



Democrat
EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Description of AGORA platform

<https://agora.democrat-horizon.eu>

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Abbreviations

DWP	Digital With Purpose
EfD	Education for Democracy
LL	Living Lab
RDC	Responsible Democratic Citizenship
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive Summary

The Agora (<https://agora.democrat-horizon.eu>) is a key feature of the DEMOCRAT Project and serves as an interactive hub designed to facilitate information exchange and debate among stakeholders in education for democracy (EfD). It complements traditional dissemination methods by providing a digital platform that supports both national and transnational living labs, in the languages of the six national partners and in English, respectively.

Key functionalities of the Agora include multilingual resources, a repository for project deliverables, and tools for community engagement. The platform will also host the project's final toolbox integrating key project outcomes, including curricula and pedagogical materials.

Data security is a priority; the Agora employs Nextcloud for secure data management, adhering to GDPR regulations to protect user privacy. Accessibility features ensure inclusivity for users with disabilities.

The Agora is designed to foster collaboration among the project partners while engaging the broader EfD stakeholder community. It is meant to facilitate exchanges through features like podcasts, blogs, and online forums. By establishing a sustainable digital presence, the Agora aims to extend its impact beyond the project's lifespan, ensuring continued dialogue and resource sharing in EfD.

Table of Contents

WHY AN AGORA? / RATIONALE FOR THE INCLUSION OF AN ELECTRONIC PLATFORM IN THE DEMOCRAT PROJECT 8

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE AGORA 8

DATA SECURITY AND OTHER TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS 11

SUPPORTING THE DEMOCRAT PROJECT PARTNERS AND ENGAGING EFD STAKEHOLDERS 13

Why an Agora? / Rationale for the inclusion of an electronic platform in the DEMOCRAT project core deliverables

In addition to the traditional website for the online dissemination of information regarding the project, the DEMOCRAT features another public information hub, the “Agora” platform (<https://agora.democrat-horizon.eu>). Linked to the project website, the Agora is supposed to be an interactive tool that will channel debate, exchange of information and experiences, fostering project visibility and wider engagement. Among the main uses of the Agora will be:

1. Is the backbone of the online Living Lab strategy of DEMOCRAT, supplementing physical participation in the 6 national living labs (Estonia (TLU), Finland (UH), Germany (HSD), Ireland (DCU), Spain (UB) and Poland (UJ)) with digital participation of stakeholders in each of the national labs, as well in a seventh, English-language transnational lab will be setup, thus fostering cross-national co-creation by sharing of experiences, mutual learning and debate (Tasks 2.3. and 4.2.).
2. The Agora will form the basis for designing the online multilingual final toolbox, which will bring together key learnings from the project into a framework which includes the RDC competence framework, a general EfD curricula, guidelines for implementation, pedagogical material and assessment and evaluation instruments. All of the above will be made available on the Agora, since the platform will serve as the repository of the project deliverables as they take shape. The final interactive tool, though, is foreseen to be more than the sum of the various deliverables (Tasks 7.3. and 6.3.).
3. The consolidation and growth of the Agora, which will be the digital location of the national and transnational living labs, as well as the repository for the elaborated reports, articles and working papers and the reference forum of opinion and debate of the transnational community of EfD for at least 7 years after the project ends, will play a major role in the sustainability and scaling-up of the project.

Key elements of the Agora

At the heart of the Agora is an English-language, transnational living lab based on the principles of community engagement, innovation and responsiveness. It is a tool for sharing and collaborating, a flexible structure open to change and supportive of the involvement of scholars, researchers, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders from within and outside the immediate project community.

The central Agora is fed by national Agoras, which replicate the central Agora structure in the specific context and in the language(s) of each of the six national partners. The decision for such a structure was taken in order to reach the different national communities of educators, education policy makers, parents and students, which generally communicate in their national languages.

The following services will be available in the central Agora (see figure 1):

- **Watch** (Agora TV and Podcast), is publicly accessible.
- **Create** (blog - public), is publicly accessible.
- **Commons** (Reddit/ Discord or other social media platforms), only private.
- **Talk** to open internal discussion fora.
- **Podcast** (Audiotape repository)
- **Library** (doc repository - multimedia production at Watch),
- **Living Labs** (information about LL and link to all open LL),

- **Calendar** (event information), About (information about DEMOCRAT and the Agora)

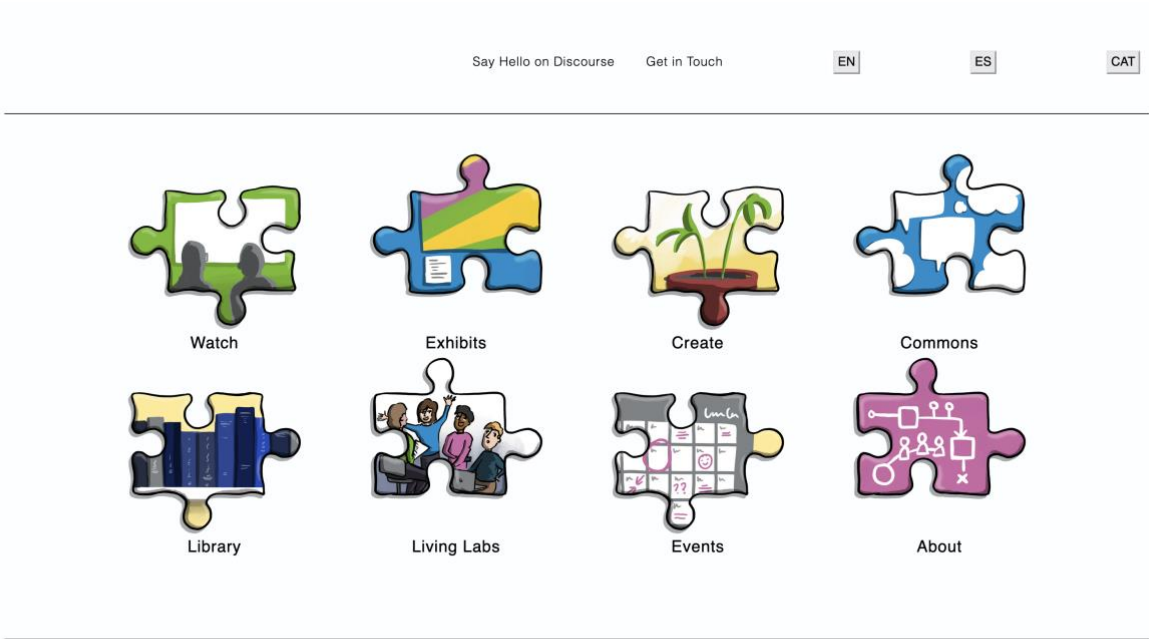


Figure 1: Entrance page of the beta version of Agora

Which of the services will be integrated into each national Agora is the decision of the respective national team. Figure 2 shows an example, where only 4 services has been chosen. However, in the course of the project progress, services may be added to the initial design of a national Agora.



Figure 2: Entrance page of the beta version of a national Agora

The Agoras will have a public and a private area. The public area offers information to the general public, while the private area is restricted to registered users. The back end of the Agoras is located at NextCloud and allows uploading to the various integrated services (see figure 3).

As the Agora system gets tested, adjustments will be made to ensure participation, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and transparency – in combination with a common framework for excellence, open science, open innovation, ethics and quality assurance. The partners will thus frame the value of the Agora platform in the R&I ecosystem beyond the end of the project. Governance will be iteratively developed through an envisaged co-designed social business plan and take into account the results and recommendations of the mid-term external evaluation to set the basis for post-project lines of action.

Accessibility, data management and ethical considerations

The Agora is free of charge and implies the consent to the use of personal data only for purpose of the project. Registration to a national Agora does not imply the registration to other national Agoras or to the transnational Agora.

For publication matters DEMOCRAT follows the open access strategy promoted by Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003 - <https://openaccess.mpg.de/BerlinDeclaration>), the Europe Science Principles on Open Access to Research Publications (2015) and the plan supported by the cOAlition S (<https://www.coalition-s.org>). We reserve 42.000€ for publication in open access, conferences fees and similar cost for open access dissemination. The Agora platform is a central element of its open science strategy making available working papers, preprint articles, opinions not only of the researchers but also of the practitioners and interested citizens.

The access of minors to social platforms such as Agora is regulated by the national legislation. In the case of Spain, the legislation allows the access from the age of 14 years without the permission of a parent or guardian. Therefore, the Agora registration always includes a question about the year of birth year as mandatory field, to prevent people under the legal age from registering.

The registration process includes the request to consent the inclusion of personal data (name, surname, e-mail direction organisation and type of organisation) in the stakeholder database. The data will only be included in the stakeholder database if consent is given. The personal data included in the stakeholder database will be used exclusively for the management of the Agora website.

The data will be controlled by the national Agora administrators. In the case of the transnational Agora, the data will be controlled and managed jointly by the Agora administrator and the project coordinator. No personal data will be transferred from the Agora to the consortium. The personal data of participants will be protected and kept anonymous. However, the confidentiality of the information provided can only be protected within the limits of the law.

Only properly anonymised data will be made available to the consortium partners and used for publication. Each of these partners will apply the anonymisation criteria of their university in accordance with European and their national legislation, so that the anonymised data can be made available to the other consortium partners and included in the outputs.

The personal data will be stored securely in a password protected folder. Only researchers designated by the Agoras' data controller will have access to the data. All information collected will be securely and permanently destroyed three years after the completion of the project. As participation in the Living Labs

and its activities is entirely voluntary, participants may withdraw at any time, by contacting the data controller up to the beginning of the writing stage. In this case the personal data will be deleted.

The Agora is based on the “Terms of Use”, “Cookie Policy” and “Privacy Policy” in accordance to the GDPR regulation. Users will have to agree to these terms and conditions when creating an account in the national or transnational Agoras. Its design allows the accessibility for disabled people using the ARIA functionalities.

A private policy and legal notice included in the Agoras explains how personal data collected through the contact form will be processed, in accordance with the GDPR. When registering, users are asked for their age. If the age is above the national legal limit, a parent's or guardian's consent will be requested.

Users are free to create a profile. This profile may include various information such as education, work experience, a photograph, the city or location or other information. Users can decide whether they want to include sensitive information in their profiles, and whether to make this information public. The information contained in the profile will not be used for research or commercial goals.

Agora will use only functional cookies and will no use tracing cookies.

Although the data collected will be managed by the Agora administrators and the anonymising (or pseudonyming) will make it unlikely that registered individuals can be re-identified or that individuals who have shared the data can be re-identified, the nature of the project is such that all partners are considered to be jointly responsible. For this reason, the project partners will sign a joint controllership agreement assuring the application of the GDPR.

Further explanation on how the ethical problem is handled can be found in the Data Management Plan.

Data security and other technical characteristics

The following provisions are in place to ensure that data collected through the Agora platform (national and transnational sections) during the project will be kept secure and protected from unauthorized access:

- Agora uses Nextcloud as host. This solution is open source and has been audited by the NCC Group. The audit against the Control Clause 14 of ISO27001 ‘Security in Development and Support Processes’ was done in 2016 and can be downloaded from the Nextcloud site (<https://nextcloud.com/secure/>). As Nextcloud is an on-premise service, Nextcloud GmbH that provides it has at no time access to the data stored on the user’s server. Nextcloud also provides event logging, backup tools, fine-grained access control to files via groups, and the secure sharing of links by using passwords and expiration dates. Nextcloud uses industry standard SSL/TLS encryption for data in transit.
- The Agora platform (national and transnational) is administrated by FOGGS. For the included services separate clouds at different hosting providers are used, each with distinct login credentials. All host are located in Europe
 - Reclaim Hosting:
<https://reclaim.cloud/> Server Location: Frankfurt
 Privacy Policy: <https://www.reclaimhosting.com/privacy-policy/>
 Code of Conduct: <https://www.reclaimhosting.com/code-of-conduct/>
 Secure administration logins provided with 2FA available. Data processing is performed in accordance with GDPR. Policies exist prohibiting harassment and hate speech. Client manages server security (eg., firewall) and backup.
 - Agora: <https://agora.democrat-horizon.eu>

Supporting the DEMOCRAT Project partners and engaging EfD stakeholders

The Agora is a key tool for engaging the DEMOCRAT Project partners, among themselves and with a wide range of stakeholders involved in EfD within Europe and beyond. Examples of such engagement using the functionalities of the Agora include:

For the DEMOCRAT Project partners

The six national education / living lab partners

An Agora version has been prepared for each of the six national teams, in the language(s) of each team. Through the “tiles” of each Agora the respective DEMOCRAT team can share background documents, blogs, interviews and other videos with their respective national EfD stakeholders (e.g. teachers, school principals, students, parents, education researchers/experts, national authorities, “sister” projects funded by the EU). They can also use their national Agora to organize the respective living labs, hosting them there online but also support the in-person living labs with the aforementioned material.

All DEMOCRAT project partners

The transnational Agora fulfills similar functions as the national Agoras, but it is meant for use by the entire group of DEMOCRAT Project partners in the common working language (English). The NextCloud electronic infrastructure that partly underlies the Agora plays the role of internal repository, document sharing and co-working platform for the project partners, who access the restricted area via assigned usernames and passwords.

For the broader EfD stakeholder community

Citizenship Educators and Researchers

“Sister” projects in the EfD sector are offered through the transnational Agora – as well as through the national Agoras, if they operate in the respective languages – an electronic platform to present their news and findings, engage with the EfD community in Europe and beyond, and advance collaborative initiatives. The Agora is a flexible tool and can be adapted, within available resources, to address specific needs that may be communicated by the stakeholders. In this light, and at the initiative of the Democrat Project partners, the Transnational Agora already hosts biweekly “Democracy Talks”, with a different EfD expert as guest each time. Furthermore, contact has been established with the EERA-ECER “Research on Citizenship Education” Network (<https://eera-ecer.de/networks/eera-networks/34-research-on-citizenship-education>) and the intention is to offer the Agora as platform for the use of the Network, which brings together the education research community that focuses on issues of democratic citizenship education in Europe.

Teachers

Through the transnational and the national Agoras material is offered to teachers involved in EfD, including background material used by the DEMOCRAT Project partners, as well as original material produced by the

Project itself. This material can be papers and blogs but also interviews/podcasts and online training sessions for specific EfD competences. Eventually, the Project's final findings will also be made available on the Agora, along with toolbox for curriculum development on EfD.

Students

Material specifically useful for students and young people will also gradually become available on the transnational and the national Agoras. For example, an effort is being made to make available through the Agora electronic games with an educational element. Steps in this direction have been taken by presenting and promoting the Agora in the context of the Digital With Purpose (DWP) annual Global Summits and following up with game developers thereafter.

Other Stakeholders

The online material posted on the transnational Agora and the national ones under the three previous stakeholder groups are also relevant for other EfD stakeholders, notably parents and national/regional/local authorities but also NGOs active on the field of education for democracy or civic education in general. They can monitor the flow of ideas and activities and make their own interventions from their perspectives and in fulfilment of their responsibilities through the Agora(s). The inclusion of Stichting International Parents Alliance as partner of the DEMOCRAT project certainly facilitates access to that group of stakeholders, while authorities at national and sub-national level as well as NGO's are brought in by the six national teams through their living labs and beyond. As the project advances, authorities at EU and international level (e.g. UNESCO) will also be informed of the project's emerging findings and the engagement possibilities offered by the Agora platform.