual Relevance:

Curricula may not sufficiently address how emotional intelligence and critical reflection can be taught in a culturally sensitive manner that is relevant to all students' backgrounds.There could be a stronger focus on the practical application of these skills in real-life situations, which is critical for students to understand the relevance of what they learn.

A notable gap is the connection between current educational practices and ongoing research or literature in the field. There may be a lack of incorporation of evidence-based practices into the curriculum. Addressing these gaps would likely involve a more comprehensive approach to curriculum development, which could include clearer guidelines, consistent implementation across different educational settings, enhanced teacher support, and incorporation of evidence-based strategies. Questions stemming from analysis of this 'aspect' include:How are these concepts evaluated for effectiveness in different educational systems? What literature supports the teaching of these skills in an educational context?

Resilience and thriving in uncertainty

Resilience and thriving in uncertainty	- not compromising democratic values - collaboration during crisis - facing crisis together, problem-solving in crisis - personal peace and balance - basics about psychological well being, learning to self-regulate emotions, learning to learn, growth mindset, setting healthy boundaries etc - individual survival skills from food growing and cooking to making do without electricity, internet

Appendix figure 10 Resilience and thriving in uncertainty

Resilience and thriving in uncertainty - Commonalities

There is some emphasis on maintaining democratic values and effective collaboration during crises recognised across the different country contexts. For example, a focus on personal peace, balance, and problem-solving skills. All countries underscore the importance of not compromising on democratic values, which is critical for developing resilience in the context of social and political challenges. When referenced, there is a shared understanding of the importance of collaboration during crises. This involves collective problem-solving and support systems that are crucial for thriving in uncertain times. Encouraging a growth mindset and teaching students to set healthy boundaries are common strategies for fostering resilience. Some countries, like Finland, also include teaching individual survival skills, such as food growing and cooking, and making do without modern conveniences like electricity and the internet, which can contribute to resilience in practical

ways. These commonalities demonstrate an awareness across these educational systems of the need to prepare students not just academically but also emotionally and practically for the uncertainties of the future.

Resilience and thriving in uncertainty - Contrasts

The Irish curriculum includes elements like personal peace and balance and emphasizes the basics of psychological well-being. It also focuses on individual survival skills, which are part of a broader approach to resilience that includes making do without modern conveniences. The Polish approach to resilience may include elements of psychological and pedagogical care within schools, but details on specific resilience-building strategies or how these are integrated into the curriculum are not as clear. Estonia's curriculum might include aspects of resilience, but the extent to which this is explicit or detailed within the curriculum seems to be limited. There may be more emphasis on collaboration and collective problem-solving during crises. The Finnish approach to resilience includes fostering a sense of community and trust within the school, developing everyday skills such as time management, and emphasizing collective well-being and safety. The Spanish curriculum specifically mentions not compromising these values during crises, potentially reflecting a strong emphasis on maintaining democratic principles as part of resilience education. The German documentation suggests that the teaching of resilience may not be as explicitly outlined in the curriculum. Instead, it may involve supplementary courses and initiatives, such as training students to act as mediators in conflicts.

Resilience and thriving in uncertainty - Gaps and avenues for exploration

Across each context, there is limited focus on teaching resilience in the context of broader global challenges. The curricula might not fully address how to manage global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and technological disruption, which are increasingly relevant for students' future resilience. Direct references to mental health education and emotional intelligence are sparse. There may be a lack of explicit and detailed content within the curriculum that specifically addresses how to develop resilience and thrive in uncertainty. The degree to which resilience is taught may vary significantly, not just between countries, but potentially within regions and schools in the same country, leading to inconsistent educational experiences. Curricula might not always provide clear connections between the skills taught and their application in real-world scenarios that students are likely to face. There is a lack of information on how students' resilience is assessed and measured to ensure that they are effectively acquiring these skills. The documents do not extensively discuss the training that teachers receive to help them effectively teach and support students in developing resilience. Questions stemming from this comparative analysis include: How can educational systems better incorporate global challenges into teaching resilience? What resources or literature address building resilience in educational settings?