



School civic education

Blue paper



Aims

Unravel how the EU and youth active citizenship are conceptualised, learned and practiced by, and within, the school arena

Data collected

-24 schools involved
-34 textbooks analysed
-101 interviews with teachers
-51 focus groups with 387 high school students

Output

13 recommendations
a documentary



Understanding the role of school education on promoting active citizenship

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This paper will summarize the main findings of WP6 in non-technical terms for dissemination to relevant stakeholders. Schools are contexts in which young people spend most of their time, growing and developing as students and citizens. The development of literacy skills goes, necessarily, along with learning how to interpret the world and interact with different others, how to question the existing norms and values and

their very meaning. In other words, schools are, inevitably, contexts for learning about and practice democracy, either through their academic framework (curricula, schooling activities, classroom environment, extracurricular projects, etc.) or because they stand as a sort of 'organising system' (through their relationships with community-based programs and as a privileged space of peer

interaction). In Europe, the promotion of active citizenship with a European focus was the motto for several educational reforms, since the mid-1990s, even if the last decades also revealed the ambivalence of decision-makers and a tension between goals and practice. Therefore, Work Package 6 of the Catch-EyoU project is focused on the role of school education in promoting active citizenship.



Scope and Aims of Work Package 6: “Representation of the EU and youth active EU citizenship in educational contexts”

Work Package 6 of the CATCH-EyoU project is focused on the role of school education in promoting active citizenship. In order to unravel how the EU and youth active citizenship are conceptualised, learned and practiced by, and within, the school arena (in- and out-of-classrooms), the WP6 seeks the following goals:

1. To identify and analyse key discourses on the EU and youth active citizenship at EU, national and regional levels in school curricula, school textbooks and among teachers.

2. To investigate the extent to which these discourses differ across curricula, textbooks and teachers

3. To investigate potential ambivalences and tensions in the discourses about the EU and youth active citizenship at EU level in textbooks textual and visual context and methods/activities.

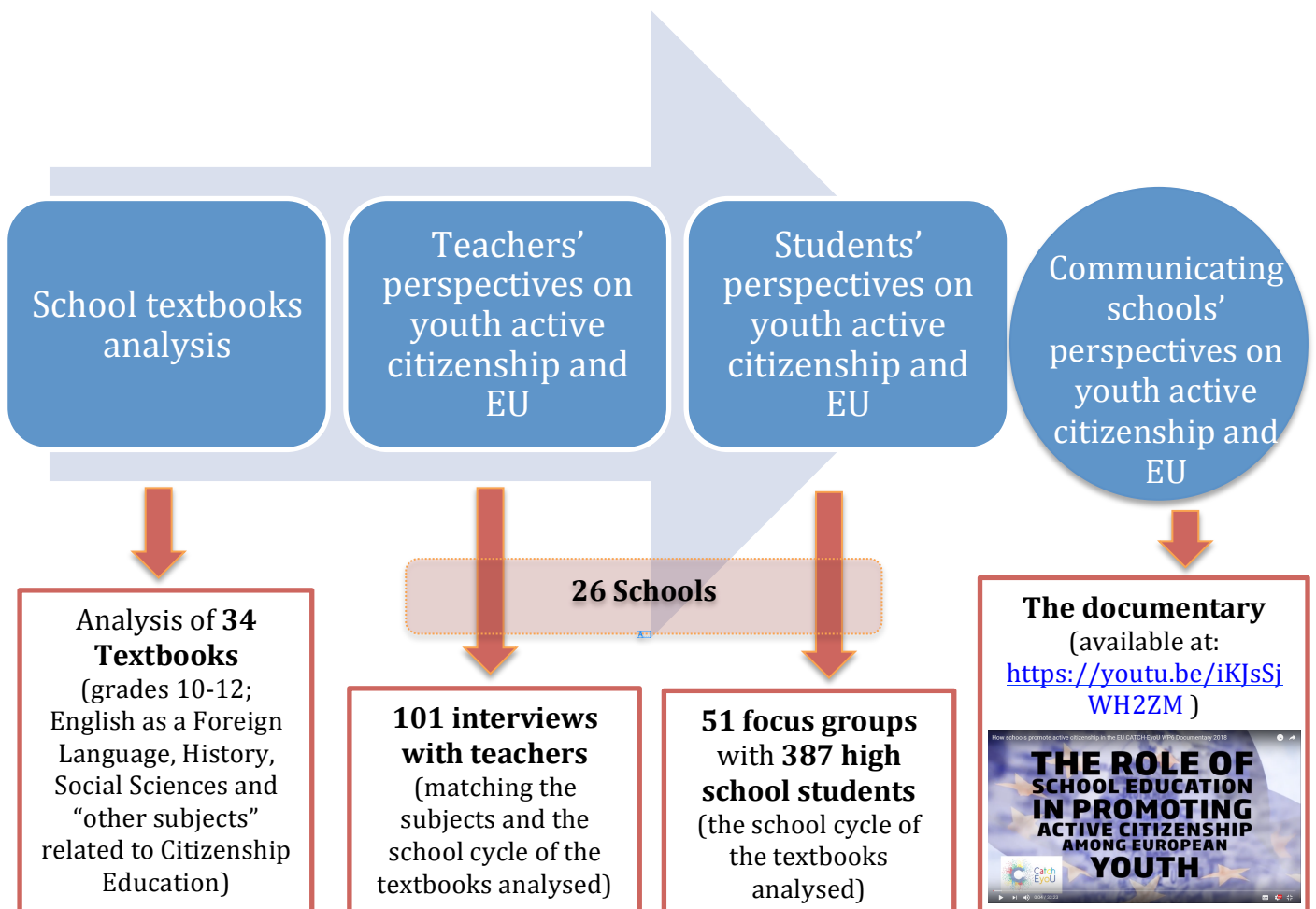
4. To explore similarities and differences across participating countries regarding the EU and youth active citizenship at EU, national and regional level depicted in school curricula, school textbooks and among teachers and students.

To accomplish these goals, this Work Package assumes a broad vision of the school curricula including in- and out-of-classroom experiences and explores how issues related to (youth) active citizenship at local, national and European levels are 1) depicted in school textbooks, and conceived by 2) teachers and 3) young students from academic and vocational tracks in schools situated in communities with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in six EU countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Sweden.



What, How, with Whom

How is 'European citizenship' conveyed, interpreted and practiced by teachers and students across the member-states? To what extent are education programs incorporating it? How are in- and out-of-school experiences contributing to the construction of European citizenship? This Work Package aimed to provide answers to these questions.



Method

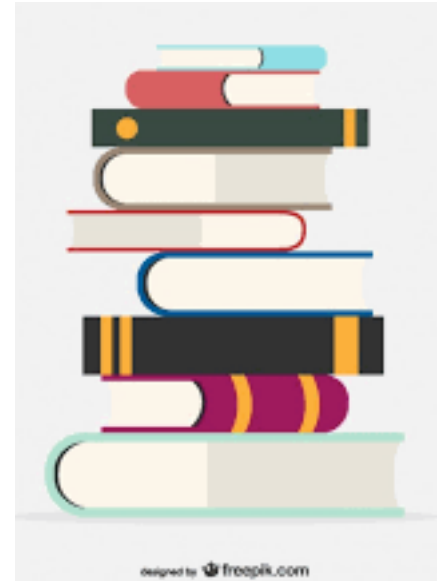
Regarding **textbook analysis**, the project team decided to use textbooks from History, English as a Foreign Language and Social Studies/Citizenship from academic and vocational tracks; the textbooks were best-sellers in each country or considered particularly interesting after consultation with teachers and/or specialists in the area of teacher training. After the selection in each country, the project team initiated the analysis using a content grid that was subject to a process of validation and cross-validation to ensure the comparability and reliability of the analysis. Concerning **interviews with teachers** and **focus groups** with students, four schools were selected in each country representing diverse sociocultural contexts; both regular and vocational/technical schools were included in the study. In each school, researchers conducted 4 interviews with teachers and 2 focus group discussions with young students. Some of the conclusions from the analysis of the textbooks were succinctly described in the script, in order to intentionally generate the teachers' and students' opinions. There was an effort to diversify the sample (of teachers and students) in terms of age, gender and experience.



What are the main findings from the **textbooks analysis**?

The **Themes** addressed by the textbooks:

- **Active citizenship** (generally not related to young people), with a **predominance of normative and conservative (over non-normative and critical)** discourses of active citizenship;
- **Living with and relating to others/intercultural awareness**, but scarce reference to gender and multiculturalism – **inequalities are not an issue**;
- **Construction of the EU in a historical perspective** – informative and uncritical – and **limited references and discussion of the EU dimension**, particularly the EU sense of belonging and identity;
- **The EU appears in many cases as instrumental** (opportunities for employment, to study, ...) more than as a principled community to which “we, the people” belong to; also, **the local community appears as relatively irrelevant** while **locus** for approaching the topics of **active citizenship** and **youth citizenship**;
- Emphasis on more **conventional and system-friendly behaviours** in relation to youth civic and political involvement, seldom enabling the possibility of **questioning the law** in democratic societies.



The **Pedagogy** underlying the textbooks:

- Tendency for the simple identification of phenomena or ideas, with **little emphasis on analysing and confronting non-consensual perspectives** – **limiting the potential of the textbooks for generating a vivid debate**;
- Most textbooks **do not articulate with the daily lives of young people** – **focusing instead on in-class activities** – be it the discussion of the EU or current events such as youth protest movements and the multicultural nature of our communities;
- **Limited diversity of pedagogical methods, which are mainly thought of as in-class** – absence of references to possible study visits, limited suggestions for field work. **The internet, however, appears as a context where young people can develop knowledge and understanding of their reality**;
- **Relatively less complexity and depth of textbooks for vocational tracks (when compared to academic ones)**;
- **General emphasis on the development of “individual” competences of the students**, more than on their conscientization of their role as citizens, with implications for the here-and-now of their daily lives.





What are the main findings from the **interviews** and the **focus groups**?

TEACHERS

- **School as locus for civic/political learning** through **knowledge and competencies** (history, politics, critical thinking) and **initiatives** (e.g., school councils, interaction with NGO and political parties)

- **Lack of curricular flexibility and training**
- **Grades in national exams** regulate the school life.

- **Young people are not interested in politics;**
- **Youngsters can engage** when **stimulated** and if driven by **meaningful** issues.

- **Absent and superficial** approach to the **EU and civic and political issues;**
- **It is up to the individual teacher** to go beyond the textbooks.

- **The EU as far away** for most of young people;
- For youngsters, **European citizenship is taken for granted.**

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

YOUTH CIVIC AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

THE EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM AND SCHOOL ETHOS

THE TEXTBOOKS APPROACH TO POLITICAL ISSUES

THE CONNECTION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

STUDENTS

- **The school as the main context for civic/political learning**
- **Missing link between what is taught and organized within the school and the youngsters' experiences**

- **Internalization of guilt** related to youth disengagement;
- **Dissatisfaction towards politicians;**
- Importance of actively **producing change.**

- **Academic pressure;**
- Availability to listen the youngsters, but **no real consideration of their opinions.**

- **Textbooks are outdated;**
- **Little suggestions of activities to foster debate and critical thinking**

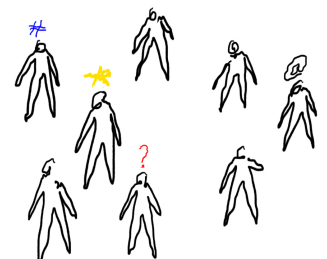
- **It is important to be part of the EU**
- **Critiques (and attention) to the EU** (e.g., power imbalances; lack of institutional transparency; humanitarian crisis linked to the refugees).



Recommendations to strengthen the role of school education in fostering active (European) citizenship

The following recommendations draw on the Position Paper of the International Youth Panel (IYP) – based on the WP6 International Report – and also on two dissemination events organised at the University of Porto. In these events, a Conference and a Seminar, the main results of Work Package 6 were presented and further discussed by two Members of the European Parliament, representatives of four youth organisations, the Portuguese Secretary of State of Education, teachers and students¹.

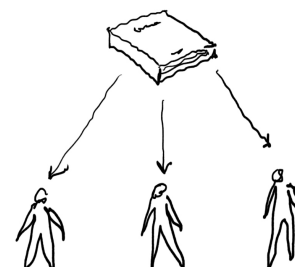
- I. **Citizenship and political education should be systematically considered in all curricula** in schools across Europe, integrating activities linked to real-life experiences.
- II. Educational European institutions should provide **training plans and refresher courses dedicated to citizenship and European issues** for all teachers.
- III. European and National institutions should promote greater **opportunities for cooperation and interaction between schools and youth NGOs**, in order to enhance European citizenship and civic and political involvement.
- IV. More **real, hands-on experiences linked with national and European politics** should be created, so that students can better understand political mechanisms and institutions. The organisation of **tours, visits and political debates**, as forms of promoting the meaningful acquisition of political knowledge and raising civic-minded youngsters, are recommended.
- V. Schools should promote decision-making regarding school governance and resources for student councils and youth student organisations, **providing all students the opportunity to self-manage activities in- and out-of-school and to co-organise activities** based on concrete bottom-up experiences.



¹ The drawings included in the following pages were illustrations produced live in the Conference, throughout a round-table with youth organisations and a seminar with Members of the European Parliament, while the results of the project were being discussed. The illustrations were produced by Dário Cannatà.



- VI. The **use of innovative pedagogical methods** (technological ones included) is recommended, hand-in-hand with the traditional teaching materials (the textbooks), supporting **debate and critical reflection** about current political/civic issues.
- VII. Educational European institutions should further promote **training and job-shadowing opportunities** offered by the European programs (Erasmus + Adult Education), and schools should have human resources dedicated to designing and managing projects.
- VIII. The gap between the school and the real life should be addressed through non-formal activities organised by the youngsters, including **opportunities for dialogue between young people and political parties** grounded on concrete experiences and consequences.
- IX. In order to **change the common downplaying of Citizenship/Political Education** (be it a subject or a transversal curricular dimension) compared to other school subjects, it is necessary to have experts in the area of citizenship and political education to collaboratively work with all teachers.
- X. **Teachers should be encouraged to engage with political issues** – not assuming the educational project as an ideological project leads to depolitization, with consequences for youth citizenship.
- XI. The **creation of structured co-curricular spaces for political debate**, in which politicians could also be invited by the young people, increasing the regularity of their presence in schools.
- XII. To promote opportunities for civic and political engagement, **supporting the youngsters who want to become active but do not know how to do it** (through the provision of information and tools to the youth associations), democratising participatory resources.
- XIII. To encourage **the use of alternative assessment instruments in schools**, not only focused in the exams but involving students in the decision-making processes – the school should be, first and foremost, a place of learning and not a place of assessment. The **dichotomy 'assessment vs participation' should be challenged**.





PROJECT NAME	Constructing Active Citizenship with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions (CATCH-EyoU)
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