

Template – Youth Democracy Labs ActEU

ActEU Youth Democracy Labs — General Information

What?

The ActEU Youth Democracy Labs are an innovative way of involving young European citizens in our research process and co-creating policy recommendations. The labs are designed as short workshops (of at least 2 hours) with around 15-25 participants.

Who?

The Labs can be organized by teachers, civil society organizations or anybody involved in political and civic education

We recommend participants to be 15-25 young citizens, which can also be University students.

Structure and content:

We provide a detailed template for a Youth Democracy Lab of 120 minutes, successfully tested and implemented in the ActEU project (<https://acteu.org/>).

Preface

The Youth Democracy Labs, developed within the ActEU project, are designed to interactively discuss with students central concepts of the project – representation, participation and polarization. Students are invited to develop their own views and, if applicable recommendations to improve the situation.

The following template is based on the practical experience of the Youth Labs organized during the ActEU project and a subsequent revision for the most effective implementation. This template is only a basic suggestion - the specific implementation depends on the age, size and knowledge background of the group.

The workshop is ideally conducted with 2-3 workshop leaders. Both on site as well as online versions of the workshop are possible and have been successfully implemented.

The toolkit contains a template for a PowerPoint presentation for conducting the lab, which can be customized according to your own preferences.

Didactics & Output

The Youth Democracy Lab is designed as an interactive workshop with young citizens, characterized by activating methods and practice-oriented learning. The participants are given space to work in small groups, exchange ideas in plenary sessions and reflect comprehensively on the relevant content.

The labs are conducted with the aim of developing concrete recommendations related to two specific areas:

1. Which kind of recommendations would participants make to policymakers to counteract the identified deficits and trends?
2. Which kind of teaching materials should be developed to improve political/civic education and increase the state of knowledge of the (young) population on the issues targeted by ActEU?

Necessary material / equipment (in case of on-site workshop)

- Flipchart sheets & markers
- Moderation cards
- Presentation and laptop
- Prepared document for student recommendations
- One classroom (big enough to separate class for groupwork I & II)

Procedure for a recommended time frame of two hours/120 minutes (minimum)

1. Welcome & introduction (5 minutes)

- a. Introduction
- b. Explanation of the Youth Democracy Lab: introducing participants to their role

2. Warm-up / icebreaker (5 minutes)

The participants are presented with 7 statements and have to report if they agree with the statement / have already done what is mentioned in the statement:

1. *I have voted in a democratic election.*
2. *I have taken part in a demonstration.*
3. *I have signed a petition.*
4. *I have spoken to a politician (on-site/digital).*
5. *I find the opportunities for young people to get involved in politics inviting and well communicated.*
6. *I believe that my vote makes a difference in elections.*
7. *I feel motivated and informed when it comes to political issues in Europe.*

3. Presentation: First insights in the concepts “Representation”, “Participation” and “Trust” (10 minutes)

In each case, explanation of the concept and a current reference point, presentation of selected descriptive content from the surveys & individual quotes from the focus groups. Group work I is then briefly explained by the workshop leader.

4. Group work I: Discussion at 2 stations (40 minutes)

a. Preparation in pairs:

Brief exchange on the key question: Based on the concepts presented (representation, participation, trust), where do you place these in your everyday life? Do these concepts occur anywhere? Where do they play a role for you? What are the biggest problems concerning representation, participation and trust?

b. Group division:

The group is split in two. One group discusses “Representation”, the other “Participation”. Each group is accompanied by one/two workshop leaders.

i. Stimulus: “Chinese Portrait”

The participants are asked to describe politicians (Group “Representation”) and political institutions (Group “Participation”) associating them with animals and their characteristics. This start should enable a playful but in-depth discussion of key aspects of integrity, reliability and a sense of responsibility in a political context (Group “Representation”), as well as a discussion about the motives and backgrounds of the young generation to participate (Group “Participation”).

ii. Open discussion:

The participants will be encouraged to share their opinions on the results, enrich them with personal experiences and add other aspects that are relevant to them. The results are recorded using moderation cards/flipchart sheets. The workshop leader can ask guiding key questions, but is rather passive.

Station “Participation”: Questions on barriers to engagement, attractiveness of participation opportunities, self-efficacy, effectiveness of institutions, etc.)

Station “Representation”: Questions on integrity, reliability, sense of responsibility, qualities of politicians, etc.)

5. Break (5 minutes)

6. Group work II: Recommendations (25 minutes)

The participants should collect recommendations in small groups (4-5 people maximum); It is important that the workshop leader(s) explain clearly what is expected from the participants: Concrete, hands-on recommendations for policy-makers as well as educators on how to improve the current situation on the three core concepts and the level of education on these (and related aspects of democratic systems) respectively.

Specific task for the group work:

- Policy(-makers): What should politicians do to strengthen European democracy?
- Political education: In your opinion, which topics are important for schools and other educational institutions to prepare young people well for life in a democracy?

Each group records the results in writing (printed sheet); You can use the sheet prepared for this purpose:

Discuss in your group what recommendations you would like to make to politicians and political education. Develop concrete suggestions, use specific examples and put them into text form.

7. Receipt of the recommendations and discussion (25 minutes)

a. Single groups present their results

Each group quickly presents their recommendations. In case of unclear/non-concrete recommendations, the workshop leaders can investigate the exact meaning (e.g. through asking for concrete examples)

b. Group discussion

In case there is time left, the recommendations (especially aspects common to all groups) can be discussed in the whole group

8. Conclusion & farewell (5 minutes)

a. Thanks to the participants & farewell

Additional options

Additional actors

Feel free to engage additional actors, e.g. civil society representatives, in your labs. They could for example help in collecting the recommendations or have different added value depending on their field of expertise. Also, they could provide you with groups of participants outside the University if wanted.

EU as a multi-level system

Representation participation and trust work differently and are perceived differently across the different levels of the EU system. In conceptualizing the labs, we noticed that it is very difficult to accommodate several levels in one lab, which is why the labs will often focus on one level mostly. This is not a problem per se. In case you (want to) organize several labs, you could specifically focus on different political levels (local, regional, national, EU) in the different labs.