Democrat
EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Comparative Assessment of National Living Labs and Pilot Interventions

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CIVED	Civic Education Study
CR	Comparative Report
D	Deliverable
EfD	Education for Democracy
EU	European Union
ICCS	International Civic and Citizenship Education Study
LL	Living lab
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
PBL	Project-based learning
RDC	Responsible Democratic Citizenship
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

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Executive Summary

Funded under the Horizon Europe programme, the DEMOCRAT project aimed to develop, test and validate a comprehensive framework and set of tools for Education for Democracy (EfD) across diverse European education systems.

This comparative assessment report summarises the findings from forty pilot interventions carried out in six countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain), which were supported by national Living Labs, and evaluated internally and externally. While the national reports (included in D5.2) provide in-depth descriptions of individual interventions within the context of each country, this report takes a cross-cutting analytical approach to identify recurring patterns, contextual variations, and transferable lessons regarding the design, implementation, and sustainability of EfD initiatives.

Methodologically, the report is based on a mixed approach, combining qualitative and quantitative sources. These sources include documentation and reflections produced by teachers and national teams; data derived from student self-assessment and teacher evaluation tools; observations from Living Lab processes; and findings from an external evaluation carried out by project partners who were not involved in implementing the pilots. This triangulation allows for a nuanced interpretation of both learning outcomes and implementation conditions, while acknowledging the contextual and exploratory nature of the project.

The comparative analysis shows that the development of democratic competences rarely occurs in isolation. Most pilot interventions addressed several competences for responsible and democratic citizenship (RDC) – solidary participation, deliberation, critical judgement and democratic resilience – simultaneously, confirming the interdependent nature of democratic learning. Project-based learning, experiential activities, dialogic and deliberative practices, civic simulations and critical media literacy proved to be effective pedagogical approaches for fostering integrated competence development, provided they were coherently aligned with the RDC competence framework.

Learning outcomes varied according to the educational level, the duration and intensity of the interventions, and the degree of curricular or institutional integration. Longer, more embedded interventions tended to produce deeper, more consistent learning effects, whereas shorter, more isolated activities often produced more uneven results. At the same time, the analysis highlights that non-curricular initiatives can achieve a high level of institutionalisation when supported by school leadership and democratic governance structures.

The report also emphasises the pivotal role of teachers and school teams in translating the RDC competence framework into meaningful pedagogical practices. Teacher commitment, prior experience with participatory methodologies, and access to peer support through Living Labs were identified as crucial factors for successful implementation. Living Labs not only functioned as spaces for the co-design and adaptation of tools, but also as infrastructures for professional learning, reflection, and mutual learning.

Findings from the external evaluation reinforce these conclusions, while also highlighting persistent challenges. These include time constraints, competing curricular demands, inconsistent institutional support, and the difficulty of applying uniform assessment tools in diverse contexts. While the external perspective confirms the added value of the DEMOCRAT approach, it also stresses the importance of contextual adaptation, sustained support, and realistic expectations regarding scalability.

Finally, the report identifies the key conditions necessary for the transferability and expansion of EfD interventions. These include institutional recognition, alignment with existing school cultures, the flexible use of tools and the presence of collaborative support structures. Rather than offering prescriptive models, the DEMOCRAT project provides a validated framework and a set of adaptable tools to inform future EfD policies and practices across Europe.

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1. Introduction

The DEMOCRAT project, funded by the *Horizon Europe* programme, aimed to develop, test and validate a curricular framework and a set of tools aimed at strengthening Education for Democracy (EfD) in European education systems. Its purpose is to provide schools, teachers and education managers with conceptual and pedagogical tools that enable democracy and Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) to be not only a curricular subject, but also a living practice integrated into the daily life of schools. To this end, the DEMOCRAT project combined research, co-creation, and experimentation: it analysed current educational needs, designed evidence-based resources, supported schools through collaborative methodologies and tested their applicability through pilot interventions supported by consultation and co-working sessions in a Living Lab format. The ultimate goal was to understand how democratic competences can be taught, practised, and assessed in real contexts, and what conditions allow these teaching methodologies to be sustained and adapted for use in diverse education and learning contexts.

In this context, the comparative assessment report presented here constitutes a decisive step in the validation of the DEMOCRAT approach to EfD. Unlike the national reports, which describe each intervention and its specific context in detail, this document takes a cross-cutting perspective in order to analyse the information collected by the national teams in an integrated manner. Its mission is to identify common patterns, significant differences and transferable lessons, in order to understand which elements of the RDC competence framework work consistently in different European countries, what are the challenges faced when trying to introduce the RDC competence framework into different education systems, and what support and adjustments are needed for successful implementation.

This comparative approach thus offers a broader view that not only covers the activities carried out during the pilot interventions, but also looks at the institutional, organisational and pedagogical conditions that have enabled — or hindered — their implementation in different environments. This makes it possible to assess the adaptability of the RDC competence framework, the functionality of the assessment tools and the role of Living Labs as support structures. The comparison between different contexts provides a more complete view of the potential of the DEMOCRAT approach to EfD and the tools developed within it.

The present introductory chapter sets the stage for the elaboration of the entire Comparative Assessment Report (CAR) and is organised in five sections. The first section (1.1.) presents the objectives of the report in detail and clarifies its relationship with the national reports (see deliverable D5.2.), explaining the sources of the information used. The second and third sections present the conceptual framework of the project and the Living Lab methodology used by the project to contextualise the implementation of the pilot interventions within the DEMOCERAT framework. More specifically, the second section (1.2.) presents the conceptual framework of the project: the RDC competences that should characterise students successfully taught EfD, the pedagogies used to promote RDC-competence-conducive teacher and student reflection processes, and the tools created to assess the degree of successful implementation. The third section (1.3.) introduces the Living Lab methodology adopted by DEMOCRAT, highlighting its role as an iterative, collaborative innovation process through which stakeholders co-develop, test, and refine the educational tools and approaches applied in the project. Finaly, the fourth (1.4.) and fifth (1.5.) sections present the methodological aspects of the CAR, defining its scope, possibilities and limitations. Thereafter the main CAR chapters follow.

1.1. Objective of the comparative assessment report and relationship with national reports

The main purpose of this comparative assessment report is to analyse and evaluate in an integrated manner the results, dynamics and lessons learned from the pilot interventions carried out in the six countries of the DEMOCRAT project, in order to understand how EfD has been implemented in real contexts and what implications this has for the validation and improvement of the DEMOCRAT approach.

This report is based on information gathered from national reports prepared by the team responsible for each country, and external evaluation carried out by DEMOCRAT partners operating outside the national teams (see more below).

The national reports constitute the primary source for comparative analysis and bring together all the information generated during the project. Their content is derived from three types of evidence:

- The development of the pilot interventions, documented through monitoring carried out by the national teams.
- The activities of the Living Labs, which provide reflections, shared interpretations of the RDC competence framework and analysis of local implementation conditions.
- Evaluation data and teacher impressions, collected during the application of student self-assessment and teacher evaluation tools.

In this way, the national reports function as contextualised summaries, integrating classroom observations, design decisions, adaptations made, difficulties encountered and teacher assessments, as well as the discussions and analyses that emerged in the Living Labs.

This comparative assessment report attempts to identify cross-cutting patterns, significant contrasts and conditions that favour or hinder the development of democratic competences. To achieve that, it does not directly access the raw data from the pilots, but rather draws on the material consolidated by the national teams and their (internal) evaluation outcomes (see DEMOCRAT Deliverable D5.2.). It also uses the filter of external evaluation of individual pilot interventions and of each national Living Lab as a whole, carried out through structured interviews of relevant stakeholders by DEMOCRAT partners not involved in the Living Labs and pilot interventions.

The comparative analysis thus seeks to understand the functioning of the DEMOCRAT approach from an overall perspective, respecting the specificities of each country but drawing out common lessons that guide the next project steps:

- the revision of the framework and tools,
- and the development of the Toolbox.

In this sense, the report places the national results in a broader perspective, offering a systematic and well-founded interpretation of the project as a whole.

1.2. The DEMOCRAT framework: European vision of EfD, RDC competences, outline of a European curriculum and assessment tools

To reinforce the resilience and promotion of democracy, DEMOCRAT has, through a participatory approach, elaborated an outline of a European curriculum for EfD based on a framework of Responsible Democratic

Citizenship (RDC) competences, and developed tools to assess the RDC competence internalisation by students. To test this approach, a number of local pilot interventions have been set up in schools in the six countries, where DEMOCRAT operates: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain. The experience gained through the pilot interventions is being assembled, in the last DEMOCRAT project months, in the form of a toolbox to support the adoption of transformative EfD practices in the EU and beyond. This effort has been pursued within a European vision of EfD, which had been developed at the start of the DEMOCRAT project by the project consortium in cooperation with stakeholders from the national education communities.

1.2.1. A European vision of Education for Democracy

DEMOCRAT's vision of EfD started from the conception of democracy as a macro- and micropolitical order. The operational definition of democracy as the equal right of all citizens to participate equally in the collective shaping of the social living conditions that affect them or more briefly: equal participation in the political shaping of one's own living conditions (Lessenich 2022:14)[1] allows to conceive it as an institutional order as for the 'government of the people by the people for the people' as exposed by the US President Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address (1863), but also as a way to take collective binding decision in all social domains of a society as sport associations, schools, business organisations, Non-governmental organisation, groups of friends or families. It is obvious that democratic principles are not applied in in many of these environments, but it is a measure the degree in which democracy is implemented as a transversal societal principle.

A core concept used by DEMOCRAT was the of 'Agency', which Prout & James (1990: 8)[2] for education express as follows:

> *„Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes*."

In the political field, agency is anchored in public debates and relates to decision-making processes of the political system as such and how citizens participate beyond voting in the decision processes in liberal representative democracy. But only an understanding of this notion in terms of micro-politics makes it possible to relate democratic action to areas of everyday life and to ask how democracy should be part of the decision-making processes in families, schools or businesses. This opens up the space for debate on democratic agency, not in the sense of advocating for radical grassroots political systems, but in the sense of asking in which areas of daily life democratic principles should be applied and in which they should not.

Based on this conception of democracy and agency. DEMOCRAT developed a European vision of EfD, which was resumed in the policy brief as follows:

- To safeguard democracy within the European Union, transformative education for democracy must be reinforced, also taking into account fast-moving digitalisation and fast-breached planetary boundaries.
- The shift to transformative education for democracy should be based on a coherent competence framework defined in complementarity with the frameworks of citizenship competences proposed by the

[1] Lessenich, S. (2022). Límites de la democracia: La participación como problema de reparto. Barcelona. The German original: Lessenich, S. (2019) Grenzen der Demokratie. Teilhabe als Verteilungsproblem, Ditzingen: Reclam

[2] Prout, A. & James, A. (1990). A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems. in James, A. & Prout, A. (eds). Constructing and Re-constructing Childhood. Basingstoke.

EU (Key Competences for Lifelong Learning) and the Council of Europe (Competences for Democratic Culture). The four key RDC competences identified by DEMOCRAT are: Solidary Participation, Deliberation, Judgement, and Democratic Resilience.

- The above competence framework should be translated by EU member states and schools in different parts of Europe into a sample curriculum for responsible democratic citizenship adjusted to their education systems and societies.
- Schools have to be laboratories of democratic practice on a daily basis and across subjects, not just for a few hours of civic education or education for democracy per week, and need to connect with a conducive local, European, global and digital environment.
- Students need to be aware of both their rights and responsibilities, and be guided to act on both, within their peer groups and in relation to their teachers, parents, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders.
- A crucial aspect of any approach to education for democracy is the competence of the teacher to create an environment in which the students can learn democracy in action and not just in words.

A competence framework for Responsible Democratic Citizenship

The next step was the development of the RDC (Responsible Democratic Citizenship) framework as the conceptual backbone of the DEMOCRAT project and as a proposal to organises EfD around these four core competences. These competences are described and developed in the *European curriculum for Education for Democracy* developed by the project, which provides a common basis for guiding both the design of educational interventions and the development of assessment tools.

1. Solidary participation

Solidary participation refers to the ability of students to become actively involved in the life of the classroom, the school and the community in a cooperative manner and with a focus on the common good. It includes contributing to collective projects, taking on responsibilities, showing sensitivity to the needs of others and participating in decisions that affect the group. This competence combines action—taking part, deciding, coordinating—with relationship—listening, empathising, supporting—and allows participation to go beyond mere presence to contribute in a co-responsible manner.

2. Deliberation

Deliberation encompasses the ability to engage in dialogue, exchange reasons and make shared decisions in a reasoned manner. It involves active listening, considering different points of view, justifying opinions, responding to objections and participating in structured conversations aimed at solving problems or making collective decisions. The project curriculum emphasises that deliberation requires specific pedagogical conditions — safe spaces, clear rules, dialogue methodologies — that encourage the expression of disagreements and reasoned analysis.

3. Critical judgement

Critical judgement encompasses the ability to analyse information, evaluate arguments, identify biases, and form well-founded opinions. It includes media literacy, ethical understanding, and social analysis competences. The curriculum highlights the importance of comparing sources, recognising intentions, arguing with evidence, and understanding how discourses are formed in the public sphere. This competence is essential for students to navigate a diverse and often polarised information ecosystem.

4. Democratic resilience

Democratic resilience is defined as the ability to maintain democratic engagement in situations of conflict, tension, or social pressure. It includes managing emotions, sustaining dialogue in the face of disagreement, resisting manipulative content, and acting in accordance with democratic principles even when this involves facing discomfort or dilemmas. This competence combines emotional, ethical, and social strength and enables students to act respectfully and responsibly in complex contexts.

Outline of a European Curriculum for Education for Democracy

The RDC competence framework is a cornerstone of the Outline of a European EfD Curriculum, which DEMOCRAT has developed based also on the analysis of the current circumstances in the six European countries for its implementation and its possible applications in educational settings (see D4.1.[3]). This 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 competences 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 consultation and co-working 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 interventions in Living Labs, focusing on the development of RDC competences 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.

Tools for observing and supporting RDC competences

To facilitate the implementation of the principles of the outlined European Curriculum and the RDC competence framework in schools, the project developed two main tools:

[3] Hytti, M.; Sandström, N.; Kalev,L.; Mallon, B. & Eren, E. (2024) OUTLINE of a European EfD Curriculum Democrat Deliverable 4.1. https://democrat-horizon.eu. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14512483

- Student self-assessment, which invites students to reflect on how they participate, dialogue, argue and manage democratic situations in specific activities.
- Teacher assessment, which allows teachers to describe students' competence performance based on observable behaviours in real learning situations.

Both tools are designed as training instruments, aimed at generating reflection and facilitating pedagogical adjustment. They do not seek to measure in a standardised way or to compare between schools, but rather to support teachers in observing processes that might otherwise remain implicit or invisible.

The adaptations made in different countries—linguistic adjustments, simplifications, reorganisation of items—provide valuable information on the clarity, usability and age appropriateness of the tools, aspects that will be integrated into the final review planned within the DEMOCRAT Toolbox.

Testing the European Curriculum, its RDC competence framework and the tools in practice

For the design of the local pilot intervention to test the European Curriculum, its RDC competence framework and the tools, some principles were proposed. They address pedagogical considerations (methods, content, and participation in learning), organizational and structural arrangements (collaboration, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and ethics), and practical and feasibility aspects (realistic implementation, evaluation, and scalability across contexts):

1. In local Living Labs and pilot interventions, engage diverse actors for cooperation and co-development: students, parents, teachers, schools, NGOs, public administrations or institutions, entities from the creative sector going beyond the boundaries of the formal education system. Please ask for their input / involve them in co-creation of a) pilot design, b) implementation assessment and evaluation.
2. Include physical face-to-face meetings (e.g. in national Living Labs) as well as online meetings and spaces where appropriate.
3. Make an effort to include youth and children in co-creating / co-designing the interventions and their assessment. If they cannot participate in the Living Lab meeting, teachers and youth workers should make an effort to include their input as much as possible at the beginning, during, and at the end of the intervention.
4. If possible, make participation in Living Labs and pilots a part of in-service training for teachers (and youth workers, if applicable) – most likely participating in such a research and development project is new to them and they are learning many new competences about research, co-creation and how to develop students' RDC competences. Receiving an official diploma or some other form or recognition can help them in their career and act as an extra piece of motivation.
5. When selecting and designing LPPs, take into account the RDC competence framework, D2.1, D3.1 and D4.1. EfD curricula (short summary in previous chapter). You need to address at least one RDC competence in each intervention in a meaningful way. Consider the input you have gathered in previous Living Lab meetings and via WP4 activities. You should also consider what you have learned from WP2 and WP3. The bottom line is that these should have helped you to identify your country's problem-areas, needs and opportunities.
6. Use design thinking principles if applicable:
   - UNDERSTAND, EMPATHISE: Understand your stakeholders and the challenges, problems and opportunities there are. Much of this has been done in the previous Living Lab meetings.
   - DEFINE PROBLEM(S): Decide what specific democracy and EfD challenges and which competences you are focusing on.

- FIND SOLUTIONS: the solutions are often already existing practices and partnerships you could be building on! See below some ideas on what we look for in terms of learning approaches.
- PROTOTYPE: you can skip this step if there are already existing methods and materials, but you might also think of adapting existing materials. Or you might think of this phase as a small pre-pilot, trying out a new tool or material on a smaller scale, e.g. with 1-2 teachers, before introducing it to more schools.
- TEST: test the proposed solutions (methods, approaches, materials)
- EVALUATE: while testing, don't forget to assess and evaluate (more about that below)
- REPEAT (OPTIONAL): e.g. you have done one iteration of testing method X in school A in autumn 2024, and once initial evaluation is done, the teacher(s) decide they want to do it again a little differently in spring 2025 – that means there will be two iterations of testing and further developing method X.

7. If the intervention is based on a previous or ongoing project, or existing practice/experience, feel free to rely on that (reiteration usually makes it better), but adjust it to the DEMOCRAT approach and use the DEMOCRAT assessment and evaluation framework.
8. Make sure there is an element of innovation. Even when the approach/method/material is not new or is implemented within an existing practice, it should help demonstrate added value and help solve the challenges you have identified in your country / school / youth centre. Innovation could be e.g. in terms of the newness of the competence focus, method used, organisation, context, etc.
9. All in all, keep an eye on feasibility. If the workload or complexity of the intervention becomes too much for you or the stakeholders involved, adjust it. A completed intervention is better than an intervention that was never started or was abandoned half-way.
10. Pay attention to obtaining informed consent from the students, parents and other participants of the intervention as well as other ethical aspects. The frames and guidance for this is already provided by UB, see respective files and if needed, adjust.

The design principles are advisory, except for the 10th that is obligatory in the case of all interventions where data is collected and used in the DEMOCRAT project.

These principles were elaborated considering that the pilot intervention will be created especially for the DEMOCRAT project in close cooperation between the national teams of DEMOCRAT and the school and a direct intervention of the national team in the schools.

However, the point 7 previewed the situation that a pilot intervention is not created especially for the DEMOCRAT project, but it is an ongoing school project in EfD. Also in some newly created intervention, the application of the outlined principles of the design was not always possible. Particularly the point 1 to 4, which expressed principles of democratic schools, were critical. The internal procedures, patterns of behaviour, and general workloads are barriers to apply them. In these cases, the families and the students did not participate in the design of the interventions.

In some interventions, for example in Spain, the national project team did not participate directly in the pilot intervention having no contact with the students except in the session to present DEMOCRAT to the students. The role of the national Project team was to monitor the intervention through in-person and online meetings with the responsible teacher or school team.

Regarding point 6 above, most of the pilots respond to a concrete detected democratic challenge with a link to one or more RDC competences. The pilots opt for a concrete pedagogical solution and test this solution in practice together with the assessment tools co-created by DEMOCRAT.

1.3. Living Labs and pilot interventions

The Living Lab methodology originates in projects of technological innovation. Since the 1990s it has been applied to a broader range of projects, particularly those related to social innovation, especially to the application of digital technologies, in various societal domains. The concept has been defined as "*a user-driven open innovation ecosystem based on a business – citizens – government partnership which enables users to take an active part in the research, development and innovation process*" (EC 2009: 7)[4]. As this definition shows, it is in its origin a concept to promote product and service innovation in business areas, which later has been applied in other domains such as regional and local development, health and sustainability. DEMOCRAT use this concept for the development of tools for EfD in cooperation with stakeholders from the community of Education in six EU countries.

The DEMOCRAT project understands Living Labs as structured platforms for the identification of social problems and the formulation of solutions. Subsequently, these solutions are tested in real contexts, with the aim of refining them based on the testing experience. In order to facilitate the conversion of the social invention into a social innovation, DEMOCRAT employs a scaling-up strategy development. The scaling-up strategy has two elements: a) the open innovation process to achieve a novel and practicable solution for effective EfD with the potential to transcend the social niche, where they were created; b) extending the activities of the Living labs to a critical mass so that the social inventions could become social innovations.

This requires the creation and expansion of a community interested to participating in the development of envisaged solutions. The overarching goal is to improve the EfD as a pivotal means to reinforcing European Democracy, which is one major social problem of the EU.

The Living Labs are environments of mutual or collaborative learning between academics and practitioners, as well as among practitioners themselves. Collaborative learning is regarded as an essential element of policy development based on public participation (see Daniels & Walker, 1996)[5]. Referring to complex public policy situations, which appear intractable, Daniels & Walker (1996) consider that "the process of defining a problem and generating alternatives makes for meaningful social learning as constituencies sort out their wone and other's values, orientation and priorities".

According to Simonsen & Robertson (2013)[6] mutual learning is the fundament of participatory approaches as the DEMOCRAT project proposed with its Living Labs. It is "a process of investigating, understanding, reflecting upon, establishing, developing, and supporting mutual learning between multiple participants in collective 'reflection-in-action'."

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[4] EC - Directorate-General for the Information Society and Media (2009) Living Labs for user-driven open innovation. Luxembourgh.

[5] Daniels, S. E., & Walker, G. B. (1996). Collaborative learning: improving public deliberation in ecosystem-based management. Environmental impact assessment review 16(2), 71-102.

[6] Simonson, J., & Robertson, T. (2013) Participatory Designe. An Introduction. Simonson, J., & Robertson, T. (Eds.). (2013). Routledge International Handbook of Participatory design. London/ New York

The DEMOCRAT project established six national Living Labs in the six participant countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland, and Spain), where the prototypes would be designed and tested. The national Living Labs were offered the opportunity to create language-based online groups ("National Agoras"). Only the Spanish and the German Living Labs accepted this offer. In Spain, a bilingual Agora in Catalan and Spanish was created. The Agora and the subgroups provide access to project-generated content and relevant resources. They are used as repository of documents, audiovisual material and blogs written by consortium members or external staff, such as researchers from other projects on democracy or EfD or teachers. While the Spanish and German Agoras included this material in their national language, a transnational, the English-language Agora offered a common platform for exchanges among the DEMOCRAT partners and the broader EfD community.

From the identification of social problems and the formulation of solutions to the design of the final inventions and development of a strategy to convert the inventions into social innovations, the entire Living Lab process was conceived as an iterative mutual learning process for the participating community. For this reason, DEMOCRAT project has devised at least five thematical national and transnational workshops:

1. Brainstorming workshop to generate ideas and foster consensus around the basic vision of the project (responsible democratic citizenship, competences, EfD and learning approaches) and to develop a competence framework for Responsible Democratic Citizenship.
2. Validation of the competence framework, the initial outline of the EfD curriculum and education approaches. It also includes a presentation of the results of the revision of educational praxis and material sin the field and how they informed the public debate.
3. Design of local educational projects to test the Competence Framework, the outline of the European Curriculum and the proposed competence assessment tools in real world contexts.
4. Monitoring and self-assessment of the local projects and first reflections on the suitability of the Competences Framework, the European Curriculum, the assessment tools and innovative pedagogical approaches, and debating the outline of pedagogical material in the area of Human Geography.
5. Refinement of the developed tools, debating the impact of local educational projects based on competence assessment and evaluation; validating education material; debating toolbox for practitioners and scaling up prospects and designing sustainable scaling up strategies.

The national workshops were designed to connect the DEMOCRAT project to the national and regional education communities and to engage them with the testing of methods and final toolbox development. After each series of national workshops, a transnational workshop was organised to enhance the European dimension of the mutual learning. These five themes were thought to be the minimum common Living Lab structure in each country. In accordance with the needs of each national Living Lab, additional onsite or online events and activities were organised.

This series of national and transnational workshops were the backbone of the Living Lab activities. They were complemented by the activities at the transnational and two national Agoras. Each national Living Lab developed additional activities, such as expert interviews, focus groups, and video interviews, among others.

Steps 3 and 4 were thought to be an exchange of the experience among the local pilot interventions, thus providing the essential source of information for the development of the envisaged project outcomes. Steps 4 and 5 were devoted to the refinement of the tools. Lessons learnt from the Living Lab activities are presented in Chapter 6 of this report.

1.4. Methodological approach of the comparative assessment report

The CAR adopts a mixed methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative elements. It analyses narratives and descriptions of pedagogical practices, design decisions, difficulties encountered, adaptations made, and assessments provided by teachers and national teams. It also considers evidence gathered through the external evaluation of local pilot interventions and Living Lab processes. On the other hand, data derived from student self-assessment and teacher evaluation tools is systematised to allow patterns of understanding, use, modification and results linked to the RDC competence framework to be observed (see Deliverable 5.2). This combination enables both observable trends and interpretative nuances to be identified, thereby enriching the understanding of the implementation process.

Given the contextual and diverse nature of the interventions, the analysis does not seek to establish causal relationships or make normative comparisons between countries. Instead, it focuses on identifying regularities, convergences, and contrasts that allow us to understand the conditions under which EfD works, which supporting elements are most decisive, and which barriers are repeated in different contexts. The analysis pays attention to variables such as educational level, the duration and intensity of the pilots, the degree of curricular integration, teacher support, school culture, and the role played by Living Labs.

This methodological approach allows for a comparative analysis that respects the heterogeneity of the participating contexts and is consistent with the exploratory nature of the project. The analysis does not aim to offer universally valid generalisations, but rather well-founded patterns among the DEMOCRAT outputs, thus also contributing to the development of the final Toolbox.

In the preparation of this comparative assessment report, AI-based digital tools, including Elicit, ATLAS.ti, ChatGPT (model GTP-5.2) and Microsoft Copilot, were used to support the drafting process. Their main tasks were to support the organisation and processing of complex information, and to improve the clarity and coherence of the text. The authors closely supervised the use of these tools, which did not generate original empirical data or analytical conclusions. The authors remain entirely responsible for the content and interpretations presented in this report.

1.5. Scope, limitations and structure of the report

This comparative assessment report takes into account all the pilot interventions developed within the framework of the DEMOCRAT project and completed by the time the respective national evaluation report was drawn up (see deliverable D5.2.). The 40 pilots provide a rich and diverse, but also heterogeneous, basis for the preparation of the CR.

A first limitation stems from the variability in the duration, structure and educational levels of the pilots. Some of them are long-term, complex projects, while others are short, focused interventions. This diversity is a strength of the DEMOCRAT project, as it allows the applicability of the RDC competence framework to be explored in very different contexts, but it introduces differences that make strict comparisons between cases difficult.

A second limitation stems from the use of assessment tools. Although all countries applied student self-assessment and teacher assessment, their use was not uniform. In some contexts, they were used without

modification; in others, they were adapted to the educational level, simplified or reorganised.[7] These variations reduce the direct comparability of the results, but provide valuable information on the usability and the need to adapt the language and structure of the tools to each context.

Despite these limitations, the combination of sources—national reports, structured data from the assessment tools, observations from the Living Labs, external evaluation reports and cross-national specimens —provides a solid basis for rigorous comparative analysis. The aim is not to produce universally applicable generalisations, but to identify patterns, lessons learned and key conditions that will guide the improvement of the DEMOCRAT approach, support the construction of the Toolbox and enable an in-depth understanding of the experience gained through the pilots.

The structure of the CAR reflects this purpose. Following this introductory chapter:

- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the set of interventions, their context, types and scope;
- Chapter 3 analyses how the RDC competences were addressed in the pilot interventions;
- Chapter 4 examines the use, adaptation and evaluation of the DEMOCRAT assessment tools;
- Chapter 5 explores the results obtained in terms of democratic learning;
- Chapter 6 presents the lessons learned from the Living Lab process(es);
- Chapter 7 presents the external evaluation of the implementation of DEMOCRAT Living Labs and pilot interventions;
- Chapter 8 identifies the factors that facilitated and those that hindered implementation, as well as conditions for transferability and sustainability; and
- Chapter 9 presents the main conclusions of the report.

[7] In a social innovation project, users are expected to propose changes to the prototype with the aim of improving it for subsequent application.

2. Overview of national interventions

The aim of this chapter is to provide a descriptive and comparative characterisation of the set of educational interventions developed in the six countries participating in the DEMOCRAT project. This initial overview provides an understanding of what has been done, in what contexts and under what organisational conditions, before moving on to the in-depth pedagogical analysis that will be developed in subsequent chapters.

The report covers a total of 40 interventions involving 144 teachers and 1,889 students, from primary to secondary education, teacher training and adult education.[8] This diversity is one of the structural features of the project: it allows us to observe how the DEMOCRAT approach adapts to very different institutional contexts, pedagogical cultures, curricular frameworks and available resources.

The purpose of this chapter is not to analyse learning outcomes or pedagogical decisions, but to describe and compare the basic characteristics of the interventions, so that the reader has a general map for interpreting the pedagogical analysis (Chapter 3), the use and adaptation of assessment tools (Chapter 4), learning outcomes (Chapter 5), the contribution of Living Labs (Chapter 6), the external evaluation (Chapter 7) and the final interpretation of conditions and transferability (Chapter 8).

To this end, the chapter is organised into two complementary sections:

- 2.1. Compared variables, which offers a cross-sectional reading of the common and differential patterns of the interventions, including their distribution by educational levels, duration, age range, methodological approaches, curricular integration and themes.
- 2.2. National overview, which presents a descriptive summary of each country's pilots using the typology developed in section 2.1.

Taken as a whole, this chapter provides a descriptive framework from which it is possible to understand the practices implemented and the diversity of contexts in which the DEMOCRAT approach has been deployed and tested.

2.1. Typology of interventions

The analysis of the typology of interventions is essential to understanding how the DEMOCRAT approach has been deployed in each country and what are the structural elements that condition the implementation of the RDC competence framework.

The diversity of educational levels, age ranges, duration, methodologies, topics, organisational structures and links to the curriculum is not only an indicator of the flexibility of the DEMOCRAT approach, but also a key explanatory factor for the results obtained and the lessons learned.

Below is a breakdown of the interventions by different variables, which helps to build an initial picture of the scope of the pilot interventions developed by DEMOCRAT.

[8] This report analyses only the interventions completed prior to this report. The DEMOCRAT project has developed further interventions, but these have not been included as they are still not finalised at the moment writing the national assessment reports (D5.2).

2.1.1. Duration of the interventions

The duration of the interventions implemented within the framework of the DEMOCRAT project shows considerable diversity between countries and schools. To facilitate comparison, the 40 pilot interventions have been grouped into four homogeneous categories based on the estimated implementation time: short (1 day–4 weeks), medium (1–3 months), long (4–8 months) and extensive (entire academic year).

Category	Description	No. of interventions
Short	1 day – 4 weeks	**5**
Medium	1–3 months	**12**
Long	4–8 months	**17**
Extensive	Entire course	**6**

Table 1. Distribution of pilot interventions according to duration

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

Based on this classification, it can be seen that long interventions (4–8 months) constitute the largest group, with a total of 17 projects, indicating that in a significant number of cases the experiences took place over a prolonged period within the school year. These are followed by medium-term interventions (1–3 months), with 12 projects, a format that is common in contexts where interventions are organised into quarterly modules or units with specific planning.

The group of short interventions (1 day–4 weeks) comprises 5 projects, characterised by workshop formats, themed weeks or activities concentrated in limited periods. Finally, there are 6 long interventions (entire school year), including those whose duration is described as '9 months', which are considered equivalent to a full academic year.

This distribution reflects the coexistence of different time formats within the project as a whole and provides a descriptive framework that allows the different interventions to be situated before analysing their pedagogical implications in later chapters.

2.1.2. Age range

The distribution of interventions according to the age range of participating students shows a diverse presence of age groups across all DEMOCRAT interventions. Based on the original ranges recorded in the national reports, ages have been grouped into five comparable categories, providing a clear overview of the educational scope of the 40 interventions.

The largest group corresponds to 17–19, with a total of 15 interventions. This is followed by the 15–17 and 10–13 groups, both with 6 interventions.

There are 5 interventions in the 13–15 group, while the 6–10 group, has 4 interventions. There are 3 interventions in the over 19 group. Finally, one project has a very wide range combining different educational levels and has been classified as Mixed wide (7 to 15 years).

Age group	No. of interventions
Over 19	3
17–19	15
15–17	6
10–13	6
13–15	5
6–10	4
Mixed wide *(very broad range that cannot be classified precisely)*	1

Table 2. Distribution of pilot interventions by age range

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

This classification provides a descriptive overview of the age range covered by the DEMOCRAT pilot interventions and allows the distribution of the pilots to be placed in relation to the different educational stages.

2.1.3. Methodological approaches

The information gathered in the national reports and in the Toolbox database on pilot interventions shows a wide methodological diversity in the implementation of DEMOCRAT project interventions. In order to describe this diversity in a comparative and homogeneous manner, a descriptive classification has been developed that groups the approaches mentioned by the interventions into seven broad categories. This typology does not replace the analytical classification used in section 3.2, but is used here for strictly descriptive purposes, allowing the data to be organised systematically.

Methodological approach	No. of projects
PBL/projects	9
Simulation / role-play	8
Deliberation / debate	6
Media literacy	6
Cooperative	4
Dialogic/narrative	4
Community / external	4

Table 3. Distribution of pilot interventions according to methodological approach

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

The most frequent approach is project-based learning, with nine interventions, particularly present in long-term projects and initiatives linked to school participation or community development. This is followed by simulations and role-play activities, with eight interventions that cover elections and other decision-making processes.

Approaches focused on structured deliberation and debate, as well as those linked to media literacy and critical analysis of information, account for six projects each, reflecting the importance of both argumentation and working with sources and media in the project as a whole. Approaches based on cooperative learning, dialogic and narrative approaches, and community or external activities comprise between four and five interventions each, showing a significant but less widespread presence in comparative terms.

This classification provides a descriptive overview of the methodological landscape of DEMOCRAT interventions, allowing us to identify characteristics of use and offering a common framework for the comparative analysis that will be developed in subsequent chapters.

2.1.4. Curricular integration and institutional positioning

Here we examine how the various pilot activities were integrated into the regular functioning of the respective school. We have identified three levels of integration, as shown on the table that follows.

Level of integration	No. of interventions
Structural integration	9
Functional integration	17
Specific interventions	14

Table 4. Distribution of pilot interventions according to level of integration

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

The first group consists of nine interventions with structural integration, directly linked to school projects, consolidated democratic structures—such as student councils or participatory budgets—or long-term initiatives that form a stable part of the school's annual planning. These interventions show a high degree of institutionalisation and a sustained presence in school life.

Secondly, seventeen interventions are functionally integrated, taking place within specific subjects, term-long modules or teaching units. Although they do not involve large-scale organisational changes, they do maintain clear curricular continuity and a direct link to the educational content of each stage of education.

Finally, fourteen interventions are classified as one-off events, including workshops, simulations, themed weeks or activities concentrated in short periods. These experiences, although significant, are organised outside the regular curriculum and do not require a restructuring of the school's teaching plan.

This classification provides a descriptive overview of the institutional positioning of the interventions and allows us to assess the degree of curricular integration of the set of experiences developed in the DEMOCRAT project.

2.1.5. Themes addressed in the interventions

The table below classifies the DEMOCRAT project interventions by theme and provides a descriptive overview of the main content and guidelines addressed. Based on the documentation provided by the national teams of the pilot interventions, the interventions have been grouped into four broad thematic families, which facilitate a comparative reading of the whole.

Theme	No. of interventions
Participation and school democracy	9
Civic engagement and community	12
Media literacy and critical thinking	9
Historical memory, diversity and controversies	9
Total	**40**

Table 5. Distribution of pilot interventions by theme

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

The most represented theme is Civic Engagement and Community, which includes 13 interventions. This category groups together projects aimed at strengthening the relationship between students and their social or institutional environment, including activities with local administrations, community involvement experiences, civic simulations, and urban projects. These are interventions that, without the need for pedagogical analysis in this chapter, show an orientation towards understanding the functioning of the community and decision-making systems beyond the classroom.

School participation and democracy includes nine interventions focused on internal structures and dynamics of participation, such as student councils, participatory budgets, assemblies, and mediation activities. These experiences are characterised by their focus on the democratic life of the school and the development of collective responsibilities within the school context itself.

Another nine interventions are grouped under the theme of Media Literacy and Critical Thinking, which includes projects related to information analysis, understanding how the media works, identifying misinformation, and developing critical competences in relation to digital or narrative content. The distribution shows the presence of this type of project in several countries and educational levels.

Finally, the category of Historical Memory, Diversity and Controversies include eight interventions focused on sensitive issues related to human rights, discrimination, democratic memory and cultural diversity. These initiatives incorporate activities with historical materials, awareness-raising dynamics, exhibitions and debates on coexistence and plurality.

This thematic classification provides a descriptive map of all the interventions carried out in the DEMOCRAT project, showing the diversity of approaches and content addressed before their detailed analysis in subsequent chapters.

2.2. Overview of the six participating countries

As already indicated, 40 interventions, distributed unevenly among the six countries that participated in the DEMOCRAT Project. The following table summarises the number of interventions, teachers and students involved.

Country	No. of interventions	No. of teachers involved	No. of students involved
Estonia	10	20	455
Finland	4	23	258
Germany	7	17	251
Ireland	5	7	142
Poland	8	15	210
Spain	6	62	573
Total	**40**	**144**	**1,889**

Table 6. Distribution of interventions, teachers and students by country

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

This distribution already illustrates two important characteristics:

1. Diversity in scale and coverage: some countries concentrate on large-scale interventions involving a high number of students (Spain, Estonia), while others prioritise more limited pilot interventions with a strong pedagogical focus (Finland, Ireland).
2. Variability in the teacher participation model: from extensive approaches (Catalonia/Spain) to models more focused on small groups of teachers and trainers (Finland, Ireland).

Below is a detailed overview of each Living Lab at the national level, integrating both quantitative data and the organisational, pedagogical and support elements already highlighted in the national reports and the combined document.

2.2.1. Estonia

Ten interventions are being implemented in Estonia, placing it among the countries with the most pilot activities carried out within the framework of the DEMOCRAT project. It should be noted that Estonia developed six more interventions, but these are not included in the analysis as they have not been completed. The ten interventions involved 455 students and 11 teachers, with a typical age range of 16 to 19 years.

In terms of age range, this distribution reflects the predominance of experiences aimed at students aged 16 to 19, which corresponds to the age range data, where the 17–19 and over group accounts for five projects, followed by the 15–17 (two projects), 13–15 (one) and 10–13 (one) groups. One final project covers a wide age range, from 7 to 15 years old.

The duration of the interventions in Estonia shows some diversity. Three projects last four months, two last one month, and the rest are distributed between two, three, five, six or eight months, with one project in each category. This variety places Estonia within a group of countries that have opted for medium- and long-term interventions, although without reaching the configuration of a full course.

In terms of methodological approaches, Estonian interventions show considerable terminological heterogeneity in the available documentation, but all of them combine elements such as project-based learning, simulations, debate, role-play and inquiry-based learning. Each intervention uses specific formulations, reflecting a methodological adaptation to the needs and characteristics of each school, although active methodologies are always present.

With regard to the topics addressed, three interventions focused on political simulations and two were linked to global education. The rest are distributed among community engagement, media literacy, local democracy, EfD and entrepreneurship, showing a wide range of topics aligned with different dimensions of democratic citizenship.

Finally, in terms of curricular integration, six interventions present functional integration, being developed within subjects, modules or teaching units. Two interventions are integrated structurally, forming part of school projects or structures, while another two are classified as one-off, as they are implemented in the form of workshops or concentrated activities.

In summary, the descriptive characterisation of the Estonian interventions allows us to situate their contribution within the DEMOCRAT project before addressing the pedagogical and results analyses that will be developed in the following chapters.

The Estonian Living Lab was characterised by its highly dynamic operation, combining face-to-face workshops with various educational actors, online meetings, specific training and individualised support and guidance for teachers. In this way, the Living Lab facilitated exchanges that helped teachers overcome professional isolation, share doubts and adapt the RDC competence framework to their context.

2.2.2. Finland

In Finland, four interventions are being carried out as part of the Democrat project involving 23 teachers and 258 students, spread across schools and teacher training. Although this is a small number compared to other countries, the Finnish interventions have a clear and coherent structure, which facilitates their descriptive characterisation.

The distribution by age range confirms this diversity. Two interventions are clearly in the 17–19 or more group. Two interventions are in the 10–13 group, corresponding to intermediate courses in basic education. This heterogeneity reflects the combination of schools and universities that characterises Finnish interventions as a whole.

In terms of duration, two interventions last two months and one lasts three months, while the remaining intervention lasts one month. This places Finland among the countries that have opted for medium-length interventions, aligned with modules or teaching sequences specific to the Finnish curriculum structure.

The methodological approaches indicated in the national report reflect a recurrent use of active methodologies focused on analysis and critical understanding. In particular, the interventions are described using terms such as critical thinking, inquiry, participatory discussions, textual analysis and teacher training-

based design, which shows an approach focused on critical literacy and the development of reflective judgement, especially in the case of teacher training. Although the formulations vary from project to project, all interventions integrate elements of rigorous analysis and guided reflection.

In terms of topics, Finland presents three areas: media literacy and critical thinking, EfD, and citizenship competences applied to teacher training. Two interventions focus specifically on identifying reliable information and critically analysing sources; one addresses citizenship content from an applied perspective in school; and another focuses on adapting RDC competences within the framework of university teacher training.

In relation to curriculum integration, two interventions show functional integration, developed within stable subjects or training modules, both in schools and universities. One intervention corresponds to structural integration, given its link to broader citizenship competences training programmes in initial teacher education. The fourth intervention is classified as ad hoc, due to its short format and autonomous nature within the school's planning.

The Finnish Living Lab acted as a co-creation ecosystem, bringing together teachers, trainers, researchers and local agents. Its structure encouraged horizontal exchange, joint reflection and the production of materials.

In short, the Finnish interventions are characterised by a combination of school and university projects, with a clear emphasis on critical thinking and media literacy, and a temporary organisation tailored to teaching modules. This description allows us to situate their contribution within the DEMOCRAT project as a whole before analysing it in detail in later chapters.

2.2.3. Spain

In Spain, the DEMOCRAT project presents six interventions, involving 62 teachers and 573 students, carried out in primary and secondary schools. These are a varied set of projects that share a focus on democratic participation, community action and project work with an impact on the environment. It should be noted that two further interventions have been developed in Spain that are not included in this analysis. In one case, this is because it has not been completed and in the other because it was a case study.

The age ranges show that three interventions are concentrated in the 13–15 age group, two in the 10–13 age group, and one in the 6–10 age group, corresponding to the middle years of primary education. There are no projects aimed at students over the age of 16, so Spanish interventions are carried out entirely within the framework of compulsory education.

The duration of the interventions is notable for its remarkable continuity, as five of the six projects last for the entire school year. Only one intervention lasts for three months. The interventions carried out in Spain have mostly opted for extensive, sustained projects.

The methodological approaches declared combine elements of project-based learning, community work, service learning, simulation, cooperative learning and deliberation. Although each intervention formulates its approach using its own terminology, all projects use active methodologies geared towards participation, cooperation and reflective work.

The topics are mainly distributed between civic engagement and community and historical memory, diversity and controversies. One project specifically addresses the topic of participation and school democracy.

In terms of curricular integration, three interventions present structural integration, as they are linked to participation structures or school projects; two show functional integration, developed within specific teaching units; and one intervention is classified as ad hoc, due to its concentrated format.

The Spanish Living Lab, based in Catalonia, functioned as a consolidated community of practice, organised through workshops, online sessions, interviews and working groups with schools, and a Catalan/Spanish Agora for sharing content and reflections.

In summary, the Spanish interventions are characterised by their temporal continuity, their participatory orientation and their full deployment within the framework of compulsory education, offering a solid set of experiences for subsequent comparative analysis.

2.2.4. Germany

Within the framework of Democrat, seven interventions are being carried out in Germany, involving 17 teachers and 251 students, developed at different educational levels and characterised by a strong presence of methodologies based on simulation, dramatisation and experiential learning. These are a diverse set of projects that combine content related to democratic memory, the fight against discrimination, student participation and institutional understanding.

The age ranges confirmed in the consolidated file reflect this diversity: two projects belong to the 6–10 age group, another two to the 13–15 age group, two more to the 15–17 age group, and one to the 17–19 age group or above. This presence of projects for very different age groups corresponds to the thematic and methodological variety of the interventions.

In terms of duration, the interventions take a variety of formats: from short one-month experiences to interventions lasting seven or eight months, as well as others lasting two or four months.

The topics addressed in Germany mainly include political simulation—three interventions focused on recreating institutional processes—and projects related to historical memory, diversity, and the fight against discrimination. Experiences of youth participation and service learning are also included, making up a wide range of topics.

The predominant methodological approaches are simulations, role-play and theatrical methods, which are present in most interventions. Experiential learning practices, service learning and creative approaches are also identified.

In terms of curricular integration, five of the seven interventions are classified as one-off, as they take the form of workshops, thematic activities or concentrated experiences. Two interventions feature functional integration, being incorporated into specific teaching units or training sequences. It should be noted that, despite not having been implemented as part of the curriculum, two pilot interventions originate from projects that appear to be part of the school's annual programme.

The German Living Lab was based on collaborative meetings between teachers, political education professionals, cultural educators and researchers.

In short, the German interventions are characterised by a wide diversity of themes and methodologies, a prominent presence of simulations and role-playing, and predominantly one-off curricular integration.

2.2.5. Ireland

Five DEMOCRAT project interventions were implemented in Ireland, characterised by a strong focus on media literacy, critical analysis of information and dialogue-based work in the classroom. These involved 7 teachers and 142 students. The interventions were carried out in ascending order of age: The first intervention involved 7–9 year olds, followed by interventions with students from the 10–11 and 16–18 age groups. The final two interventions were carried out with teacher students over the age of 19.

In terms of duration, Ireland has the shortest set of interventions in the DEMOCRAT project. Three projects correspond to short-term activities—workshops, intensive sessions, or week-long formats—while two interventions take place over periods of one or two months. No intervention lasts for the equivalent of a school year.

The topics clearly focus on media literacy and critical thinking, with four of the five interventions centred on information analysis, critical reading of texts and images, and understanding disinformation phenomena. An additional intervention focuses on EfD in initial teacher training.

In terms of methodological approaches, dialogic methods, critical analysis of texts and images, and inquiry-based approaches predominate. The interventions take the form of guided discussion, analysis of narrative materials, critical reflection, and brief activities involving the interpretation and evaluation of sources. In the case of the university project, approaches geared towards educational design are used.

In terms of curricular integration, three interventions present functional integration, developing in structured teaching units or training modules, while two are classified as specific, due to their brief and autonomous format. No experiences with structural integration were recorded.

The Living Lab activities included seven national workshops with teachers, youth workers, trainers and European representatives. The national team played an essential role in adapting tools, resolving ethical issues and assisting with school timetables, which are very tight in this country.

Overall, the Irish interventions stand out for their emphasis on media literacy, the use of dialogic methodologies and the predominance of short- or medium-term projects, giving them a distinctive profile within the DEMOCRAT project.

2.2.6. Poland

Poland implemented eight interventions, becoming one of the most active countries in compulsory education and mobilising 15 teachers and 210 students. The interventions are geared towards school participation and the formation of democratic structures within the school.

The distribution of age ranges makes Poland the country with the highest concentration of pilot interventions in the early stages of education: four projects are in the 10–14 age group, one in the 7–15 age group, and two interventions correspond to students over the age of 12–18.

The duration of Polish interventions is one of the most characteristic elements of the country. Seven of the eight projects are long-term, lasting between six and eight months, and one even lasts for nine months, equivalent to a full academic year. Only one intervention falls into the medium-term category (three months). This makes Poland one of the countries with the greatest temporal continuity in the development of pilot interventions.

In terms of themes, four interventions focus on participation and school democracy, addressing participatory budgets, student councils and internal democratic dynamics within the school. Two projects work on content related to historical memory, diversity and tolerance, while one intervention focuses on community engagement and another on human rights.

The predominant methodological approaches are structured around project-based learning, cooperative work and direct student participation. The interventions also incorporate elements of inquiry, dramatisation, community activities and debate dynamics, but the common thread is active and collective work.

In terms of curricular integration, four interventions are structurally integrated, as they are associated with formal structures within the school (such as participatory budgets or student councils). Two interventions are functionally integrated, through units or modules within the curriculum, while two others are classified as one-off due to their more limited format.

The Polish Living Lab was organised around regular face-to-face and online meetings, connecting teachers, researchers and community actors.

In summary, Polish interventions are characterised by their temporal continuity, their strong institutional focus on school participation and their predominance in the early stages of education, offering a distinctive profile within the DEMOCRAT project.

2.3. Chapter summary

The comparative analysis of the forty pilot interventions of the DEMOCRAT project shows a diverse educational landscape, marked by a plurality of levels, durations, themes, and forms of institutional integration. Although each country has deployed the jointly developed DEMOCRAT approach according to its own educational traditions and curricular structures, the whole reveals some common characteristics that allow for a better understanding of the scope of the DEMOCRAT project.

In relation to age, the data show a concentration of interventions in the 10–13 and 13–15 age groups, but also a notable presence in the 15–17 and 17–19 or older age groups, especially in countries that link interventions to vocational training or university education. This confirms that DEMOCRAT interventions can be adapted to different stages of development without losing coherence or functionality.

The duration of the interventions offers one of the most significant contrasts between countries. Estonia, Spain and Poland have numerous long-term projects—lasting six to nine months—while Ireland and part of Finland are characterised by short or medium-term interventions, tailored to workshops, modules or intensive practical training. Germany is in an intermediate position, with a combination of short projects and others that last slightly longer than six months. This variability is relevant for understanding the design and sustainability conditions analysed in the following chapters.

In terms of methodological approaches, the set of interventions reflects a wide presence of active methodologies: project-based learning, simulations, debates, role-playing, case studies, critical analysis and cooperative work. Although each country uses its own terminology, most projects combine several approaches, particularly around research, deliberation and experiential learning. This methodological diversity shows that the DEMOCRAT framework does not limit teaching practices, but rather adapts to the pedagogical styles and traditions of each education system.

The classification by theme reveals four main areas of work: participation and school democracy, civic and community engagement, media literacy and critical thinking, and historical memory and diversity. Although each country has examples of different interventions, there is a cross-cutting presence of activities aimed at understanding democratic institutions, analysing information, making collective decisions and reflecting critically on the social and cultural environment.

Finally, the data on curriculum integration offer a key insight into the institutional positioning of the interventions. Countries such as Poland and Spain stand out for their pilot interventions with structural integration into school projects or stable school participation structures; Estonia and Finland combine functional integration with some structural experiences; while Ireland and Germany have a greater number of one-off interventions. These differences do not reflect higher or lower quality, but rather different organisational models that condition the way in which democracy is incorporated into school life and will offer different results, as will be seen in later chapters.

In summary, Chapter 2 shows that the DEMOCRAT project has been successfully rolled out in very diverse educational contexts, adapting its approach to the characteristics of each country and the institutional conditions of each school. This descriptive characterisation provides the necessary framework for understanding, in the following chapters, how the interventions were actually designed, how they were implemented and what results they generated in terms of the development of democratic competences.

3. Comparative analysis of competences, pedagogical approaches and intervention design

This chapter analyses how the interventions in the six countries have worked on advancing the four competences of the DEMOCRAT RDC competence framework: solidary participation, deliberation, critical judgement and democratic resilience.

Unlike the previous chapter, which focused on description, this chapter delves into how the interventions were developed and how they addressed the advancement of competences at different educational levels, with divergent pedagogical approaches and under heterogeneous organisational structures.

In this sense, the chapter fulfils three central functions:

1. To identify how RDC competences have been worked on in actual classroom practice.
2. To analyse the predominant pedagogical approaches, their consistency with the RDC competence framework and their suitability for different ages, contexts and durations.
3. To examine the logic of design and implementation, including the role of Living Labs, co-design processes, contextual adjustments, and organisational structures.

3.1. How the RDC competence framework have been addressed

Analysis of the 40 interventions shows that the four RDC competence framework have not been worked on in a uniform manner or following a "one intervention = one competence" scheme. Approximately half of the experiences combine several competences at once, and the other half focus almost exclusively on one of them. However, in some of the interventions that have decided to focus on only one competence, teachers indicate that aspects of the other competences have also been worked on. This highlights how the four competences are interrelated.

The following figure shows how the competences have been worked on. Solidary participation stands out as the one worked on in most interventions, followed by critical judgement and deliberation.

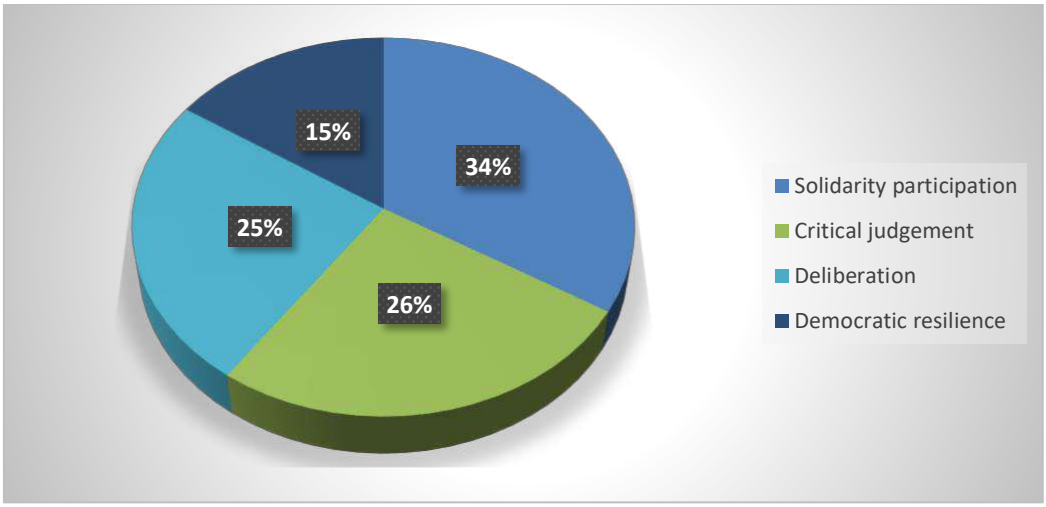

Figure 1. Distribution of pilot interventions according to the competence they activate

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

The sum (26 + 20 + 19 + 12 = 77) greatly exceeds the total number of pilot interventions (40). This confirms that, on average, each intervention works on about two competences. In other words, the interventions have tended to work in an inter-competence manner.

Based on the national reports on the pilot interventions, three ways of working on competences can be distinguished:

- Interventions with a primary focus on one competence, where the objective is explicitly stated as, for example, strengthening critical judgement in the face of misinformation or promoting student participation in formal school structures. This occurs in 22 interventions.
- Interventions that seek to develop two competences in combination. In nine experiences, the decision was made to work on competences in pairs, with the most frequent results being:
    - Solidarity participation and deliberation
    - Deliberation and critical judgement
    - Critical judgement and democratic resilience
- Integrated approach interventions, in which the project work is conceived as a space for simultaneously developing the four dimensions, without strictly separating the objectives by competences. This occurs in nine experiences.

This combination of approaches is explained by the very nature of the democratic practices that have been promoted: participation involves deliberation, deliberation requires critical judgement, and maintaining positions in contexts of conflict demands democratic resilience. In practice, many activities formally 'begin' with one competence, but end up activating several at once. Some teachers have pointed out this option of being able to work sequentially, from "easier" to "more difficult", on the four competences of the DEMOCRAT framework.

Below, we present how each competence has been worked on, highlighting both the cases in which it is addressed specifically and those in which it is integrated into broader combinations.

3.1.1. Simultaneous and integrated work on competences

Before examining each competence in detail, it is important to note how they are combined in the interventions. The following table shows the combinations.

Competences	Solidarity participation	Critical judgement	Deliberation	Democratic resilience
Solidarity participation	26	11	13	11
Critical judgement	11	20	12	9
Deliberation	13	12	19	9
Democratic resilience	11	9	9	12

Table 6. Distribution of pilot interventions according to the competence or competences they work on

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.)

The co-occurrence matrix reveals:

- 13 interventions work on both solidarity participation and deliberation.
- 12 interventions combine critical judgement and deliberation.
- 11 interventions combine solidarity participation with critical judgement or democratic resilience.
- 9 interventions combine democratic resilience with deliberation or critical judgement.

These data show how RDC competences do not function as separate pieces, but as a network of interconnected practices. This integrated nature is particularly reflected in:

a) Long interventions where the four competences may appear intertwined, such as:
   - participating to improve the environment,
   - deliberating to decide collectively,
   - exercising critical judgement to substantiate decisions,
   - resilience is employed when disagreements or institutional obstacles arise.

b) Modular and media literacy interventions. These start with a clear focus on critical judgement, but the actual activity requires deliberation (to compare sources), participation (in analysis groups) and resilience (in the face of information manipulation).

c) Dramatised, dialogical or community interventions where the democratic experience is lived in a narrative and social way. An example of the process would be:
   - deliberation arises from dialogue,
   - resilience appears when managing diversity and conflict,
   - participation emerges in the collective construction of meaning.

This section summarises what will be the common thread throughout the rest of the chapter: competences are worked on in a network. This also happens in those interventions that have sought to focus on one. Based on this framework, the specific ways of working for each competence are analysed.

3.1.2. Solidary participation

In most countries, solidary participation has been understood not only as 'taking part' in activities, but also as responsible involvement in improving the environment and collective life of the school or community. The fact that 26 of the 40 interventions explicitly mention it as a competence worked on reflects its centrality. Solidarity participation is, quantitatively, the most prevalent competence in the interventions. This is particularly true in longer-term interventions. In 14 of the 26 experiences that work on this competence, the duration of the intervention is longer than six months. One aspect that highlights this centrality is that 10 of the 26 interventions indicate that solidarity participation is the main competence.

In Spain and Poland, a large proportion of the interventions with primary and secondary school students place solidary participation at the school of the pilot intervention. In Spanish schools, for example, course projects are developed in which students identify problems of coexistence, use of public space or environmental sustainability and design collective actions to address them. In Poland, several interventions revolve around the creation or revitalisation of student councils, school participation groups or projects to improve the school climate. In these cases, solidarity participation is the main focus, and deliberation and critical judgement are used to serve this purpose: the aim is not to debate for the sake of debating, but to decide what to do and how to do it.

In Estonia, Germany and Spain, some interventions emphasise community participation. In this way, students collaborate with local NGOs, municipal services or cultural projects in activities ranging from awareness campaigns to intergenerational projects. Here, the participation competence is worked on very explicitly in terms of taking on real responsibilities towards external actors, which at the same time requires managing time, commitments and expectations.

In Ireland and Finland, especially in short interventions and initial teacher training, solidarity participation is built more from within the classroom: cooperative work, task sharing, decisions about the organisation of the learning process itself. It does not always project outwards (to the community or institution), but the ethical dimension of participation is taken care of: listening to others, upholding agreements, accepting shared responsibilities. In these contexts, solidarity participation is often closely linked to deliberation and democratic resilience: one learns to participate while learning to sustain disagreement and manage emotions.

Looking at the whole picture, it can be said that:

- Solidary participation is a core competence in longer-term interventions that are more integrated into school projects (especially in Spain and Poland).
- In shorter or more experimental interventions (Ireland, part of Finland), participation appears as an internal classroom dynamic linked to other competences, rather than as the sole objective of the project.

In short, the interventions show that solidarity participation is strengthened when it takes place in environments where students must assume real responsibilities and cooperate in processes that affect others. The pattern seems to show that participation becomes deeper and more meaningful when it involves making decisions with consequences, managing diverse interests, and sustaining shared commitments in projects that require continuity. Therefore, rather than simply involving students in activities, solidarity participation seems to act as the relational basis from which both deliberation and critical judgement become possible, by offering students concrete experiences of collective action and democratic co-responsibility.

3.1.3. Deliberation

Deliberation is probably the most recurrent competence in the interventions of the six countries. Recurrent in the sense that it is the competence that is least often worked on in a centralised manner (4), unlike solidarity participation (10). It is a competence that has been worked on in combination with one or more other competences, rather than in a centralised manner.

Deliberation is combined in projects focused on participation as well as those oriented towards critical judgement or democratic resilience, and is worked on using a wide variety of methodologies. Analysis of the interventions indicates that 19 interventions explicitly identify it, but the co-occurrence matrix shows that its actual presence is even greater. Thus, deliberation co-occurs with solidarity participation in 13 interventions and with critical judgement in 12. In other words, even when it is not stated as a main objective, it is de facto activated as a requirement for other competences.

In Estonia, for example, deliberation is at the core of activities with secondary school and university. In political simulations and advanced media literacy projects, students must:

- analyse arguments from different sources,
- prepare their own positions,
- anticipate counterarguments,

- participate in moderated debates or simulated public discussions.

Although the stated focus may be critical judgement in the face of disinformation, the heart of many of these activities is deliberation in contexts of high informational complexity.

In Spain, some interventions combine deliberation with participation and democratic memory. For example, one of the interventions not only asks students to act, but also to debate which problems to prioritise, what criteria to use to decide, and how to handle discrepancies between groups. In a secondary school intervention focused on rights and coexistence, the process of formulating proposals for the school requires negotiation, argumentation and revision of positions, so that deliberation structures the entire itinerary: from the identification of the problem to the final presentation to the educational community.

In experiences in Germany, deliberation was approached in a way that was highly sensitive to cultural and social diversity. The debates are not only about abstract political content, but also about experiences of discrimination, inequality or exclusion. In this context, deliberation is also learned as the ability to listen and hold difficult conversations without breaking the bond with the group.

In interventions in Ireland and Finland, deliberation appears to be closely linked to dialogic and narrative practices. In primary school classrooms, for example, spaces for conversation are created using stories, dramatic scenes or images that invite exploration of different perspectives. In teacher training, real or hypothetical situations are discussed regarding the role of the teacher, inclusion or the treatment of controversial issues in the classroom.

Overall, the interventions that work on this competence show that:

- There are experiences in which deliberation is the central focus, declared as the main objective (e.g., school debate projects or parliamentary simulations).
- In many others, deliberation is an essential means to achieve other ends: participating in solidarity, making collective decisions, constructing proposals or critically analysing public messages.

This dual condition—end and means—explains why deliberation appears so repeatedly in the interventions carried out and why its co-occurrence with other competences is so high.

In Poland, no pilot intervention indicates working on deliberation, but this competence still appears implicitly in several activities focused on student participation and improving school life. In these contexts, students must discuss which school issues to address, how to organise proposals for change, and how to present them to their peers or teachers. Although deliberation is not formulated as an explicit objective, it arises naturally when students compare arguments, negotiate priorities, and agree on collective decisions, becoming a functional element of the participatory process.

In summary, the interventions show that deliberation flourishes when spaces for sustained dialogue are created in which students can confront ideas, review positions and explore divergent perspectives without breaking the bonds of the group. The pattern observed is that deliberation gains depth when it is not limited to formal exercises but is integrated into processes where decisions are complex, disagreements are real, and arguments must be justified to others. Thus, rather than a technical discussion, deliberation acts as the cognitive and social scaffolding that allows solidarity participation and critical judgement to be articulated democratically.

3.1.4. Critical judgement

Critical judgement is worked on in different ways depending on the country and level of education, but in almost all cases it is linked to specific content and real sources of information, not just abstract exercises. It is the second most frequent competence (20 interventions mention it), and co-appears with deliberation in 12 interventions and with solidarity participation in 11, which shows the extent to which it is integrated into processes of dialogue and collective action.

In Estonia, several secondary and higher education interventions use materials directly related to disinformation: fake profiles, manipulated videos, misleading news. Here, critical judgement is at the heart of the design, where students have to break down messages, identify persuasive strategies, analyse who is speaking and from where, and assess consequences. Although participation and deliberation are also present (debates, simulated campaigns, etc.), the intervention is explicitly formulated as an opportunity to develop the ability to detect and resist information manipulation.

In the pilot tests in Finland, critical judgement is incorporated in a highly structured way through activities in primary school, adult education and university. In primary school, images, memes or text fragments are analysed, guiding students in questions about intent, omissions and bias. In adult education, debates were held in pairs and groups, combining key vocabulary and the identification of reliable information in photographs and videos on social media. In teacher training, future teachers are asked to design activities to work on critical thinking with children and adolescents, which adds a layer of professional reflection: not only do they exercise critical judgement, but they must also think about how to teach it.

In the Irish experience, critical judgement is intertwined with the narrative and emotional dimension: analysis of news and social media, analysis of stories, dramatised scenes, dilemmas that invite questioning of assumptions. In some cases, the ability to 'read between the lines' of normative messages or stereotypes present in school or media materials is explicitly worked on.

In the interventions in Spain and Poland, critical judgement is often approached from the perspective of confronting situations in the environment: municipal decisions, socio-environmental conflicts, debates on rights. In these contexts, students are encouraged to:

- compare points of view,
- seek additional information,
- identify weak or biased arguments.

In the pilot interventions in Germany, critical judgement is not explicitly mentioned among the competences developed by the interventions. However, it is implicitly addressed. It appears in the identification and reporting of discriminatory discourse. The activities ask students to analyse messages that normalise exclusion or hatred and to question their legitimacy in a democratic society.

An analysis of the interventions that work on this competence reveals three types of interventions:

- Interventions where critical judgement is the main and explicit competence (especially in media literacy).
- Interventions where critical judgement appears in the background, subordinate to processes of participation or deliberation.
- Integrated interventions in which critical judgement is incorporated as part of the overall work with all competences (especially in long-term school projects).

In short, the interventions show that critical judgement develops more solidly when students work with information, narratives or problems that require interpreting, contrasting and evaluating evidence in real or plausible contexts. The pattern is consistent: critical thinking gains meaning when it is not reduced to identifying biases, but when it is used to understand complex situations, engage in dialogue with others and inform collective decisions. Therefore, rather than an isolated analytical competence, critical judgement acts as the reflective engine that underpins both deliberation and democratic resilience, enabling students to navigate autonomously and judiciously in changing and often ambiguous democratic environments.

3.1.5. Democratic resilience

Democratic resilience is the least "named" competence in the pilot interventions (12 interventions explicitly mention it), but it appears in those contexts where students must maintain their involvement in situations of uncertainty, conflict or pressure. Its development does not usually arise from isolated activities, but from educational experiences that require perseverance, adaptation and the ability to maintain dialogue when the process becomes complex. The co-occurrence matrix shows that resilience co-occurs with solidarity participation in 11 interventions and with critical judgement and deliberation in 9, indicating that, although few interventions declare it as a primary objective, it is frequently activated when democratic work enters areas of tension.

In Estonia, in some pilot interventions, resilience is worked on in a particularly visible way in long or demanding interventions, such as school mini-companies, community internships or election simulations. In these projects, students must deal with mistakes, readjust decisions, coordinate with external actors, or defend positions in public debates, learning to sustain their democratic involvement in changing environments with high personal or collective demands.

In Finland, democratic resilience is developed both in primary school and in initial teacher training. In classroom projects aimed at community building, children learn to resume dialogue after conflicts, manage frustrations, and maintain collaboration in activities that require continuity. In teacher training, resilience is linked to the ability to sustain complex projects, revise proposals based on criticism, and maintain collaborative practices in contexts of pressure, methodological uncertainty, or diversity of perspectives.

In pilot tests in Germany, democratic resilience appears explicitly in experiences such as simulation games about the creation of a new society. The dynamics force students to negotiate under pressure, face deep disagreements, review collective decisions, and maintain dialogue in conflict situations, thus working on the ability to maintain democratic interaction even in tense or highly uncertain scenarios.

In Spain, democratic resilience is integrated, for example, into an intervention that works on historical memory, where students must cooperate in creative processes and solve problems that do not have closed solutions. The need to adjust proposals, manage friction within the group, and maintain the involvement of multiple agents throughout a project that evolves with the participation of multiple agents favours sustained work on democratic resilience in everyday classroom practice.

In Poland and Ireland, although no intervention explicitly states democratic resilience as a competence being worked on, elements that indirectly activate it can be observed. In Polish projects focused on participation in school or community initiatives, students must learn to maintain commitment when processes are prolonged, when decisions are delayed, or when tensions arise between participants. In Irish projects, both in activities with students and in teacher training, situations arise in which participants must continue to engage in

dialogue despite marked differences, resume tasks after disagreements, or sustain democratic practices in contexts of fatigue, emotional pressure, or sensitive issues.

In short, the interventions show that democratic resilience arises when real conditions of challenge are created, not only when it is formulated as an explicit objective. The pattern observed is consistent: resilience appears where students or teachers must maintain democratic practices—participatory, dialogical, and critical—in contexts of difficulty, uncertainty, or frustration. Therefore, rather than an isolated competence, democratic resilience acts as the layer of depth that allows participation, deliberation and critical thinking to be sustained over time and in the face of the challenges inherent in democratic life.

3.2. Pedagogical approaches

The interventions carried out within the framework of the DEMOCRAT project show a remarkable variety of pedagogical approaches that respond both to national traditions and to deliberate decisions by the Living Labs or decisions made by the teachers in charge of the interventions. This methodological diversity is presented as a set of techniques, each of which has a specific educational function, and each function is aimed at developing one or more competences from the RDC competence framework.

It should be noted that, unlike other projects, DEMOCRAT has not imposed a single methodology, but has opted for open social innovation. This has allowed each intervention to select and combine techniques according to its school reality, educational level, duration and the competences to be developed. This has resulted in a very rich set of practices which, far from being anecdotal, reveal certain common transnational characteristics of pedagogical innovation.

The five main methodological approaches into which the 40 interventions can be grouped are described below, emphasising not only the techniques used, but also their pedagogical functions and their relationship to the RDC competences. It should be noted that this classification is not intended to be exhaustive; it is an analytical tool to describe trends, avoid scattered lists and connect the methodologies used with the competences they seek to develop. Due to this specific functionality for analysing results, it may differ from other classifications used within the DEMOCRAT framework, which follow more taxonomic functions (grouping and ordering based on similarities).

3.2.1. Project-based learning and experiential learning

Project-based learning (PBL) and experiential learning constitute the most widespread and structural methodological approach within the DEMOCRAT project interventions. This approach is characterised by presenting students with real challenges facing the school or community, which require research, decision- , comparison of information and the creation of a final product with meaning beyond the classroom. The experiential logic underpinning this approach—learning through action, reflection, and constant review—allows democratic practices to be built in authentic situations rather than in isolated or purely academic exercises.

Techniques used in interventions

National reports have documented multiple PBL techniques used at different educational levels, including:

- Guided research and fieldwork, where students identify a problem in their environment (coexistence, sustainability, discrimination, child participation, etc.) and collect relevant information.

- Co-design workshops, in which students and teachers jointly plan the phases of the project, distribute responsibilities and decide on criteria for evaluating progress.
- Collaboration with external actors, especially in Spain, Estonia and Poland: local councils, NGOs, local radio stations, cultural associations and community agents.
- Production of public materials (campaigns, reports, presentations, school events, audiovisual materials) that require students to organise information, justify proposals and communicate clearly.
- Structured reflection sessions, through diaries, learning records or regular discussions about the process followed, the problems encountered and the decisions made.

These techniques vary from country to country, but they all share a key element, which is to require students to take on an active and responsible role, turning the classroom into a space for democratic action, not just for the transmission of content.

Pedagogical functions of PBL within the DEMOCRAT framework

PBL fulfils pedagogical functions that make it an ideal approach for the development of democratic competences.

- It encourages solidarity participation by inviting students to work in teams, take on shared responsibilities and commit to solving real problems in the school or community.
- It structures deliberation in a natural way, as each phase of the project—from identifying a problem to deciding on solutions and assigning tasks—requires arguing, listening, negotiating, and reaching agreements.
- It develops critical judgement, because project decisions require analysing sources, comparing evidence, evaluating alternatives and justifying proposals with clear criteria.
- It promotes democratic resilience, as real projects involve obstacles, disagreements, uncertainty, or external resistance, which requires sustained effort, adjusting strategies, and persisting in collective action.

Despite the differences in how these functions are implemented in each intervention, they all reflect the same underlying idea: democratic competences are developed when students work together, make decisions with others and collectively face the challenges posed by a real project.

Relationship between PBL and RDC competences

PBL is the approach that most simultaneously activates all the competences in the RDC competence framework. Specifically:

- Solidary participation is the competence most strongly linked to PBL (present in most interventions that use this approach).
- Deliberation appears as the second most frequent, as PBL techniques require continuous agreement between students.
- Critical judgement is particularly activated when projects involve research, information analysis or the design of reasoned proposals.
- Democratic resilience emerges in long interventions where frustration, conflict or uncertainty must be managed.

PBL technique	Competences activated
Guided research	Critical judgement
Co-design of the project	Deliberation + Participation
Contact with NGOs/local councils	Participation + Resilience
Production of public materials	Participation + Critical judgement
Diaries and reflection	Resilience + Critical judgement

Table 7. Competences activated by the PBL approach

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.) and Toolbox database

This relationship is not coincidental, as PBL reproduces the dynamics of real democratic participation, where competences are not activated separately but in an integrated manner. The following table shows the relationship between PBL techniques and the RDC competences they activate.

This pattern is repeated in most interventions that use PBL, regardless of the country.

National characteristics of PBL[9]

Although all countries adapt PBL to their context, certain specific characteristics can be observed in the interventions:

- In Spain's pilot interventions, long-term interventions have been developed that are linked to coexistence, sustainability and community participation, with a strong presence of external actors.
- Pilot interventions in Poland seem to orient PBL towards institutional improvement, strengthening the role of student councils and youth agencies.
- Pilot interventions in Estonia use PBL as a platform to connect young citizens and the media, combining social action and critical analysis.
- The pilot experiences in Germany integrate PBL with art, theatre, social photography and community participation, promoting expressiveness and ethical reflection.

In all cases, PBL becomes a flexible but demanding framework that allows for the integration of participation, reflection, deliberation and analysis, and is well suited to primary, secondary and sixth form education.

3.2.2. Dialogic, deliberative and argumentative methodologies

Dialogic, deliberative and argumentative methodologies bring together a set of teaching practices that place learning within structured conversation, the exploration of diverse points of view, the analysis of arguments and the collective construction of meaning. Rather than isolated techniques, they represent a way of understanding the classroom as a space for democratic exchange, where students learn to listen, think and decide with others. This approach appears in all six countries and constitutes one of the methodological pillars of the DEMOCRAT project.

[9] At this point, the aim is not to establish generalisable national patterns, but rather to comment on some particularities that largely depend on the research team in each country and on the educational centres willing to cooperate with the DEMOCRAT project.

Techniques used in the interventions

The national reports have documented multiple dialogic techniques used at different educational levels, including:

- Dialogue circles, common in Spain, Germany and Ireland, where students take turns speaking and the focus is on listening, formulating clear ideas and recognising other perspectives.
- Structured debates, very common in Estonia and Germany, and also in Spain, with explicit rules, argumentative preparation and differentiated roles.
- Moral dilemmas, used in Finland and Spain, which force students to examine ethical conflicts, prioritise values and justify decisions.
- Philosophy for children and similar inquiry techniques (especially in Ireland), where conversation is structured around questions generated by the students themselves.
- Guided analysis of images, texts or problems, for example in Finland, where dialogue is combined with media literacy competences.
- Dialogic dramatisations, especially in Ireland and Germany, which allow perspectives to be explored through the interpretation of characters or scenes.

Although these techniques differ in format and complexity, they all share a common pedagogical principle based on the idea that thinking develops through interaction, not in isolation.

Pedagogical functions of the dialogic approach

In the interventions developed within the framework of DEMOCRAT, dialogic methodologies fulfil essential functions:

- They provide a safe space to explore disagreement, which is an essential condition for learning deliberation and democratic resilience.
- They develop the ability to argue, as students must justify their positions, respond to objections and revise their ideas in the light of new arguments.
- They promote active listening and recognition of diversity, especially in multicultural contexts such as Germany.
- They deepen critical judgement by inviting students to analyse evidence, evaluate statements and distinguish between opinions and reasoned arguments.
- They encourage democratic forms of participation in the classroom, distributing speaking time, responsibilities and decision-making power.

Unlike PBL, which starts with action to generate reflection, the dialogic approach starts with reflection to guide action.

Relationship between the dialogic approach and RDC competences

A cross-analysis of the techniques and competences worked on reveals that the dialogic approach is most closely linked to the competence of deliberation, but also activates other competences in a significant way. Specifically, the most activated are:

- Deliberation is the core competence present in almost all dialogic interventions.
- It is very common in critical judgement, especially when analysing texts, images or problems.
- In democratic resilience, this approach appears when dialogue involves disagreement, emotional tension or experiences of discrimination.

- In solidarity participation, it is activated to a lesser extent, but emerges when the group makes collective decisions or builds classroom agreements.

Below, you can see which techniques activate each RDC competence.

Dialogic technique	Competences activated
Dialogue circles	Deliberation + Resilience
Structured debates	Deliberation + Critical judgement
Moral dilemmas	Critical judgement + Resilience
Philosophy / Dialogic inquiry	Critical judgement + Deliberation
Dialogic dramatisation	Empathy → Resilience
Guided analysis of texts/images	Critical judgement + Deliberation

Table 8. Competences activated by the dialogic approach

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.) and Toolbox database

In general, when structured dialogue is used, deliberation and critical judgement emerge together, and resilience appears as a natural consequence of managed disagreement.

National particularities of the dialogic approach

The dialogic approach takes on particular characteristics in each country's pilot interventions:

- Some of the pilot interventions in Ireland stand out for their use of dramatisation, storytelling, shared reading and P4C. The classroom is conceived as a 'community of inquiry' where students ask questions, analyse personal motivations and develop empathy. The emotional dimension is more explicit than in other countries.
- Finland, in its pilot interventions, combines dialogue with critical analysis of media materials. The exchange is structured around images, headlines or situations, which requires students to argue based on data and evidence. The dialogue is more analytical and less narrative than in Ireland.
- Among the pilot experiences in Spain, dialogic methodologies are integrated into school projects. Dialogue is the tool for constructing proposals, identifying problems, or working on sensitive issues (memory, coexistence, sustainability). It has an organisational function rather than a merely expressive one.
- Some of the pilot interventions in Germany focus on inclusion and the management of cultural diversity. Dialogic activities allow experiences of discrimination and inequality to be addressed, creating safe spaces where students can express complex experiences without breaking the cohesion of the group.
- Estonia is developing some pilot experiences with a more argumentative and formal approach, especially in secondary schools. Dialogue is used to confront evidence, analyse media messages and prepare public interventions.

3.2.3. Civic simulations and structured democratic practices

Civic simulations are a pedagogical approach that allows students to experience the dynamics of formal democratic life from within. Instead of studying electoral processes, parliaments or public hearings as theoretical content, this approach proposes reproducing their functioning in the classroom through roles, procedures and sequences of interaction that reflect their real logic. Simulation turns students into protagonists of collective decisions, negotiations, debates and votes, confronting them with the tensions, discrepancies and responsibilities that are inherent in democratic practice. This approach appears in several countries and occupies a prominent place in the pedagogical structure of the DEMOCRAT project.

Techniques used in the interventions

The national reports document different simulation techniques applied to institutional and civic contexts:

- Electoral simulations, developed especially in Estonia and Spain, in which students create parties, draw up programmes, design campaign materials, prepare debates and participate in voting following formal procedures.
- School parliaments and assemblies, common in Spain and Poland, where proposals are drafted, committees are organised and motions are defended before the school assembly.
- Parliamentary or public policy debates, common in Estonia and Germany, which involve representing assigned positions, responding to counterarguments and acting within regulated turns.
- Institutional role-playing games, present in several countries, in which roles such as spokespersons, moderators or journalists are adopted, exploring the responsibilities of each role.
- Simulated public hearings, integrated into Spanish and German interventions, which connect deliberation with real problems in the school or municipal environment.

Although these techniques vary in complexity and scope, they all share the reproduction of the logic of democratic institutions so that students can experience collective decision-making within regulated frameworks.

Pedagogical functions of the simulation approach

In the interventions developed within the DEMOCRAT framework, simulation methodologies have the following functions:

- They offer experiential understanding of democratic functioning by placing students within formal processes of decision-making, representation and deliberation.
- They activate deliberation under pressure, as students must argue and respond to objections within limited time frames and under strict rules.
- They require critical judgement, especially in interventions that require the analysis of speeches, programmes, political messages or persuasion strategies.
- They foster democratic resilience, as students must defend positions, manage electoral defeats or unfavourable votes, and face public disagreements without abandoning the process.
- They increase motivation and commitment by generating intense, emotionally meaningful experiences that are perceived as authentic by students.

Simulations take different formats and levels of complexity depending on the context in which the pilot intervention takes place, but they all share the principle that learning democracy means practising it. By placing students within formal processes of deliberation, representation and decision-making, simulations

turn the classroom into a space where thinking is activated in interaction with others, rather than in isolation. This experiential dimension—based on role, responsibility, and negotiation—is what allows the democratic competences acquired to transcend the specific activity and become integrated into broader forms of civic participation and understanding.

Relationship between the simulation approach and RDC competences

Cross-analysis of techniques and results shows that simulations are one of the approaches that activate the highest number of RDC competences simultaneously:

- Deliberation occupies a central place, as all simulated processes require arguing, responding to objections and making collective decisions under explicit rules.
- Solidary participation is activated when students take on representative responsibilities, participate in committees, or coordinate actions within a "party" or delegation.
- Critical judgement appears when they have to analyse speeches, programmes or campaign messages in order to prepare well-founded interventions.
- Democratic resilience is developed by managing disagreements, accepting unfavourable election results, or holding minority positions in votes or debates.

The techniques that activate each competence are shown below.

Simulation technique	Competences activated
Electoral simulations	Solidary participation + Deliberation + Critical judgement
Parliaments/assemblies	Solidarity participation + Deliberation
Parliamentary debates	Deliberation + Critical judgement
Institutional role-playing games	Solidarity participation + Democratic resilience
Simulated public hearings	Deliberation + Democratic resilience

Table 9. Competences activated by the simulation approach

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.) and Toolbox database

In general, when working with formal simulations, deliberation, public accountability and disagreement management emerge together.

National particularities of the simulation approach

Although present in several interventions, this approach takes particular forms depending on educational traditions and local priorities:

- In the case of some of the pilot interventions in Estonia, electoral simulations are combined with analysis of propaganda and political messages, integrating this approach with media literacy.
- In the case of some of the experiences developed in Germany, simulations incorporate elements related to diversity and social justice, addressing issues of coexistence and multicultural perspectives from simulated political positions.
- Among the pilot tests implemented in Spain, they are linked to school projects and municipal participatory processes, reinforcing the connection between school and community.

- In Poland, although less frequent, simulations in pilot interventions are linked to the functioning of student councils and school representation structures.

These variations demonstrate the versatility of the approach and its ability to adapt to different national contexts while maintaining its educational value.

3.2.4. Critical media literacy and analysis of disinformation

Media and Information Literacy is considered as crucial for democracy as mis- and disinformation is growing with negative impact on democracy. Unlike other approaches that focus more on face-to-face interaction or collective action, this approach invites students to explore how information circulates, how public messages are constructed, and how they influence opinion and decision-making. Working on disinformation, bias, visual manipulation, and the reliability of sources allows for the development of a deep understanding of the current challenges facing democratic societies, especially in a digital environment where constant exposure to fragmented and emotionally charged content demands new forms of critical thinking.

Techniques used in the interventions

Analysis of the interventions allows us to appreciate the techniques linked to media literacy and critical analysis of information:

- Analysis of manipulated or misleading news, especially in Estonia and Finland, where students break down headlines, compare versions and detect omissions or biases.
- Identification of fake profiles and deepfakes, present in Estonian interventions, which requires examining authenticity, seeking alternative sources and recognising patterns of visual manipulation.
- Comparison of media narratives, common in Finland and in some Spanish interventions, where headlines, narrative structures and approaches from different media are contrasted.
- Guided fact-checking exercises, very common in Finland, which allow for the application of evidence evaluation criteria and the distinction between facts and opinions.
- Creation of informative or counter-disinformation messages, used in Ireland and Estonia, to understand the mechanisms of persuasion and communicative responsibility from within.

Despite their differences, they share a common pedagogical principle that critical thinking is not developed in isolation from public messages, but in interaction with them, through shared analysis that requires arguing, comparing and justifying interpretations.

Pedagogical functions of the media literacy approach

This methodological approach has the following functions:

- They strengthen critical judgement, as they require analysing evidence, identifying biases and interpreting complex communicative materials.
- They develop democratic resilience by preparing students to resist information manipulation and hold informed positions in the face of misleading narratives.
- They encourage deliberation, especially when analyses are carried out cooperatively and require consensus on the reliability of a source or the validity of an argument.
- They promote cognitive self-regulation by teaching students to curb impulsive responses to polarising messages and to examine the emotions associated with information.
- They connect learning with contemporary democratic challenges, increasing students' perceived relevance and motivation.

Unlike simulations, which place students in democratic action and then analyse it, the media literacy approach starts from the critical analysis of information to guide more conscious and informed participation.

Relationship between the media literacy approach and RDC competences

A cross-analysis of the techniques used and the competences developed shows that the media literacy approach is particularly linked to critical judgement, although it also significantly activates democratic resilience and, to a lesser extent, deliberation and solidarity participation. Specifically, the most activated are:

- Critical judgement is the competence most directly associated with this approach, as all activities require evaluating information, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and detecting bias.
- Democratic resilience appears when students must uphold reasoned conclusions in the face of manipulated or majority narratives.
- Deliberation is activated when groups must agree on interpretations or discuss the reliability of a source.
- Solidarity participation is incorporated to a lesser extent but emerges especially when designing campaigns or content intended to inform others.

The techniques that activate each RDC competence are shown below.

Technique used	Competences activated
Analysis of manipulated news	Critical judgement + Democratic resilience
Identification of fake profiles and deepfakes	Critical judgement + Democratic resilience
Comparison of media narratives	Critical judgement + Deliberation
Guided fact-checking	Critical judgement
Creation of information campaigns	Solidarity participation + Critical judgement

Table 10. Competences activated by the media literacy approach

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.) and Toolbox database

In general, when working on critical media literacy, critical judgement and democratic resilience emerge together, while deliberation appears as a natural extension of the collective comparison of sources and interpretations.

National particularities of the media literacy approach

This approach takes particular forms depending on educational traditions and local priorities:

- Some of the pilot interventions in Estonia develop the most advanced proposals, integrating media literacy with digital citizenship and political simulations.
- Among the pilot experiences in Finland, some work with this approach in a highly structured way, especially in primary school, with progressive sequences of analysis and verification.
- Some of the pilot tests in Ireland combine it with narrative and expressive methodologies, placing media literacy within practices of emotional interpretation and dialogue.

3.2.5. Creative, expressive and narrative methodologies

Creative, expressive and narrative methodologies constitute a pedagogical approach that places democratic learning in the realm of interpretation, emotion and symbolic exploration. In contrast to approaches that reproduce institutional processes or rely on rational discourse analysis, this approach uses artistic and narrative resources—such as dramatisation, social theatre, collage, comics, photography, creative writing, and audiovisual formats—to enable students to explore conflicts, points of view, and experiences that often remain hidden or silenced in the classroom. By working with metaphors, characters, scenes and narratives, students can address sensitive issues from a creative distance that facilitates expression, debate and empathy.

Techniques used in interventions

National reports show a wide variety of creative techniques applied in educational projects:

- Drama and social theatre, where students act out situations of conflict, discrimination or ethical dilemmas in order to analyse them in depth.
- Visual narratives, such as photography, collage or comics, which allow identities, stereotypes and social discourses to be explored through images.
- Production of podcasts and videos, which requires articulating a message, structuring a story and communicating it to an audience.
- Creative writing, used in several countries, which invites exploration of emotions, positions and contradictions based on personal or fictional stories.
- Community art that links artistic creation with collective action and social participation.

Although these techniques differ in format and level of structure, they all share the pedagogical principle that artistic and narrative creation allows for the expression, exploration and transformation of individual and collective experiences that are fundamental to democratic learning.

Pedagogical functions of the creative and expressive approach

In the interventions developed within the framework of DEMOCRAT, creative and expressive methodologies fulfil essential functions:

- They encourage emotional expression, allowing students to explore feelings and experiences in a safe and symbolic setting.
- They enhance empathy by inviting students to interpret characters, perspectives or situations other than their own.
- They activate more inclusive forms of deliberation, especially for those who find it more difficult to participate in formal debates.
- They foster critical judgement by analysing representations, stereotypes and implicit messages in visual or dramatic narratives.
- They connect democratic learning with personal identity, encouraging deep reflection on values, beliefs and experiences.

Unlike more structured approaches—which rely on formal procedures or rational analysis of information—creative and narrative methodologies allow for exploration of the emotional and symbolic dimensions of democratic life, generating insights that emerge from expression, interpretation, and shared imagination.

Relationship between the creative and expressive approach and RDC competences

Analysis of the interventions shows that this approach activates democratic resilience in a particularly intense way, as working with emotions, conflicts and represented situations allows participants to learn to sustain disagreement and manage tensions constructively.

It also significantly activates solidarity participation, especially when creative production is carried out collectively. Critical judgement competence appears when analysing discourses, symbols or social representations, while deliberation arises in processes of joint interpretation and discussion of meanings.

Below, you can see which techniques activate each RDC competence.

Technique used	Competences activated
Dramatisation and social theatre	Democratic resilience + Solidarity participation
Visual narratives (photography, comics, collage)	Critical judgement + Deliberation
Podcasts and videos	Solidarity participation + Deliberation
Creative writing	Democratic resilience + Critical judgement
Community art	Solidarity participation + Democratic resilience

Table 11. Competences activated by the creative and expressive approach

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.) and Toolbox database

In the set of interventions based on creative and narrative methodologies, it can be observed how the combination of expression, interpretation and collective work tends to strengthen democratic resilience and solidarity participation in particular, while critical judgement and deliberation tend to arise from the joint exploration of meanings and perspectives.

National characteristics of the creative and narrative approach

This approach takes on some particular forms. For example:

- Germany uses it to address diversity, coexistence and social justice, integrating artistic expression with discussions about identities and discrimination.
- Ireland uses dramatisation and narratives to address ethical dilemmas and explore emotions in primary and secondary school classrooms.
- Spain incorporates this approach into projects on democratic memory and community participation, using audiovisual formats as a tool for public communication.

3.2.6. Comparative summary of approaches, techniques and competences developed

The intersection between pedagogical approaches, techniques used and competences developed allows us to summarise how each approach activates certain dimensions of the RDC competence framework. The following table summarises these patterns that have been discussed.

The table shows that each pedagogical approach activates a specific competence pattern, derived both from the nature of the techniques used and the pedagogical function they fulfil. Project-based learning and simulations are the most comprehensive approaches, as they allow the four competences of the RDC competence framework to be worked on simultaneously. Dialogic methodologies and media literacy are more

clearly oriented towards deliberation and critical judgement, while creative methodologies particularly favour resilience and participation from an expressive and experiential perspective.

Pedagogical approach	Predominant techniques	RDC competence most frequently developed
Project-based learning and experiential learning	Guided research; co-design of proposals; interaction with NGOs/local councils; public products; reflection through diaries	Solidary participation (very high); deliberation; critical judgement; democratic resilience (in long-term projects)
Dialogic, deliberative and argumentative methodologies	Dialogue circles; structured debates; moral dilemmas; philosophy for children; dialogic dramatisation	Deliberation (very high); critical judgement; resilience; participation (in classroom agreements)
Civic simulations and structured democratic practices	Electoral simulations; school parliaments; parliamentary debates; institutional roles; public hearings	Deliberation (very high); Democratic resilience; Solidarity participation; Critical judgement
Critical media literacy and disinformation analysis	Analysis of deepfakes; fake profiles; headline verification; bias analysis; campaign creation	Critical judgement (very high); Democratic resilience; Deliberation; Participation (when collective campaigns are produced)
Creative, expressive and narrative methodologies	Drama; social theatre; visual narratives; podcasts/videos; community art; expressive writing	Democratic resilience (high); Solidarity participation; Critical judgement; Deliberation (in collective interpretation)

Table 12. Relationship between pedagogical approaches, techniques used and RDC competence developed

Source: own elaboration based on national reports (see deliverable D5.2.) and Toolbox database

3.3. Design and implementation of interventions

The design and implementation of DEMOCRAT's pilot interventions show how the interventions transformed the RDC competence framework into concrete practices. While Chapter 2 described the structural features of the interventions—their educational level, institutional location, and curricular integration—this chapter analyses the pedagogical and organisational decisions that made their development possible, the processes that accompanied their construction, and the adjustments that arose during their implementation.

Overall, the design was not a linear or completely predictable process. Each pilot intervention developed its own way of organising the intervention based on its professional culture, available resources, and prior familiarity with participatory and dialogic approaches. The project was not implemented in a uniform manner, but evolved within each school through successive adaptations, micro-decisions and continuous adjustments that determined the final form of each experience. This section examines these design patterns from an analytical perspective, without yet delving into the resulting learning outcomes (Chapter 5), the contribution of Living Labs (Chapter 6), the external evaluation (Chapter 7) or the factors that facilitated or hindered implementation, which are examined in Chapter 8.

3.3.1. Real processes of curriculum integration: tensions, decisions and adaptations

Based on a comparative examination of the interventions, three patterns of integration can be distinguished that correspond to the levels identified in Chapter 2, but now viewed from the perspective of design and the real tensions that emerged during their development.

A first form, associated with structural integration interventions, is observed in several Spanish pilots and in some in Germany and Poland. In these cases, the intervention was incorporated into established school projects—such as participatory structures, citizenship programmes, or long-term initiatives—which provided institutional stability and a defined organisational framework. This integration facilitated comprehensive planning, a distribution of responsibilities among teaching teams and fluid connections with other initiatives at the school. Rather than an add-on, the project became a natural extension of already established practices, which reduced tensions and allowed for deeper ownership by the educational community.

A second form, linked to the interventions classified in Chapter 2 as functional integration, was particularly visible in Poland and Estonia, as well as in some cases in Germany and Spain. These interventions were developed within subjects, quarterly modules or teaching units that lasted several weeks or months. Although they did not involve large-scale organisational changes, they did offer the continuity necessary to articulate several phases of work, delve deeper into specific content and adjust the design to the needs of the group. Their disciplinary nature facilitated curricular coherence, but also required managing tensions between the pace of the project and the obligations of the academic calendar.

Finally, a wide range of interventions followed the pattern of one-off interventions, which were more common in Finland, Estonia, and Ireland. These experiences—workshops, simulations, themed weeks, or activities concentrated in short periods—were integrated into the normal functioning of the school without modifying pre-existing structures. Their design had to be adapted to limited time frames and very restricted sequences, which required detailed planning and careful selection of activities. Although their impact was shorter-lived, they allowed for experimentation with innovative pedagogical approaches and the activation of specific competences in a focused manner.

The coexistence of these three patterns allows us to understand the diversity of decisions taken by the schools during the project: the distribution of time, the degree of autonomy granted to students, teacher collaboration, and the flexibility to reorganise the pedagogical itinerary. In this sense, integration determined not only the formal location of each intervention in the curriculum, but also the real possibilities for adaptation, the depth of the work carried out, and the ability of teachers to sustain the project throughout its implementation.

3.3.2. Co-design as a driver of innovation

Co-design played a central role in the development of the project, although it took different forms depending on the country and type of intervention. None of the interventions were implemented as a closed package; all required adjustments, adaptations and shared decisions throughout the process. This co-design was carried out in different ways depending on the intervention. However, a comparative analysis of the interventions reveals some common patterns and allows us to establish four generic categories:

- Co-design through internal teacher dynamics. Teaching teams met to analyse methodological options, reorganise sequences and review the relevance of certain materials. This collaborative work allowed the interventions to acquire internal coherence and enabled the teams to adjust their design according to the students' response. Examples of this can be found in the cases of Spain and Germany.
- Student and parents' participation in the co-design phase. In several schools, students contributed to selecting topics, prioritising relevant issues in the school environment, or deciding how to structure some of the activities. This early participation directly influenced the direction of the interventions and allowed the project to reflect the interests and expectations of the students. Several examples

can be seen in Poland. In some schools, parents were also included in the co-design process, in addition to student participation. This only occurred in a few cases.

- Adaptations. Teachers reviewed the resources provided by the national teams and adjusted the level of complexity, pace and approach according to the needs of the group. These adaptations were particularly important in short interventions, where each session had to fulfil a specific function. Examples can be found in Ireland and Finland.
- Co-design with external actors. Some interventions extended the co-design of the intervention to external actors—NGOs, local journalists, municipal institutions—with whom they collaborated in developing activities and selecting examples related to media literacy or community participation. The intervention thus took on a hybrid character between school and environment. Examples can be found in Estonia.

In general, co-design appears to be a cross-cutting pattern where teachers did not simply reproduce sequences but created versions of the project tailored to their students and the culture of each school.

3.3.3. Duration, intensity and internal structure of the interventions

The differences in curriculum integration and co-design patterns described in the previous sections help to explain the variations observed in the duration, intensity and internal structure of the interventions. In the 40 pilots analysed in the DEMOCRAT project, duration was not an incidental feature, but a structural element that defined what kind of democratic experiences could be developed and how deeply the RDC competence framework could be worked on.

In those interventions with structural integration—present in several Spanish and some German pilots—the duration extended over more than one term or even the entire school year. This continuity made it possible to organise the work in successive phases, such as research, deliberation, action and final reflection, and enabled students to take on stable roles, such as spokespersons, moderators or communication officers. In addition, the participation of several teachers contributed to a richer and more adaptable methodological sequence, as teams were able to review the design based on the group's progress, reorganise timings when difficulties arose and hold more complex debates. In these contexts, the intervention was not a series of isolated activities, but a sustained pedagogical process with the capacity to generate visible changes in the participatory culture of the school.

In interventions with stable but limited curricular integration, which were common in most Polish pilots and in several in Estonia and Germany, the duration was usually between six weeks and six months. This intermediate interval allowed for the development of linked modules, where each block—source analysis, guided discussions, simulations, creative activities, or community participation—functioned as an autonomous unit but was articulated with the others. Although the intervention did not change the institutional structure of the school, it did have sufficient continuity for students to progress from initial understanding to the production of materials, proposals or public presentations. The planning was more rigid than in structural projects, but still left some room to adapt the sequence to the pace of the group.

In the case of functional integration interventions, which were predominant in Finland and in some of the Irish pilot interventions, the duration was short, often only two to four sessions. In this format, each activity had to fulfil a very specific purpose within an extremely compact sequence. The internal structure tended to be organised around highly concentrated moments of dialogue, analysis of materials, argumentation exercises or short dramatisations. Although limited in time, these interventions aimed to generate intensive experiences,

capable of introducing students—or trainee teachers—to democratic practices through carefully designed situations. Their viability depended largely on methodological clarity and the support provided by national teams or Living Labs.

A comparison of these three patterns shows that duration does not in itself determine the pedagogical quality of the interventions, but it does condition the learning opportunities that can be generated. Long projects facilitate complete cycles of exploration and democratic action; medium-length interventions allow for balanced combinations of techniques; and short interventions function as intensive micro-experiences, particularly useful for introducing complex competences in contexts with rigid schedules. What matters, therefore, is not only the number of weeks or sessions, but how the time available is linked to curriculum integration and co-design, shaping the internal structure of each intervention.

3.3.4. The role of Living Labs and national teams

In all six countries, the presence of Living Labs and national teams was a key element in the design and implementation of interventions, although the type of support varied between contexts. In general, support was provided as follows:

- In Spain and Poland, support was linked to institutional coordination: Living Labs facilitated coordination between management teams, teachers and existing school structures, enabling the stable integration of the intervention into school projects or strategic lines.
- In Estonia and Finland, support was more focused on technical aspects, especially in activities related to media literacy, source analysis and digital material management. Living Labs collaborated in adapting resources to different educational levels and in planning sequences tailored to short modules.
- In Ireland, the support was more dialogue-based and focused on facilitating sensitive conversations, managing dilemmas and incorporating appropriate narratives for different educational levels.
- In Germany, the national teams and Living Labs provided particular support for processes related to cultural and social diversity, helping teachers to select appropriate dynamics and to manage discussions on discrimination or injustice in a safe manner.

Through regular meetings, review of materials, and spaces for reflection, the Living Labs and national teams contributed to maintaining the internal coherence of the project, resolving practical issues, and adjusting the intervention as it progressed.

Despite some differences, there are common elements in the role played by the Living Labs and national teams. They all acted as a pedagogical reference framework, helping to translate the RDC competence framework approach into concrete tasks, viable teaching sequences, and dynamics appropriate to each context. They also operated as spaces for professional support, offering guidance when doubts, tensions or internal resistance arose in the schools. Above all, they facilitated a process of continuous design adjustment, as support was not limited to the initial phases: in many cases, it was maintained throughout the intervention, allowing strategies to be revised, activities to be reorganised or competences work to be rebalanced according to emerging needs.

The comparative analysis therefore shows that the role of Living Labs is not limited to providing resources or ad hoc training but is a structural condition of the DEMOCRAT project itself. Their presence allowed the interventions to evolve, enabled teachers to feel supported in a process of pedagogical change, and allowed each pilot to develop a situated, coherent, and viable version of the democratic competence-based approach.

3.4. Context within the international debate

The comparative analysis carried out in this chapter should be framed within a broad international debate on the methodologies, institutional conditions and pedagogical approaches that favour the development of democratic competences in children, adolescents and teachers. The results of the DEMOCRAT project interventions are in line with a body of literature that, for decades, has pointed to the importance of active, dialogic and participatory experiences in strengthening civic literacy, democratic attitudes and effective participation. However, the project's findings not only seem to confirm this evidence, but also allow it to be nuanced and, in some respects, expanded.

1. International consensus on active and participatory methodologies

Large comparative studies in civic education have consistently shown that active participation, experiential learning and cooperative dynamics have a positive impact on students' democratic disposition and socio-political engagement. Research such as CIVED[10] and ICCS[11] highlights that schools that promote meaningful participation, reasoned debate and community action experiences offer better opportunities for the development of advanced civic competences. Added to this are recent analyses[12] that link project work with civic self-efficacy and cooperative learning with sustained participation.

The results of the analysis of the pilot interventions seem to coincide with this evidence: interventions that incorporated these methodologies more intensively—such as political simulations (Estonia and Germany), eco-social and democratic memory projects (Spain), or community activities (Poland and Estonia)—show more robust patterns of solidarity-based participation, deliberation, and critical judgement.

2. The importance of open dialogue, narrative education and building student voice

A significant body of international literature emphasises the value of an open classroom climate, structured dialogue, and narrative methodologies in promoting deep democratic competences. Research on socio-constructivist and deliberative approaches[13] shows that reasoned exchange between peers improves understanding of diverse perspectives, encourages critical reflection, and strengthens the willingness to participate in collective processes.

Similarly, studies on narrative pedagogies and educational drama[14] show that experiences based on stories, ethical dilemmas, or emotional explorations contribute to generating empathy, mutual recognition, and a sense of democratic belonging. This evidence clearly coincides with patterns identified in Ireland, Germany, and Finland, where dialogic, narrative, and experiential work is central to addressing sensitive issues and sustaining complex conversations without fracturing group cohesion.

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[10] Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Oswald, H., & Schulz, W. (2001). *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen*. Amsterdam: IEA.

[11] Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Cox, C., & Friedman, T. (2022). *ICCS 2022 International Report*. Amsterdam: IEA.

[12] Kahne, J., & Sporte, S. (2008). Developing citizens: The civic outcomes of school practices. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), 738–766.

[13] Hess, D. (2009). *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*. New York: Routledge.

[14] Ackroyd, J. (2004). Role-play, realism and engagement: Drama-based pedagogy for active citizenship. *Research in Drama Education*, 9(1), 29–49.

3. Media literacy and democratic resilience in the contemporary digital context

Information erosion, polarised discourse and the spread of disinformation have made media literacy a priority in the international debate. Recent studies[15] show that explicitly working with dubious sources, fake profiles or manipulated content helps develop cognitive and emotional mechanisms of resistance to manipulation, reinforcing both critical thinking and democratic resilience.

The results of the pilot interventions in Estonia and Finland are fully in line with this trend. In these countries, activities focused on the analysis of manipulated images, deepfakes, source verification, and digital dilemmas generated learning processes that activated both critical judgement and elements of democratic resilience, understood as the ability to maintain informed, reflective, and ethically consistent positions in the face of external pressures or polarising narratives.

4. Curricular innovation and emerging models in democratic education

In recent years, research into educational innovation has challenged the idea that democratic education can be limited to a set of specific content or subjects. Instead, comprehensive approaches are being proposed that combine project-based learning, inquiry, phenomenological perspectives, and democratic school organisation. These trends can be seen in proposals such as the *democratic whole-school approach*[16] or the *learning situations* and competence-based curricula models developed in several European countries.

The findings in Chapter 3 indicate that the DEMOCRAT project is fully in line with this international trend. Countries such as Spain and Poland show cases of structural integration; Estonia is developing broad functional practices; while Finland and Ireland are articulating hybrid approaches, combining cooperation, inquiry, narratives and community action. This diversity confirms that democratic education benefits from a flexible approach that allows it to adapt to the institutional, temporal and cultural conditions of each context.

5. Tension between disciplinary rigour and democratic education: an ongoing debate

A significant part of the literature warns of the persistent tension between meeting curricular requirements and generating profound democratic experiences. Research on the implementation of civic programmes[17] shows that many schools face difficulties in balancing:

- the pace of compulsory content,
- the need for sustained deliberative processes,
- and openness to more flexible and collaborative methodologies.

This challenge is also recognised in the analyses of the DEMOCRAT project, particularly in functional or specific interventions, where teachers had to reconcile the disciplinary curriculum with activities that required time for reflection, inquiry, cooperation, or community action.

6. Convergences between international literature and DEMOCRAT findings

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[15] Mihailidis, P., & Thevenin, B. (2013). Media literacy as a core competency for engaged citizenship. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 57(11), 1611–1622.

[16] Carter, A. (2019). Democratic schools and whole-school approaches to citizenship education. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 18(2), 35–48.

[17] Losito, B., & Damiani, V. (2015). Implementing civic and citizenship education in Europe: Challenges and opportunities. *European Education*, 47(4), 242–256.

Three clear convergences emerge from the intersection of international evidence and the project results:

a) Active, dialogic and situated methodologies—recognised as the most effective in international debate—are also those that have generated the most consistent effects in the project pilots.

b) Meaningful curricular integration amplifies the depth of democratic learning, confirming the theses of comprehensive or democratic school approaches.

c) Critical media literacy reinforces both critical judgement and democratic resilience, a pattern also observed in the pilot interventions that worked with complex digital environments.

3.5. Chapter summary

A comparison of the forty interventions shows that the development of responsible democratic citizenship (RDC) competences did not follow a uniform pattern, but emerged from unique combinations of pedagogical approaches, design decisions, institutional conditions, and varying degrees of appropriation of the DEMOCRAT approach. The analysis in this chapter reveals both the transformative potential of the DEMOCRAT project and the tensions that conditioned its actual implementation.

The actual use of the RDC competence framework showed that competences are not usually worked on in isolation. In most interventions, participation drove deliberative processes, deliberation activated critical judgement, and moments of conflict or uncertainty required democratic resilience. This interrelationship was not accidental, as it responds to the very logic of democratic practices, where acting, dialoguing, analysing and sustaining disagreements are part of the same pedagogical sequence. Quantitative data on co-occurrences reinforce this reading, showing that each intervention activated an average of two competences, even when it claimed to focus on only one.

The pedagogical approaches used—project-based learning, dialogic methodologies, civic simulations, critical media literacy, and creative methodologies—shaped different patterns of competence work. PBL and simulations were the most comprehensive approaches, capable of simultaneously mobilising all four competences thanks to their anchoring in real problems and decision-making dynamics. Dialogic methodologies and media literacy generated particularly powerful contexts for critical judgement and deliberation, while creative methodologies provided a fertile space for exploring emotions, identities and perspectives, strengthening resilience and participation from an experiential level. This methodological diversity did not lead to dispersion, but rather allowed each school to build its own path to activate competences based on its professional culture and available resources.

The implementation of the interventions also showed a wide variety of ways in which they were integrated into the curriculum. Some pilots were inserted into stable school structures—such as institutional projects, participation programmes, or already consolidated strategic lines—which facilitated broad sequences, teacher coordination, and methodological continuity. Others were developed in a limited way within one or more subjects, relying on work modules that were sufficiently extensive to deploy phases of research, action, and reflection. Finally, a significant group of experiences functioned in a more exploratory manner, adjusting to reduced time frames, emerging initiatives or spaces allocated within the curriculum. In all cases, integration was a dynamic process that required constant micro-decisions and successive adjustments.

The different contexts in which the interventions took place and their particularities also triggered a process of creative adaptation in the design and organisation of the pilot interventions. Teachers adjusted activities, redistributed roles, rearranged sequences and calibrated the level of demand according to the age of the

students, the time available or the sensitivity of the topics addressed. Far from applying a homogeneous model, they reinterpreted the RDC competence framework to make it operational in very diverse classrooms. This contextualisation reinforced the situated nature of the project and helped to make democratic practices meaningful to students.

Finally, the international framework confirms that the project's findings are in line with decades of research highlighting the importance of dialogic, situated and participatory experiences for the development of civic competences. But it also makes a significant contribution: the chapter shows how these methodologies translate—with varying degrees of fidelity and success—into real educational settings, marked by curricular tensions, disparate organisational cultures, and institutional conditions that do not always favour full participation.

In short, the chapter shows that the DEMOCRAT project not only made it possible to apply a competence framework, but also revealed the capacity—and limitations—of educational institutions to transform that framework into meaningful democratic experiences. The diversity of methods, the flexibility of design, the natural interconnection of competences and the weight of structural conditions indicate that democratic learning requires time, support, a participatory culture and sustained practices. The interventions analysed show that teaching democracy is, above all, about putting it into practice, building it into everyday classroom life and sustaining it in diverse contexts, with strengths and weaknesses that external evaluation allows us to understand in greater depth.

4. Analysis of the use and adaptation of DEMOCRAT assessment tools

The assessment tools designed by the DEMOCRAT project for student self-assessment and teacher assessment were intended to provide a common framework for analysing the development of responsible democratic citizenship (RDC) competences in the six participating countries. Unlike traditional tools focused on content or academic performance, these tools sought to capture the complex dimensions of the four competences: solidary participation, deliberation, critical judgement, and democratic resilience.

Chapter 3 showed that the interventions worked on the competences in a combined and flexible way. This chapter examines how this diversity of designs influenced the actual use of the assessment tools. The analysis, based on information collected by the national teams, reveals a heterogeneous picture ranging from systematic and comprehensive use of both tools to difficulties that led to the partial adaptation, replacement or even abandonment of one or both of the tools.

The aim of the chapter is to describe how the tools were implemented, what obstacles arose, what adaptations were necessary, and how teachers assessed the usefulness of the tools.

4.1. Modalities of assessment tool implementation

The use of the DEMOCRAT assessment tools shows heterogeneous implementation depending on age range, duration of the intervention, and assessment culture of each school. Although both tools were part of the common DEMOCRAT framework, their degree of use was very different:

- 38 out of 40 interventions used student self-assessment, while
- only 18 out of 40 interventions used the teacher tool, either in its entirety or in a modified form.

This imbalance in use does not reflect a problem with the tools, but rather differences in the function, complexity and manageability of each:

- the student tool appeared to be more accessible, easier to apply in groups and more visible to students, and it provided additional information.
- The teacher tool required additional time, systematic observation and more complex interpretation criteria that had to be added to the assessment tools in accordance with the requirements of the national curriculum.

Based on this dual reality, four implementation modalities can be distinguished, which affect both tools, albeit with different patterns.

a) Full implementation: ex-ante and post use of both tools without changes

The full implementation modality is characterised by the application of the tools at two points in time—ex-ante and post—and without substantive changes to their structure. This modality was less frequent than the others, but it appears clearly in a set of interventions with greater duration and organisational stability, mainly in secondary schools and higher education institutions.

Student self-assessment was the tool most regularly applied in its complete form. In 33 interventions, students responded to the tool at both the beginning and end of the intervention, either in its original version or with minor adjustments. This complete application allowed for a comparison of perceptions and competences two points in time and facilitated the analysis of internal progress. The complete modality was more common in interventions that had more time available or in those where teachers integrated the tool into already

established assessment sequences. However, only in four interventions did students respond to the questionnaire without modifications, and in only one intervention were both tools used in their entirety without modification.

A total of 14 interventions applied the teaching tool ex-ante and post. Its application can be seen in specific interventions in Germany and Finland and, particularly consistently, in Poland, where teachers integrated the tool with remarkable fluidity into their usual monitoring practices. In 10 interventions, it was applied without modification. The full use of this tool was associated with contexts where there were stable teacher observation routines and where the duration of the intervention allowed for the incorporation of both moments.

The complete modality is distributed among different countries, but Poland stands out for the regularity with which it applied the teaching tool at two points in time and without modifications. In its interventions, the tool was naturally integrated into existing assessment practices, which facilitated its complete application.

b) Partial implementation: use of a single tool at a single point in time

This modality was common in brief interventions or those inserted into restrictive curricular sequences.

In five interventions, the student tool was applied only once (three ex-ante and two post). In two interventions, it was not applied. This pattern is particularly clear in Germany, where the brevity of the interventions—sometimes between one and four months—made it necessary to prioritise content over double-moment assessment. In Spain, some primary and secondary school interventions chose to apply only self-assessment, to avoid overloading the first meetings.

As for the teacher tool, in 22 interventions it was not used in conjunction with the student tool, especially in Estonia, Ireland and Spain. In 3 interventions it was used at a single point in time, in 1 intervention it was ex-ante and in 2 it was post.

This modality reveals that, in practice, many schools prioritised student self-assessment —which is more direct, brief and easy to administer— and reserved teacher assessment for contexts with greater temporal stability.

c) Adapted implementation: modifications in scale, language or structure

This was the most widespread modality, especially in the student tool. Of the 31 interventions that used the adapted student tool:

- 19 modified the questions,
- 8 modified questions and scale,
- 4 made other adaptations.

Modifications were particularly common in primary school interventions in Spain, Poland, Finland and Ireland, as well as in contexts of linguistic diversity in Germany, Ireland and Estonia. Adaptations included:

- simplification of language,
- reducing the number of items,
- reformulation of abstract concepts,
- alternative scales (*Yes/Sometimes/No*),
- introduction of pictograms or colours.

Although the teaching tool was used less frequently, it was also modified in six interventions, generally to adapt it to existing rubrics or protocols in the schools.

d) Partial replacement or integration into existing assessment ecosystems

In several interventions, the DEMOCRAT tools were not used in isolation, but were integrated into already established assessment systems. In the case of student self-assessment, it was integrated into existing structures such as:

- reflective journals,
- coexistence rubrics,
- group records,
- analysis of final products.

In the case of the teaching tool, it was replaced by:

- structured observations,
- internal rubrics,
- participation analysis matrices,
- tools associated with established projects (service learning, democratic memory, eco-social education).

Two particular cases should be highlighted within this modality:

- In Ireland, the DEMOCRAT teaching tool was not used, not because of a lack of evaluation, but because it was replaced by observation diaries, narrative records and qualitative documentation, formats consistent with its dialogical pedagogical culture.
- In Estonia, self-assessment was combined with qualitative analyses of products created by students (digital campaigns, videos, debates), integrating the DEMOCRAT tool as a conceptual framework.

4.2. Difficulties encountered in the application and understanding of the assessment tools

The difficulties identified in the use of the DEMOCRAT assessment tools were not uniform across countries or educational levels, but they did show recurring patterns that conditioned the implementation of the tool. While many of these difficulties arose from the linguistic or conceptual design of the questionnaire, others were related to the duration of the interventions, the teaching workload or the specific dynamics of the participating groups. The comparative analysis shows that, despite their diversity, these difficulties did not prevent the use of the tool; rather, they acted as a catalyst for a broad process of pedagogical adaptation, which is discussed below.

Difficulties related to the comprehension and language of the tools

One of the most recurrent difficulties was linked to the level of abstraction of the language used in the students' self-assessment. Although the tool was intended to be accessible to different educational levels, many teachers pointed out that its formulation required a high level of reading comprehension and a capacity for self-reflection that was not always within the reach of students, especially in primary school. In these cases, some students interpreted the questions literally, others tended to respond based on their ideal behaviour rather than their actual experience, and many had difficulty differentiating between nuances in the original scale.

In secondary school, although comprehension was greater, doubts persisted regarding the differentiation between competences. In interventions where deliberation, critical judgement and participation were worked on in an integrated way, some items seemed to overlap, which made students unsure about where to place their own practices. Similarly, items related to democratic resilience did not always fit with the experience of interventions without explicit exposure to conflict or polarisation.

The teaching tool presented different challenges. Some indicators were too broad for short interventions, and in culturally diverse contexts, certain terms needed to be contextualised to avoid divergent interpretations. Teachers also pointed out that the tool required systematic observation at times when their attention should be focused on facilitating classroom activity.

Difficulties related to adaptation to ages and educational levels

The national reports agree that the tool, as formulated, was better suited to secondary school students than primary school students. In the lower grades, reading competences and metacognitive maturity limited the possibility of applying self-assessment without teacher mediation. In some countries, such as Spain, Poland, Finland and Ireland, these difficulties led to the reformulation of questions in language more accessible to students, the elimination of overly abstract references and the conversion of the self-assessment process into a guided activity rather than an autonomous questionnaire.

In secondary school, although linguistic adaptation was less necessary, other difficulties arose: some students found it difficult to distinguish between behaviours linked to critical judgement and deliberation, especially in interventions where both processes occurred simultaneously. Furthermore, in interventions that did not address sensitive content or conflict situations, certain items of democratic resilience seemed far removed from the students' real experience, which reduced their usefulness in capturing relevant learning.

3. Difficulties arising from the limited duration of the interventions

In several countries, the pilot interventions were very short, especially in Finland and Ireland. In these cases, it was difficult to apply the self-assessment at two points in time without sacrificing substantial teaching time. Teachers pointed out that, in interventions with few sessions, the tool could take up a disproportionate amount of time in relation to the project as a whole. In addition, the brevity of the interventions reduced the possibility of students perceiving significant changes between the beginning and the end, which detracted from the interpretative value of the longitudinal comparison.

The teaching tool faced similar difficulties, as its full application required continuous and systematic observation, which was difficult to carry out in short interventions or when several groups were involved. This explains the prevalence of partial modalities and the preference, in certain contexts, for shorter qualitative records.

4. Difficulties related to teachers' workload

Teachers pointed out that the teacher’s tool required a considerable amount of attention and time to record detailed observations. In interventions with intense dynamics—debates, h r cooperative activities, action projects—it was difficult to combine the facilitation of the activity with the detailed observation required by the tool. In several schools, moreover, the tool coexisted with already established internal assessment systems, which led to it being perceived as an added element and not fully integrated into normal practice.

These circumstances explain the high number of interventions that chose not to use the teaching tool and, in the case of Ireland, its replacement by observation diaries and other qualitative formats better aligned with its pedagogical tradition.

5. Difficulties in distinguishing between competences in integrated interventions

As seen in the previous chapter, most DEMOCRAT interventions worked simultaneously on several competences from the RDC competence framework. This made both student self-assessment and the use of the teaching tool difficult. When the educational activity integrated deliberation, critical analysis and participation in the same sequence — something common in Germany, Spain and Estonia — several items in the tool were perceived as redundant or difficult to attribute to a single competence. Teachers expressed that the tool did not always reflect the real complexity of these interventions, where competences emerged in combination and not as separate dimensions.

6. Technical and logistical difficulties

Finally, logistical difficulties arose in relation to the administration of the tool. In interventions with large groups or with students with reading difficulties, self-assessment required individualised support or the division of the tool into several sessions. Some teachers indicated that the self-assessment tool was too long and that students needed a lot of time to complete it. In some cases, digital administration encountered obstacles related to the availability of devices or the need for additional assistance for students who were new to the education system. These difficulties, although isolated, affected the smooth running of the tool's application.

4.3. Assessment tool adaptations and simplifications made to resolve difficulties

The difficulties described in the previous section did not prevent the use of the tool, but they did force schools to develop creative adaptation strategies. This led to a wide range of solutions developed by teachers in the six countries, which made it possible to maintain the pedagogical usefulness of the tool despite its initial limitations. The adaptations did not follow a single pattern, but varied according to the age of the students, the duration of the intervention, the level of experience of the teachers and the assessment culture of the school. However, they all shared the objective of making the project tools understandable, manageable and relevant in real contexts.

One of the most widespread adaptations was to simplify the language of the tool. In several pilot experiences in Spain, Poland, Finland and some in Germany, teachers rewrote items that were too abstract, replacing general formulations with more direct and specific expressions. This process included verbal clarifications, examples connected to the students' experience and the elimination of difficult conceptual terms. In primary school, this simplification was essential for students to understand the tool without losing sight of its relationship to democratic competences.

Linguistic simplification was combined with another frequent adaptation, namely reducing the number of items. In brief interventions, such as those in Finland and Ireland, teachers selected only the most relevant items or questions for the project, preventing the tool from taking up a disproportionate amount of time in relation to the intervention as a whole. In some interventions, especially in primary school, this reduction made it possible to focus the assessment on essential aspects of participation, listening, argumentation, or cooperation, without requiring students to process a large number of statements.

Another important group of adaptations had to do with modifying the response scale. Since the original four-level scale was difficult for some of the younger students to interpret, many schools opted for simpler alternatives such as "Yes / Sometimes / No" or visual systems based on colours, symbols, or emoticons. This adaptation was particularly effective in contexts where independent reading was a challenge or where

students benefited from visual aids to express their self-reflection. In some interventions, this simplification was applied to both the student and teacher tools in order to maintain internal consistency.

In several interventions, the application of the tool took a different form than initially planned, and self-assessment was transformed into an oral activity or guided dialogue. In Finland and Ireland, for example, part of the self-assessment was carried out through group conversations, reflection circles or short debates in which students verbally expressed their perceptions of their participation, their ability to argue or their way of collaborating with others. In Spain, Germany, and Poland, some teachers read the items aloud and collected responses using gestures—such as thumbs up/middle/down—which made the process accessible to students who had not yet mastered reading or who needed close support.

In relation to the above, many interventions incorporated visual aids that facilitated self-assessment: coloured cards, pictograms, expressive faces or simple symbols. These resources made reflection accessible to students with reading difficulties, students who were new to the education system, or groups with varying levels of reading comprehension. These visual solutions not only made the process more fluid, but also enabled students to express nuances with greater confidence.

Another recurring adaptation was the fragmentation of the tool into several sessions. In some interventions, the administration of the questionnaire was divided into two or more moments, thus avoiding fatigue and allowing students to maintain their concentration. In Estonia, for example, this fragmentation responded both to the modular structure of the interventions and to the fatigue that students expressed when completing the tool after intense sessions of media analysis or debate.

In several countries, teachers chose to integrate the tool into existing assessment systems or partially replace some items with rubrics specific to the school or the content being studied. In media literacy interventions in Estonia, for example, self-assessment was supplemented or reformulated based on specific rubrics for source analysis or argumentative quality. In Germany, the tool was aligned with rubrics used to work on coexistence or social competences, while in Spain it was integrated into democratic memory or school participation projects that already had their own assessment tools. These forms of integration made it possible to maintain the pedagogical coherence of the project without compromising the spirit of the RDC competence framework.

Other adaptations were more contextual in nature. In some interventions, certain items were reformulated to connect them more directly with the activities carried out: debates, environmental projects, assemblies, research tasks, or media analysis. This contextualisation helped students identify with the situations presented in the self-assessment and better understand how the questions related to their specific experience during the intervention.

Finally, in interventions that worked in environments where there were logistical difficulties—very large groups, lack of devices, students with special educational needs—operational solutions were implemented, such as individual reading support, working in pairs, collective reading of the tool, or conducting the self-assessment in small groups. These strategies ensured that all students could participate in the reflection process regardless of their reading competences or the material limitations of the school.

Ultimately, these adaptations provide a better understanding of which elements of the tools promote reflection and which present barriers in real teaching contexts. At the same time, they offer clues as to the characteristics that a future version of the tool should have in order to respond to the needs of very different schools: more flexible, more adaptable to different educational levels, and more sensitive to the type of intervention. All in all, the adaptations made not only resolved obstacles but also enriched the collective understanding of how to assess democratic learning in everyday classroom settings.

4.4. Assessment tool evaluation by teachers and students

The evaluation of the DEMOCRAT assessment tools was not limited to teachers: in several pilot experiences, students also expressed their impressions of the self-assessment process and the perceived usefulness of the tool. Although the forms of feedback were different—formal in some cases, indirect in others—both perspectives provide a better understanding of the tool's suitability for real-world implementation contexts.

Overall, the evaluations show a common pattern: the tool was perceived as valuable from an educational point of view but demanding from a practical point of view. Both teachers and students appreciated its ability to generate reflection, but pointed out difficulties associated with language, abstraction, or conditions of application. Below, both perspectives are presented separately, while maintaining their internal relationship and the connections between them.

4.4.1. Teachers' evaluation of the tool

In most of the pilot interventions, teachers appreciated that the tool offered, for the first time, a systematic language for identifying, describing, and analysing behaviours associated with democratic competences. In Estonia, for example, teachers who worked on media literacy and argumentation noted that the tool helped to "make thinking processes visible" that were normally implicit in students' participation in debates and simulations. Similarly, in Germany, secondary school teachers emphasised that having clear criteria for observing active listening, turn-taking and the justification of ideas facilitated reflection on the quality of dialogue in the classroom.

In Spain, especially in pilot interventions focused on coexistence, participation, or democratic memory, the tool was perceived as useful for initiating conversations with students about their own ways of participating in school life. Although many teachers adapted the tool, they appreciated that it provided a common structure for addressing self-reflection. This perception is also repeated in Poland, where teachers appreciated that the teaching tool, applied without modification in all interventions, provided a stable framework for observing student progress in student participation tasks, collaborative projects, or awareness-raising activities.

In Finland, even in short-term interventions, teachers appreciated that the questions served to guide discussions on democratic competences, although their formal application was not always possible. In Ireland, the assessment was expressed differently because, although the teaching tool was not used, teachers considered that the principles of the tool—especially the distinction between deliberation, critical judgement, and participation—helped them to structure their own observation diaries and to reflect more systematically on the process.

These favourable assessments coexisted with significant criticism. In interventions from all countries, teachers pointed out that the original design of the tool was demanding for primary school, both because of its linguistic complexity and the abstract nature of some items. In interventions from Germany and Spain, primary school teachers indicated that the tool required a thorough reformulation to make it accessible, especially for students with reading difficulties or diverse educational backgrounds. In Finland and Ireland, the brevity of the interventions limited the real possibility of applying the tool at two points in time. In these contexts, some teachers considered that the tool took up a disproportionate amount of time and that the teaching tool, in particular, was "ambitious" for such short interventions.

Another recurring observation by teachers was the difficulty of observing isolated indicators in interventions that worked on several competences simultaneously. In combined projects—such as those on participation

and deliberation in Spain, media literacy in Estonia, or inclusion in Germany—teachers found it difficult to attribute a specific behaviour to a single competence without taking it out of context.

Despite these difficulties, the overall perception of teachers was that the tool—once adapted—generated valuable conversations, facilitated the observation of democratic learning, and contributed to professionalising reflection on the role of students in participatory, deliberative, or critical processes.

4.4.2. Student evaluation of the tool

The information available on student assessment is less systematic, as the project did not explicitly request that this dimension be collected in all countries where pilot tests were conducted. However, the cases that were documented provide relevant evidence.

In experiences in Estonia and Finland, students explicitly valued that self-assessment helped them to better understand their own democratic practices. Students in media analysis-focused interventions in Estonia stated that the tool allowed them to identify changes in their ability to evaluate sources, argue and participate in discussions. Some noted that, after completing the self-assessment, they had a better understanding of how to construct solid arguments or how to listen to their peers during debates. In Finland, secondary school and teacher training students said that they found the tool useful for becoming aware of competences that are not always explicitly worked on in the classroom.

Students also expressed difficulties, which largely mirrored those reported by teachers. In the Estonian interventions, some students mentioned feeling tired or overwhelmed when completing the questionnaire after intense interventions, which affected their concentration. In primary school—especially in projects in Germany, Spain, and Poland—several students had difficulty understanding the meaning of certain items, which led teachers to transform the questionnaire into a guided reading, use visual symbols, or simplify its content. Although in these cases the students' comments were not always explicitly recorded, their behavioural responses and the need for mediation indicate an implicit assessment of its limited accessibility.

In Ireland, where the student tool was only used in some interventions, student assessment did not focus on the tool itself, but rather on the overall reflective process. Students participated in discussions about their learning within the pilot framework, but did not give specific assessments of the questionnaire, as this was replaced by dialogue-based activities.

Ultimately, students valued the reflection process generated more than the structure of the tool itself. For some students, self-assessment was a space to verbalise what they had learned about participating, cooperating or thinking critically; for others, it was an exercise that allowed them to identify what they still needed to improve.

4.5. Chapter summary

DEMOCRAT proposed two assessment tools—student self-assessment and the teacher's assessment tool—to capture the development of responsible democratic citizenship (RDC) competences. Practical use showed different patterns and remarkable flexibility on the part of the interventions to adjust them to their needs.

The student self-assessment tool was the one most widely used across the interventions. Its relative accessibility and its ability to generate direct reflection among students facilitated its adoption, although in most cases it required substantial modifications: simplification of language, reduction in the number of items, use of visual aids, or transformation into oral dynamics. These adaptations not only responded to practical

limitations—such as reading comprehension or the reduced duration of some interventions—but also reflected a genuine effort by teachers to preserve the pedagogical meaning of the tool.

The teacher's assessment tool, on the other hand, presented greater difficulties. Its length, the need for systematic observation, and its coexistence with other assessment systems explain its lower use. The cases where it was fully implemented are concentrated in contexts with stable structures, with Poland being the most consistent example of smooth integration of the tool without modifications. In most countries, this tool was used partially or replaced by more manageable formats, such as observation diaries or internal rubrics.

The difficulties identified—linguistic, conceptual, organisational, and logistical—prompted a widespread process of creative adaptation. Far from limiting themselves to minimal adjustments, teachers reinterpreted the tool to make it viable in diverse classrooms: from merging it with existing assessment systems to fragmenting the questionnaire into several sessions or recontextualising items according to the content of the pilot. This process made it possible to convert an initially homogeneous tool into a more flexible device, capable of adjusting to the realities of each school context.

The assessments collected reinforce this interpretation. Teachers highlighted the value of the tool as a conceptual framework for observing democratic competences that are usually worked on implicitly, but also pointed out the need to adapt its design to ensure its applicability. When expressing direct feedback, students particularly valued the opportunity to reflect on their practices and better understand their own democratic learning processes. However, both teachers and students agreed that the original tool was demanding and required adjustments to make it accessible and meaningful at all educational levels.

In short, the results analysed in this chapter show that, despite differences between countries, the DEMOCRAT assessment tools served as catalysts for reflection and as a starting point for new assessment practices on democracy in schools. Far from weakening the tool, the adaptations made offer valuable information to guide a future version that is more tailored, flexible and consistent with the diversity of contexts and educational needs present in the project.

5. Results of the learning outcomes

This chapter analyses the learning outcomes generated in the DEMOCRAT project interventions, combining quantitative (ex-ante/post) and qualitative (observations, teacher diaries, student products and assessments collected in national reports) evidence collected by the assessment tools, teachers and national teams. Unlike the previous chapter, which focused on the use and adaptation of the assessment tools, this chapter examines what learning actually emerged, how it is distributed across competences and educational levels, and what factors explain the differences observed between interventions.

As we have just seen, due to the methodological and temporal diversity of the pilots, not all interventions applied the tools at two points in time, so the analysis is based on cases with comparable data combined with cross-sectional qualitative interpretation.

5.1. Quantitative results and evidence of progress

The quantitative data from the DEMOCRAT assessment tools—in particular from the student self-assessment and, to a lesser extent, from the teacher tool—allow us to identify patterns of progress in the RDC competence framework, although with significant variability between interventions. Given that not all experiences applied the tools at two points in time, making it impossible to measure progress, the analysis focuses on interventions that have sufficient ex-ante/post information to make reliable comparisons.

In the case of student self-assessment, 26 interventions provide comparable data between the beginning and the end. Of these, 17 show clear progress, while 9 show no improvement or limited progress. This implies that approximately 65% of interventions with valid data show noticeable progress according to student perception. This progress seems to be particularly concentrated in indicators of solidarity participation and deliberation, competences that tend to be activated more directly in collaborative projects, debates, simulations or decision-making activities. In contrast, progress in democratic resilience appears more irregular, which coincides with interventions in which these competences were worked on for less time or in a less structured way.

As for teacher assessment, the available data are more limited: only 18 interventions used this tool, and only 11 have comparable measurements between the two moments. In this small group, the trend is markedly positive: 10 of the 11 interventions show progress according to the teachers' assessment. This proportion, which is much higher than in student self-assessment, should be interpreted with caution, as these interventions with comparable data tend to be the longest, the most structured and those that applied the tool in its entirety. In such contexts, teachers have more opportunities to observe changes, which may partly explain this difference.

Comparing the two tools allows for further refinement of the results. In the 11 cases where comparable student and teacher data exist, we observe that:

- seven interventions show simultaneous progression in both assessments, indicating a clear convergence in the perception of change;
- in three interventions, teachers identify progress that students do not yet recognise in their self-assessment;
- and in one case, the opposite occurs, with students reporting improvements that are not reflected in the teacher assessment.

The divergences should not be interpreted as inconsistencies, but rather as an expression of the complementary nature of both tools. While student self-assessment reflects the subjective and conscious perception of one's own learning, the teacher tool is based on observable behaviours and group dynamics, which can evolve even when students do not yet fully recognise their own progress. This difference in perspective will be analysed in greater detail in section 5.4.

In comparative terms, interventions that show greater quantitative evidence of progress tend to share some common features: longer duration, complete cycles of research–deliberation–action, explicit curricular integration, and systematic use of the tool at two points in time. In contrast, shorter interventions, with less temporal continuity or partial application of the tools, show more modest progress, especially in competences that require prolonged exposure to conflict situations, analysis of sources, or intensive democratic experiences.

Although these data provide an overview of competence progress, they do not capture learning that is not easily measurable through self-assessment or teacher observation tools. Therefore, the following section delves deeper into the qualitative evidence.

5.2. Qualitative results and observed learning

The qualitative evidence gathered in national reports, teaching diaries and observations made by national teams provides a richer and more nuanced picture of the learning that emerged throughout the project. Although quantitative data provide an overview of measurable progress in the RDC competence framework, qualitative information reveals changes in attitudes, behaviours, motivations and group dynamics that are difficult to capture using standardised tools.

Unlike ex-ante/post scores, which depend on the duration of the intervention and the full application of assessment tools, qualitative results are present in virtually all interventions, regardless of country, educational level or duration. This provides a better understanding of what types of democratic experiences took place and how students' practices changed beyond what can be strictly assessed. In this regard, the following points stand out:

1. Greater willingness of students to participate and take on collective responsibilities

One of the most recurrent observations was the increase in active student participation, especially in interventions that incorporated real decision-making processes or action projects. In Spain and Poland, where the most extensive interventions included diagnoses of school problems, working committees or improvement projects, teachers observed that students showed more initiative, a greater sense of collective responsibility and more equitable participation in tasks.

In Germany and Estonia, where many interventions were linked to issues of coexistence, diversity or the media, students showed a greater willingness to express opinions and share personal experiences, even in emotionally complex contexts. These changes are not always reflected in direct quantitative progress, but they are reflected in a notable improvement in the culture of participation in the classroom.

2. Improvement in the quality of deliberation and listening competences

The ability to listen to others and argue in a reasoned manner emerged as one of the most widespread qualitative learnings. In countries where the interventions incorporated structured debates, parliamentary simulations or collective analysis of dilemmas (e.g. Estonia, Germany, Finland), teachers reported visible progress in:

- respect for speaking turns,
- the ability to justify opinions,
- the formulation of counterarguments,
- willingness to change position after listening to the group.

Even in shorter interventions, teachers observed improvements in the quality of dialogue, especially when dialogic or narrative techniques were used that invited students to explore multiple perspectives.

3. Development of critical thinking and the ability to question information

In interventions focused on media literacy, source analysis, or communication projects, students showed a progressive ability to:

- identify misleading information,
- question unsubstantiated claims,
- recognise biases,
- compare different points of view.

This learning was expressed above all in practical activities such as analysing manipulated videos, campaign simulations, creating alternative messages, guided discussions on social media, and disinformation challenges. In the interventions in Estonia, for example, several teachers noted that students "became more sceptical of sources" and "more able to argue why information is reliable or not."

4. Greater democratic awareness and understanding of the values involved

A cross-cutting learning outcome identified in almost all countries was an increased understanding of what it means to live in a democratic community. Students not only developed competences, but also a deeper awareness of:

- the value of dialogue,
- mutual respect,
- the need to reach agreements,
- the importance of responsible participation,
- how their actions affect the group.

In Spain and Germany, where some interventions addressed democratic memory or coexistence in contexts of cultural diversity, students showed greater sensitivity to experiences of discrimination, exclusion or inequality. In these cases, learning included emotional and ethical aspects that go beyond the "competence domain" in the strict sense.

5. Progress in democratic resilience when there were real opportunities to practise it

Democratic resilience did not develop universally, but it clearly emerged in interventions that also addressed conflicts, controversies or situations of frustration.

This was particularly visible in:

- participation projects in Poland, where students sometimes faced real limits in school decisions;
- media analysis interventions in Estonia, which exposed students to polarising messages;
- activities on memory, local history and rights in Spain, where discrepancies in interpretation arose on issues involving diverse sensitivities.

In these contexts, teachers observed that students learned to tolerate disagreement, sustain conversation even when it was uncomfortable, and understand why democracy requires coexisting with opposing views.

6. Changes in group dynamics and the democratic climate in the classroom

Within this point, several interventions reported improvements in:

- cooperation among students,
- more equitable distribution of speaking time,
- the inclusion of more shy or reticent students,
- fewer interruptions,
- respect for collective agreements.

In Finland and Ireland, some teachers reported that even in brief interventions, students felt more "confident" to participate and more willing to listen. These qualitative changes are not always reflected in improvements in individual assessments, but they constitute fundamental advances for everyday democratic practice.

In short, qualitative evidence reveals that the interventions were able to generate specific democratic learning and, at the same time, transform classroom dynamics, creating an environment more conducive to conscious, inclusive and reflective participation.

5.3. Differences between age range and types of intervention

The learning outcomes of the DEMOCRAT project were not homogeneous across different educational levels, age range or different types of intervention. Although there were common cross-cutting patterns, such as improved deliberation in structured interventions or increased participation in collaborative projects, the evidence collected in the national reports reveals differences linked to the age of the students, their level of autonomy, the duration of the interventions and the type of pedagogical experience implemented.

These differences are particularly relevant for the interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data analysed in the previous sections. To understand the scope and limitations of the learning observed, it is necessary to analyse how each educational level (primary, secondary, and teacher training) and each type of intervention (long-term projects, short-term interventions, media literacy activities, simulations, school participation projects, etc.) generated different opportunities for the development of the RDC competence framework.

5.3.1. Learning according to age range

The development of the RDC competence framework takes different forms depending on the educational stage and age range. The following points summarise how these learnings were expressed in groups: 6-12 years old, 13-16 years old, 17-19 years old, over 19 years old.

a) 6-12 years old (primary schools): learning focused on participation, coexistence and active listening

Among the interventions carried out in primary schools for students aged between 6 and 12, interventions were characterised by a strong emphasis on participation, cooperation and coexistence. Thus, most qualitative learning focused on:

- taking on collective responsibilities,
- improving listening competences,
- participating in a more orderly and respectful manner,

- understanding basic rules of democratic interaction,
- resolving minor conflicts through dialogue.

Learning at this level was expressed mainly in visible behaviours and group dynamics, rather than in high-level processes such as critical judgement or democratic resilience. This coincides with the quantitative results, where primary school showed moderate progress in deliberation and participation, but more limited progress in critical judgement and resilience.

Several teaching teams reported that primary school students responded better when activities were anchored in concrete experiences — playground problems, group decisions, classroom projects — and when assessment was carried out through guided dialogue or adapted tools. At this level, work on democratic competences progressed more clearly in longer interventions organised around school projects.

b) 13-6 years old (secondary schools): progress in deliberation, critical thinking and structured participation

In 13-16 group, both quantitative and qualitative results show more balanced learning across the four competences of the RDC competence framework. Students at this level have:

- greater autonomy,
- greater capacity for metacognitive reflection,
- and greater familiarity with debate and analysis dynamics.

This translates into measurable progress in deliberation, critical thinking and, in some cases, democratic resilience, especially when the interventions incorporated conflict situations—historical controversies, ethical dilemmas, analysis of disinformation—or structured deliberative dynamics.

Interventions in secondary school were also the ones that most frequently had complete ex-ante/post measurements, which allowed for more systematic observation of progress. In the experiences developed in Estonia, Germany, and Spain, the combination of media analysis, structured debates, and collective action projects generated broad learning that covered all the competences in the framework.

Furthermore, secondary school was the level where the DEMOCRAT tools worked most reliably and where the necessary adaptations were more strategic than structural.

c) 17-19 years old (secondary schools, adult schools and VET centre): advanced learning in critical thinking, complex deliberation and democratic autonomy

In the 17-19 group the DEMOCRAT project interventions generated learning characterised by greater autonomy, analytical capacity and deliberative maturity. This age range allowed for more complex content and dynamics than in primary and secondary education, favouring a more in-depth development of democratic competences.

The most notable learning outcomes at this stage focused on:

- analysing complex digital information,
- participating in debates where opposing positions were defended, justifying arguments with evidence or examples worked on during the intervention,
- comparing points of view and responding to counterarguments,
- making informed collective decisions,
- maintaining cooperation in situations of tension or disagreement

The teaching teams noted that the students at this stage showed a remarkable ability to relate what they had learned to their own emerging civic experience—youth participation, personal decision-making, critical consumption of information—which reinforced the relevance and authenticity of the activities.

With regard to the DEMOCRAT tools, students at this stage clearly understood the items in the tool, which facilitated its application with less need for adaptation and allowed for more accurate evidence of their progress when it was applied at two different times.

d) Over 19 years old: teacher training

The interventions developed in teacher training—particularly in Finland and Ireland—show a different type of learning, focused less on the direct acquisition of democratic competences and more on professional reflection:

- how to guide democratic dialogues,
- how to manage sensitive or controversial issues in the classroom,
- how to assess student deliberation or participation,
- how to interpret and adapt the DEMOCRAT tool in real contexts.

In these cases, progress is not measured primarily in terms of student participation or resilience, but in the development of teaching competences to facilitate democratic processes. Initial training students particularly valued the usefulness of reflecting on how to teach these competences, and in some cases contributed to adapting the tools to make them more accessible to younger ages.

5.3.2. Differences according to type of intervention

In addition to the educational level, the nature of the interventions conditioned the scope and depth of learning, generating different patterns according to the duration, approach and methodology used.

1. Long interventions integrated into school projects

These pilot interventions, which were common in Spain and Poland, generated the broadest and deepest learning. The combination of diagnosis, deliberation, action and reflection made it possible to work on several competences simultaneously and observe visible progress in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

2. Short or modular interventions

In Finland and Ireland, where several interventions lasted only a few weeks, learning focused on participation, listening and democratic awareness competences. Critical thinking advanced only in very specific activities, and democratic resilience had little opportunity to develop.

3. Interventions focused on media literacy

Particularly prevalent in Estonia and Finland, these interventions produced clear advances in critical judgement, source analysis and deliberation in complex information contexts. They also generated emotional learning and informational resilience in groups exposed to disinformation.

4. Interventions focused on coexistence, diversity or democratic memory

Interventions in Spain and Germany showed significant learning in empathy, recognition of others' experiences, sensitivity to discrimination, and capacity for intercultural dialogue. Democratic resilience emerged in contexts where real disagreements arose.

5.3.3. Relationship between educational level, type of intervention and competence progression

A comparison between educational levels and types of intervention shows a clear relationship between the development of the RDC competence framework and the combination of student age, methodologies used and real opportunities to practise the associated competences. National reports show that each competence requires specific times and contexts to be consolidated:

- Solidary participation progresses rapidly in interventions where students take on collective tasks or real responsibilities, something that is visible both in primary school intervention projects and in school participation experiences in secondary schools (Spain, Poland).
- Deliberation advances when there are clear structures—turns, roles, criteria for argumentation—a common element in debates and simulations carried out in Estonia, Germany, and Finland.
- Critical judgement requires sustained exposure to diverse information and guided analysis activities, such as media literacy interventions that worked with digital manipulation or source verification (Estonia, Finland).
- Democratic resilience only emerges in contexts with genuine disagreements or institutional limits, as observed in Polish participatory processes, in debates on memory and coexistence in Spain, or in analyses of polarised messages in Estonia.

5.4. Factors explaining learning and the relationship between methodology, use of tools, and results

The democratic learning outcomes observed in the interventions cannot be understood solely on the basis of the activities carried out or the occasional use of assessment tools. The comparative analysis shows that progress in the RDC competence framework depends on a set of interrelated factors linked to pedagogical design, the duration of the interventions, classroom dynamics, age range, and the way in which the project tools were used. These factors explain both the quantitative variations and the richness of the qualitative results described in the previous sections. They are discussed below:

1. Duration and intensity of interventions

Duration is one of the clearest determinants of learning. Prolonged interventions—especially in Spain and Poland—made it possible to develop complete cycles of research, deliberation, action, and reflection, offering repeated opportunities to practise democratic competences in meaningful situations.

In this type of context:

- solidary participation was consolidated through sustained responsibilities,

2. Pedagogical structure and design quality

Interventions with clear pedagogical sequences, based on methodologies such as action projects, dialogic learning, media literacy, or deliberative simulations, produced the most consistent results. These methodologies share three characteristics:

- They activate several competences simultaneously, expanding learning opportunities.
- They offer authentic contexts where participation and critical judgement take on real meaning.
- They incorporate spaces for reflection, which allow for a deeper understanding on the part of the students.
- deliberation improved thanks to multiple rounds of debate,

- critical thinking was strengthened through systematic analysis of information,
- and democratic resilience emerged when disagreements or institutional limitations arose.

In contrast, brief interventions—common in Finland and Ireland—led to more specific and limited progress, focusing on active listening, basic cooperation, and democratic awareness.

When activities were sporadic, poorly structured, or overly dependent on improvisation, learning tended to be more situational and less transferable.

3. Age range and cognitive maturity

The results varied clearly according to the age of the students:

- In 6-12 years old, learning focused on coexistence, cooperation and basic participation, consistent with their cognitive development.
- In 13-16 years old, reflective maturity allowed for more balanced progress across the four competences.
- In 17-19 years old, students showed sufficient maturity to work with complex information, hold more structured debates and make informed collective decisions, which fostered advanced learning in critical thinking, deliberation and managing disagreement.
- In over 19 years old, learning focused on professional reflection and understanding how to facilitate democratic practices.

These patterns suggest that age determines which competences can be developed in greater depth and which methodologies are most appropriate at each stage.

4. Use of assessment tools as a means of mediating learning

The tool not only served to assess, but also acted as a mediator of learning when integrated into the pedagogical process.

- When self-assessment was applied before and after the intervention, students became aware of their progress and articulated their practices better, especially in terms of participation and deliberation.
- When the teaching tool was used systematically, teachers observed changes in group interaction, active listening, argumentation and autonomy.

In interventions in several countries, the process of adapting the tool generated valuable pedagogical conversations that influenced the design of activities and the way in which competences were worked on.

In brief interventions, the use of self-assessment as a guided reflective activity generated meaningful learning even without complete measurements.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that the tool—in its original or adapted version—reinforced learning when it was part of the pedagogical sequence, not when it was applied as an external element.

5. Classroom climate and quality of social interactions

Democratic learning depends largely on the climate generated during the intervention. National reports show that:

- cohesive groups made more progress in deliberation,
- groups with prior tensions advanced more in resilience,
- culturally diverse contexts offered rich opportunities for critical analysis and intercultural dialogue,

- teachers' management of emotional safety determined the participation of more timid or reticent students.

The pedagogical leadership of teachers was decisive in creating environments where the RDC competence framework could emerge in a sustained manner.

6. Support from Living Labs and national teams

The support received by the schools had a clear impact on the results:

- it facilitated the design of context-specific interventions,
- it helped to interpret the competences and translate them into specific activities,
- it provided tools for managing difficulties or resistance,
- it reinforced the culture of evaluation and the formative use of the tool.

Interventions with closer support showed more stable progress in both quantitative and qualitative data.

7. Nature of the content worked on

The subject matter of the interventions determined the type of learning observed:

- Participatory interventions promoted responsibility and cooperation.
- Interventions on deliberation and media promoted critical thinking and argumentation.
- Interventions on coexistence and diversity fostered empathy and intercultural dialogue.
- Interventions on democratic memory promoted reflections on justice, rights and recognition of otherness.

This factor is intertwined with the previous ones and explains why certain competences advanced more in some contexts than in others.

5.5. Chapter summary

Analysis of the pilot intervention learning outcomes reveals a diverse picture, with the degree of progress observed reflecting, on the one hand the nature of the interventions and the characteristics of the students targeted, and on the other hand the way in which the DEMOCRAT RDC competence framework and the assessment tools were integrated. Quantitative data reveal measurable progress in participation and deliberation, especially when the interventions were sufficiently long and pedagogically consistent. At the same time, qualitative evidence shows visible transformations in the way of dialoguing, cooperating, managing disagreements and analysing information, even in those cases where ex-ante/post measurements were incomplete or progress was not fully reflected through the assessment tools.

The differences between age range explain much of the variation detected: 6-12 group advanced mainly in cooperative dynamics and basic participation; 13-16 group showed more balanced learning across the four competences;17-19 group allowed for more complex work in critical analysis and deliberation; and over 19 group (initial teacher training) focused on developing teaching competences to facilitate democratic processes. The different types of intervention also conditioned the results: long projects integrated into the life of the school generated broad and interrelated learning, while short experiences were oriented towards specific and situated progress.

The chapter as a whole shows that democratic learning does not depend solely on a specific methodology, but on the articulation between pedagogical design, duration, support received, age of the students and the

formative use of assessment tools. Where these elements converged, RDC competences were developed in greater depth and consistency. These patterns provide an understanding of the results observed in the project and offer keys to interpreting, in the following chapters, the lessons learned, the challenges encountered, and the recommendations that can be drawn for future educational interventions.

6. Lessons learned about the Living Lab process

The Living Lab approach is one of the most distinctive methodological elements of DEMOCRAT and played a central role in articulating the project between its conceptual framework and its practical implementation. Unlike the direct work in the pilot interventions, which was the responsibility of the national teams and individual schools and teachers, the Living Labs functioned as parallel spaces for dialogue, interpretation and reflection, where different educational actors could jointly explore the meaning of the RDC competence framework and its applicability in real contexts.

The Living Labs were conceived as a physical and virtual space for social innovation in education, that is, for the co-creation of the envisaged outcomes, such as the RDC Competence Framework, a prototype European Curriculum for EfD, and tools to assess RDC competences. They entail the creation and expansion of a community interested to participate in the development of envisaged solutions. The overarching goal is to improve EfD as a pivotal means for reinforcing European democracy, which is a major societal challenge currently in the EU.

The Living Labs are environments of mutual or collaborative learning between academics and practitioners, as well as among practitioners themselves. Collaborative learning is regarded as an essential element of policy development based on public participation. Therefore, DEMOCRAT conceives Living Labs as an iterative mutual learning process among different stakeholders in three dimensions:

I. Learning with practitioners and other stakeholders to resolve the problem of effective EfD and to enhance commitment to democracy in EU countries.
II. Learning from one's own experience with novel approaches to EfD in educational practice.
III. Learning from others' experience with novel approaches to EfD in educational practice.

From the innovation perspective, mutual learning for both designers and users can enable participants to envisage solutions for technological or social problems, which they can put into practice. It also enables those, who do not have the power or resources to directly engage in effective innovation processes to have a say in the formulation of those process. From the pragmatic perspective, the mutual learning process is expected to make novel solutions easier to adopt in practice. The DEMOCRAT project embraced this participatory approach creating a forum not only for the presentation of research results and their discussion with practitioners, but for providing a common space for reflection, sharing, consolidation and transfer of experiences on EfD. It is expected that this participatory approach will influence the practice of teachers and other educators, as well as other stakeholders with a view to improving the quality of EfD. Mutual learning is also a dialogue among researchers, teachers, other educators, parents, students, public authorities, policy makers and experts. The mutual learning workshops sought to combine social scientific conceptualisation, scientific observations, practical experience, and reflexive discussions about EfD with concrete solutions for improvement.

Analysis of the national reports shows that, although the intensity, composition and scope of the Living Labs varied significantly between countries, their contribution was consistently recognised by teachers and national teams. The Living Labs provided conceptual clarity, emotional support, professional legitimacy and inter-institutional connection; they acted as a bridge between theory and practice; and they facilitated collective reflection on the learning, challenges and possibilities of the RDC competence framework.

6.1. The role of Living Labs in adapting and validating the RDC competence framework

The Living Labs created in the six countries of the DEMOCRAT project functioned as spaces for meeting and dialogue, where teachers, education managers, researchers and social actors could jointly explore how to interpret the RDC competence framework and how to situate it within their education systems. Their function has been to create a preliminary and parallel environment for reflection, in which understandings were shared, materials were reviewed, and the conditions for applying the approach in schools were analysed.

Although their structure, frequency and depth varied considerably between countries, the analysis of *D5.2* reveals three common contributions.

1. Spaces for joint development and shared reflection on the vision of education for democracy, the RDC competence framework and the European Curriculum.

In all countries, the Living Labs provided a space where various educational stakeholders could jointly analyse the DEMOCRAT project proposals, modify and refine the proposals and the approach, and discuss how it could fit into existing practices. This was particularly important because the RDC competence framework introduces concepts that, although relevant, are not always explicitly integrated into national curricula. At the national level, the following stand out in the first phase of the Living Labs:

- In Finland, the Living Lab brought together representatives from schools, universities, social organisations and local authorities. This diversity allowed for discussion of the EfD vision and framework from complementary perspectives and its placement within the Finnish curriculum system. It also helped to situate them in an ecosystem already familiar with practices of participation and deliberation. The perceived usefulness lay in harmonising visions prior to implementation.
- In Ireland, sessions between teachers and university trainers facilitated an understanding of the framework from already established practices, such as narrative dialogue, dramatisation and working with dilemmas. The Living Lab helped to interpret democratic competences from the perspective of the country's curriculum and pedagogical approaches in the field of civic education, reducing the gap between theory and practice.
- In Poland, regular meetings allowed for a collective review of the language of the European vision of EfD, the framework and the draft European curriculum, and to discuss how it fits into the national curriculum. Joint reflection was particularly valued in order to avoid conceptual misunderstandings and ensure consistent interpretation across schools.
- In Estonia, the Living Lab workshops focused on co-creating the expected results through dialogue with key stakeholders and on creating a common understanding of EfD, the competence framework and the European curriculum in the context of the challenges facing the Estonian education system.
- In Germany, the Living Lab brought together teachers and social educators with cultural actors, allowing for discussion of the framework based on real experiences of diversity, coexistence and inclusion. This encouraged a situated reading of school democracy.
- In Spain, the Living Lab meetings provided an opportunity to reflect on the general meaning of the RDC competence framework, its fit within the new curriculum structure introduced by the 2022 education reform, especially in the Global Citizenship Curriculum, and its possible fit within the school culture of each school. Although the specific themes of the pilots were not worked on collectively, it did serve as a space for conceptual clarification prior to implementation.

- The first three workshops of the transnational Living Lab compared the experiences of educational communities in the six countries in order to develop a European framework that facilitates progress towards a flexible European model of EfD that can be adapted to different national contexts and at the same time serves to bring together EfD at the European level.

Overall, the Living Labs were valued as spaces where participants could contribute to the development of the competence framework and build a shared understanding of the approach, avoiding fragmented interpretations. Their greatest contribution in this regard was to provide a non-prescriptive environment for dialogue where teachers could familiarise themselves with the framework before putting it into practice.

The transnational Living Lab served to create a space for transnational dialogue on competences for responsible and democratic citizenship and to advance a European framework of competences.

2. General review and initial adjustments to materials

The Living Labs also played an important role as spaces for reviewing materials, resolving doubts and identifying foreseeable difficulties prior to implementation. Although these adjustments did not involve major changes, they did contribute to improving the comprehensibility and usability of the approach and its tools. At the national level, the following stands out:

- In Estonia, practical difficulties were identified with the original tool, leading to its simplification and adaptation to more manageable digital formats. The Living Lab acted as a space to recognise these initial adjustment needs.
- In Poland, participants compared the international materials with the Polish curriculum, identifying necessary terminological adjustments and clarifications. This strengthened the consistency between the RDC competence framework and the national educational structure.
- In Finland, the Living Lab allowed for the collection of observations on the understanding of competences at different educational levels, which helped to clarify expectations and better prepare teachers.
- Ireland, Germany and Spain. In these countries, the Living Labs functioned primarily as spaces to resolve conceptual questions, exchange first impressions and prepare teachers for the use of the tools without making formal adjustments to their structure.

Although the depth of the adjustments varied, the Living Labs facilitated a process of shared preliminary review, reducing uncertainties and helping participants enter the pilot with a clearer understanding of the materials.

3. Horizontal validation through the exchange of experiences

Throughout the second phase of the Living Labs, when the competence framework, the European curriculum and the assessment tools were tested, they provided spaces for sharing experiences, comparing interpretations and analysing common difficulties. This process made it possible to validate that the RDC competence framework was applicable in real contexts, without replacing the assessment systems envisaged in the project. At the national level, the following stands out:

- In Estonia, teachers presented the Living Lab with difficulties and lessons learned from using the tools, which allowed for nuanced interpretations and reinforced collective understanding.
- In Poland, each phase of the pilot was returned to the Living Lab to discuss unclear interpretations and ensure consistent readings of the approach. This feedback was perceived as particularly valuable.

- In Germany, the Living Lab allowed for the comparison of experiences from schools with diverse socio-cultural realities, enriching the understanding of competences such as democratic resilience and deliberation.
- In Spain, discussions focused on overall perceptions of implementation, internal organisation and connection with school projects, rather than on specific topics. Teachers valued being able to share difficulties and progress in a trusting environment.
- Finland and Ireland. The exchange made it possible to validate the applicability of the framework based on their own pedagogical approaches—such as narrative, dialogue, and multimodal analysis—and to compare results across educational levels.

The Living Lab acted as a space for practical validation, allowing the RDC competence framework to be confronted with the reality of the classroom. Its contribution was to generate a more nuanced and situated understanding of the approach, based on diverse experiences.

6.2. Methodological contributions of the Living Labs

The Living Labs not only provided a meeting place for educational actors, but also contributed working methodologies that were key to understanding and implementing the DEMOCRAT approach. Although their scale and intensity varied between countries, the *D5.2* national reports identify a set of methodological contributions that reinforced the quality of the process and facilitated the adaptation of the framework to diverse contexts. These contributions were organised around four dimensions: structured collaboration, iterative learning, shared professional reflection and articulation with local ecosystems. These are presented below.

1. Structured collaboration between multiple educational actors

One of the main methodological contributions of the Living Lab was to promote structured forms of collaboration between actors who do not normally work together in democratic education. The national reports show that the Living Lab strengthened:

a) Relationships between different educational levels and institutional actors. In Finland, the Living Labs articulated networks between schools, universities, municipalities and NGOs, which allowed for discussion of the RDC competence framework from complementary perspectives and strengthened the coherence of the educational ecosystem. In Ireland and Spain, the sessions connected teachers with university trainers, facilitating a deeper pedagogical perspective and building bridges between classroom practice and initial teacher training.

b) Interdisciplinary spaces for discussing experiences and approaches. In Germany, the Living Lab brought together teachers, social educators and cultural actors, generating comparative frameworks for thinking about democracy from perspectives of diversity, coexistence and inclusion. In Poland, regular collaboration between teachers, researchers and educational actors facilitated the joint review of materials and a shared interpretation of the framework.

c) Teacher support networks with temporal continuity. In almost all countries, the Living Lab served to reduce the isolation of teachers working on citizenship issues, allowing them to share doubts, challenges and strategies in a safe professional space.

In general, structured collaboration ensured that the discussion on EfD was not limited to a technical team or a specific school but became an inter-institutional and pluralistic process. Although with varying degrees of

intensity, the countries demonstrated that Living Labs can act as expanded spaces for educational governance, where visions are aligned, trajectories are compared and minimum consensus is generated on the pedagogical meaning of the RDC competence framework.

However, it was observed that the participation of different types of stakeholders in the events varied according to their thematic focus. In the first phase of conceptual development, different types of stakeholders were present, while in the second phase of pilot testing, the presence of public authorities and experts, for example from NGOs or research institutes, was considerably reduced. It is expected that in the third phase of reflection, the presence of public authorities and experts will increase again.

2. Iterative learning and progressive development of ideas

Living Labs fostered iterative learning dynamics that allowed expectations to be adjusted, materials to be reviewed and understandings to be compared before and during the implementation of the pilots:

a) Preliminary review of materials. In Estonia and Poland, the Living Lab made it possible to identify practical difficulties with the original tool and make basic adjustments—simplification, clarification of terminology, or digital adaptation—to ensure its usability.

b) Identification of training needs, not redesign. In Finland and Ireland, teachers used the Living Lab to express doubts about how to work on certain competences, especially critical judgement and deliberation. This served to adjust guidelines and better prepare for classroom application.

c) Progressive integration of learning during the pilot. In some countries (Estonia, Poland), feedback from the Living Lab allowed for more nuanced interpretations of the framework, although without modifying the design of the pilots.

The methodological value of iterative learning does not lie in structural modifications, but in the fact that it allowed a reflective culture to be built around the application of the RDC competence framework. DEMOCRAT, as a project, benefited from a mechanism that avoided rigid interpretations and allowed educational communities to engage with the framework through trial and reflection, rather than technical prescription.

3. Professional reflection and construction of pedagogical meaning

A particularly relevant contribution of the Living Labs was to provide a space where teachers could reflect on their practice and construct pedagogical meaning around democratic education. This process is documented in all countries:

a) Safe spaces for sharing professional concerns. In Germany, this space helped to address experiences related to cultural diversity and discrimination. In Spain, teachers from schools with very different profiles were able to exchange perceptions about the use of the RDC competence framework and the feasibility of introducing democratic practices in their school contexts.

b) Development of a culture of professional dialogue. The Living Labs fostered an inter-school and inter-institutional conversation on: what it means to promote school participation; how to facilitate dialogue with guarantees; what pedagogical approaches support critical thinking; how to interpret evidence of democratic learning. This methodological dimension does not appear in previous chapters of the report and constitutes a contribution specific to the Living Lab.

c) Articulation of common problems and shared analysis of challenges. Although each pilot was different, the Living Lab allowed for the "pooling" of common difficulties: teaching load; variability between groups; emotional challenges; understanding of the tool. This analysis did not translate into

immediate solutions, but it did produce cumulative collective learning, which strengthened the professional culture around the project.

This component of professional reflection turned the Living Labs into communities of practice, albeit with varying degrees of formalisation. At the project level, this dimension reinforced the pedagogical meaning of the RDC competence framework and allowed democratic learning to be understood as a collective, rather than an individual, task.

4. Connection with local ecosystems and extended educational networks

Finally, the Living Lab provided a methodological dimension linked to the opening up of the project to its educational and social environment.

a) Integration with broader educational structures. In Finland, the Living Lab connected with existing civic and participatory education networks, reinforcing its impact. In Ireland, it acted as a bridge between schools and the university, providing a research perspective that enriched the pedagogical analysis.

b) Circulation of knowledge between schools and external actors. In several countries, the Living Lab facilitated meetings where: teachers shared resources; researchers provided comparative analyses; external educational actors offered additional perspectives.

c) Consolidation of professional networks beyond the project. In Poland, Finland and Estonia, the Living Lab has left behind active networks that continue to collaborate. In Germany and Spain, teachers have expressed interest in maintaining these dynamics beyond the DEMOCRAT framework.

This openness meant that the project was not limited to the pilots but contributed to strengthening educational communities involved in democratic education.

This openness reflects the Living Lab approach's ability to project innovation beyond the pilots and link it to broader educational ecosystems. As a method, it allows democratic education to go beyond a specific project and become part of institutional, academic and community networks with the potential for continuity.

6.3. Assessment of the Living Lab process

The evaluation of the Living Lab process within DEMOCRAT is based on the reflections and perceptions recorded in the national reports. These sources document the experiences of teachers, national teams and other participants of the Living Lab approach as a space for professional development, collaboration and support during the pilot implementation. The following section summarises these accounts to identify the most consistent strengths, contributions and limitations of the Living Lab approach across countries.

The national reports include numerous references to how teachers, national teams and other participants assessed the Living Lab approach during the DEMOCRAT project. Although the experience varied from country to country, the collection of voices gathered allows us to draw up a solid internal assessment of the real usefulness of the Living Lab, its contributions and its limitations. The most notable aspects are:

1. Perceived usefulness: a necessary space for understanding and 'owning' the RDC competence framework

In all countries, participants rated the Living Lab positively as a preliminary space for shared understanding of the RDC competence framework.

This assessment is documented in the six national reports, albeit with some nuances:

- In Finland, teachers and trainers highlighted that the Living Lab was key to "grounding" the RDC competence framework in the existing educational ecosystem and understanding how to articulate it with already established practices in citizenship and dialogue.
- In Poland, its role as a stable forum for "clarifying conceptual doubts", "sharing interpretations" and "connecting the framework with the national curriculum" was valued.
- In Ireland, teachers emphasised that the Living Lab helped to translate the framework into narrative and dialogic practices specific to the system, reducing the gap between theory and practice.
- In Estonia, it was appreciated as a space that helped to interpret the framework from a national media literacy perspective.
- In Germany, its contribution to addressing democratic education from an intercultural perspective was valued.
- In Spain, participants noted that the Living Lab helped to "understand the fundamentals of the framework" and to "situate it within the real dynamics of the school".

The national teams agree that the Living Lab provided pedagogical meaning, allowing schools to understand the framework beyond its technical formulation. Teachers particularly valued its role as a safe space to ask questions, explore ideas and build a shared understanding before facing the challenge of implementation.

2. Recognition of the Living Lab as a valuable professional space, but uneven in intensity

An important part of the internal assessment refers to the variability of the Living Lab:

- In Finland and Poland, where the Living Lab had greater continuity, teachers described it as a "stable space", "useful throughout the project" and "generating a professional community".
- In Ireland and Germany, its usefulness was recognised, but it was perceived as "intermittent" and linked to specific phases.
- In Estonia and Spain, participants rated the meetings positively, but pointed out that the Living Lab could have been more frequent or structured.

The Living Lab is highly useful even in reduced formats, provided there is a minimum of structure and continuity. However, the national teams agree that its potential is greater when it is sustained over time and when it brings together diverse actors.

3. The Living Lab as a space for emotional support and professional legitimisation

Several national reports emphasise that teachers valued the Living Lab not only as a technical tool, but also as a space for emotional support, which was particularly relevant in interventions addressing:

- sensitive issues (Germany, Spain),
- complex coexistence dynamics (Spain, Poland),
- discussions about disinformation (Estonia),
- ethical or narrative dilemmas (Ireland).

In different formulations, the reports include phrases such as:

- "I did not feel alone in the process."
- "Knowing that others were experiencing similar challenges was a relief."
- “It helped us validate that what we were doing made sense.”
- "It gave us the confidence to move forward."

This recognition is significant: the Living Lab was valued as a space for professional legitimisation, where teachers could share concerns and feel supported. This type of assessment does not usually appear in more traditional educational interventions and is a distinctive contribution of the approach.

4. Perception of the Living Lab as a bridge between theory and practice

Teachers appreciated that the Living Lab allowed them to:

- better understand the framework,
- translate it into real situations,
- compare interpretations with other professionals,
- and avoid overly literal or rigid interpretations.

In Ireland, for example, teachers mentioned that the Living Lab helped to "open up the framework", showing its flexibility to accommodate varied pedagogical approaches. In Poland, the possibility of discussing how to apply the framework without imposing uniform models was appreciated. In Germany, it was noted that the Living Lab helped to interpret democratic resilience from real multicultural experiences.

The Living Lab was perceived as a pedagogical translator: it did not apply the framework, but helped to make it understandable, reasonable and viable for each context.

5. Limitations identified by national teams and teachers

Although the overall assessment is positive, the reports contain criticisms and limitations that should be considered:

a) Variability in participation. In several countries (Spain, Ireland, Germany), participation fluctuated according to teacher availability, generating irregular dynamics. This fluctuation also occurred according to the type of actors. Thus, public authorities and NGOs participated at the beginning, but then - when the pilot testing phase began - their participation decreased significantly. It is expected that their participation will increase again in the final phase of presentation of results and reflection.

b) Lack of structured time. National teams mention that institutionally protected time would have been necessary to ensure greater continuity.

c) Uneven scope. Some Living Labs were broad and multi-sectoral (Finland, Poland), while others focused almost exclusively on teachers (Spain, Estonia), which limited the diversity of perspectives.

d) Poorly defined role at the outset. In some countries, the Living Lab began as an informational space and evolved into a reflective one; this transition was not always clear to participants.

The limitations identified do not point to the ineffectiveness of the approach, but rather to the need for clearer structures, protected time and a more diverse composition to maximise its potential.

6.4. Methodological lessons on stakeholder involvement

To conclude this chapter, we provide conceptual reflections on the use of Living Labs, particularly in the field of democratic education. First, it should be noted that Living Labs are not usually democratic events in the sense that all participants have equal opportunities to control the processes or influence their outcomes.

In the case of the DEMOCRAT project, this is due to the fact that it is a publicly funded project whose objectives and results are contractually regulated by the European Commission. This means that the applicant organisation or organisations are responsible for the course of the project and thus also for the Living Labs.

The participating organisations have a strategic research interest in the project, but it can only be carried out with European funding. This raises the central question of why other organisations or individuals should participate in the Living Lab and how to select participants for the Living Lab activities.

The debate on Living Labs methodology is still fragmented, but the acknowledges essence of Living Labs is the participation of stakeholders active in the field or affected by the challenge treated by the Living Lab. Particularly for social innovation processes, it is of paramount importance to have at the beginning of the Living Lab process, a clear understanding of the social problem to be resolved. This should be conducted with the stakeholders and potential users. However, this implies that one has to have a clear understanding who are the stakeholders and the potential users are and what are their interests.

For instance, in the development of tools for the EfD, there are a wide range of stakeholders such as teachers, head of schools, parents and their associations, public bodies competent in education, political parties and providers of didactical tools. Each of them possesses a distinct set of interests and understandings of what EfD means. Additionally, the stakeholders dispose different power resources to influence in the innovation process. This must be considered when establishing the Living Labs and the activities associated with each stage of the innovation process. Technology studies show also that different types of stakeholders intervene in different phases of the process. In that sense, a fluctuation of actors in the Living Lab activities should be expected.

The DEMOCRAT project clearly distinguished between three phases of work:

a) the conceptual phase, in which DEMOCRAT's approach of EfD and the methodologies for strengthening it were developed cooperatively;
b) the testing phase, in which the DEMOCRAT approach was tested, evaluated and further developed through pilot interventions in schools; and
c) the reflection phase, in which the results of the pilot interventions were used to revise and refine the tools.

The experience of the Living Labs indicates that different actors participate in the Living Lab activities depending on the phase. In the conceptual phase, representatives of public administration, education experts and NGOs participated. However, during the testing phase, participation in activities was generally limited to teachers. Teachers involved in the pilot interventions participated, as did teachers interested in EfD. In the final reflection phase, representatives of the public administration and education experts participated in the activities once again. In the final reflection phase, representatives of public administration and education experts are once again participating in the activities.

In an ideal scenario, the organisers of the Living Labs should carefully select the participating stakeholders. The literature provides low indication how to stakeholders are identified to participate in a Living Lab (see Mbatha & Musango, 2022[18]). As the experience of DEMOCRAT indicates, in practice, there are often limitations to cooperation e.g. to dispose of limited time or other resources which conditioned the willingness of the stakeholder to participate voluntarily in activities with an open end. This, in turns, limits the ability of the Living Labs to select the participants. This gap can be addressed by other research methods, particularly desk research, expert interviews, or surveys, which requires social science know-how. These are means to obtain

[18] Mbatha, S.P. & Musango, J.K. (2022) A Systematic Review on the Application of the Living Lab Concept and Role of Stakeholders in the Energy Sector. Sustainability 2022, 14, 14009. https://doi.org/10.3390/ su142114009

information from different sources, but they cannot substitute the co-creation and mutual learning processes of workshops or other social events.

Living Labs typically function as multi-stakeholder collaborations between industry, governments, and universities (called triple helix) and sometimes include citizens (quadruple helix) on a local or regional level. They employ co-creation as well as real-life experimentation and prototyping as their primary methods. Living Labs strive to make an impact by embedding their results in existing contexts, translating their method of learning to other contexts or scaling up and influencing policy and regulations (Van Wirth et al., 2019[19]).

It is supposed that the stakeholders in the triple or quadruple helix constellations have an intrinsic motivation to participate in the helix activities. Industry has economic interest to achieve market ready innovations, the governments have regulatory but also economic interest in promoting innovation and the university have research, but also economic interest funding their research. It is also supposed that users have an intrinsic interest in improving products and services, they use, or they are incentivised for their participation.

In the field of EfD, the motivation to participate in Living Labs cannot be linked clearly to the obtainment of economic benefits. It is supposed that some stakeholders have an intrinsic motivation on innovation in EfD. However, this assumption proves to be insufficient as the example of the research staff of the consortium partners shows. They have an intrinsic motivation as their participation in the development of the research proposal indicate clearly, but they only participate in the project because it as been obtained public funding from the European Commission. Without this funding, they probably would not form part of the Living Labs on a regular basis. Other education experts interested in the topic also take part in the Living Lab activities, but only sporadically. As they are professional in the field of education research, they have on one side, other obligations, but they are also interested in obtaining economic compensation for their participation on a regular basis.

Teachers, especially those working in the field of democratic education, are assumed to have an intrinsic interest in improving their teaching practice. However, studies suggest that teachers are most likely to devote time to improving their teaching practice when they are confronted with problems in the classroom or at school. Teachers also have limited time resources, which they must plan accordingly. Participation in Living Lab activities is linked to the expected and perceived support to improve their professional practices. This circumstance reduces the number of potential candidates.

Similarly, it is assumed that they public administration and political authorities should be interested in strengthening democracy and thus also EfD. However, this does not correspond to reality. Despite the public commitment to democracy education, it is not at the top of the political education agenda. The focus there is on developing competences that are supposedly relevant to the labour market and economic policy. This is evident in the priority given to mathematics, science and technology education, to the detriment of arts, social science and humanities. Nevertheless, national Living Labs and the transnational Living Lab show that public administration has been involved in Living Lab activities at least in the conceptual phase. However, the focus is on how new approaches fit into the existing curriculum structure. Whether these new approaches will also

[19] Van Wirth, T., Fuenfschilling, L., Frantzeskaki, N. & Coenen, L. (2019). Impacts of urban living labs on sustainability transitions: mechanisms and strategies for systemic change through experimentation. European Planning Studies. 27(2): 229-257.

be incorporated into the development of new curricula is another question that cannot be addressed in a three-year Living Lab, as these are usually medium- and long-term political processes.

Another target group is the parents or guardians of the students, who in EU countries usually also have a say in school administration. The most appropriate wat to enable their participation in Living Lab activities is by parent representative bodies at both school and supra-school level. But this target group was not widely integrated in the Living Lab activities. In some countries, parent representatives have only participated sporadically in the Living Lab activities. Among other factors, this is also due to the fact that parents were not fully involved in most of the Local pilot interventions.

Finally, mention should be made of the group of students who only had their say in the DEMOCRATs Living Lab activities at two international meetings – a workshop and the final conference. There are organisational reasons for this, as the participation of students under the age of 16 requires the consent of their parents or legal guardians. Nevertheless, it is a shortcoming in relation to the original aim of the project that greater participation by students and parents was not encouraged. Similar to the parents, one of the factors was that students had rarely a voice in the design of the local pilot interventions.

This points to the organisational problem of finding participants for Living Labs and keeping them involved. Added to this is the problem of scheduling activities to ensure the largest possible number of participants, e.g. at working meetings. Collective events are indispensable for mutual learning processes. However, this short discussion about selection of participants indicates that this is the wrong question. The Living Lab managers do not select participants, they contact a wide range of stakeholder trying to attract sufficient numbers to the activities, especially the collective events, and to assure there is more or less regular participation. The Living Lab managers need to accept the fluctuation of participants in relation to the thematic focus of the event. What is highly important is to assure that the participants can contribute to the development of the envisaged project outcomes, test them and refine them. In any case, the Living Lab process is a tool to get as much participation of relevant education stakeholders, so that the interventions developed and implemented have the broadest possible buy-in and thus legitimacy within the broader educational community. What ultimately can make a difference, though, in the development of RDC competences among the students is the choice of the right pedagogy/ies and the best possible implementation in the context of each country, region and school, while sticking to the pan-European principles on which EfD is based and respecting the respective roles, rights and aspirations of students and teachers alike. In the final chapter that follows we will focus on the conditions for successful implementation and replicability of the DEMOCRAT approach.

7. External Evaluation of the DEMOCRAT implementation

The comparative analysis presented in the previous chapters examined the design, implementation and outcomes of the DEMOCRAT pilot interventions and Living Lab processes, focusing primarily on the perspectives of the national teams and participating stakeholders. While these internal accounts provide valuable insights into contextual dynamics, pedagogical decisions and learning processes, it would be beneficial to complement them with an independent external perspective.

This chapter summarises the results of the external evaluation conducted within the DEMOCRAT project, combining the assessment of local pilot interventions and Living Lab processes through a unified analytical framework. The purpose of this chapter is not to replicate or replace the internal evaluations, but rather to contrast with, validate and enrich them using evidence gathered by partners who were not directly involved in implementing the activities.

Situating the external evaluation at this stage of the report offers a cross-country analysis that connects pedagogical practices, institutional conditions, and stakeholder perceptions. This strengthens the robustness of the comparative findings overall and provides additional evidence to inform conclusions about the effectiveness, transferability and sustainability of the DEMOCRAT approach.

7.1. Purpose and scope of the external evaluation

The external evaluation of the DEMOCRAT project aimed to provide an independent and critical perspective on the implementation of the pilot interventions and Living Lab processes. Unlike the internal assessments conducted by national teams, which were based on their direct involvement in designing and implementing activities, the external evaluation aimed to validate the DEMOCRAT approach from the standpoint of individuals not involved in its operational delivery.

The main purpose of this external evaluation was threefold. Firstly, it aimed to evaluate how closely the pilot interventions and Living Labs aligned with the core principles of the DEMOCRAT framework, particularly with regard to participatory pedagogy, the development of Responsible Democratic Citizenship (RDC) competences, and the use of co-creation methodologies. Secondly, it aimed to capture the perceptions of various stakeholders, including students, teachers, families, and external partners, regarding the relevance, quality, and perceived impact of the interventions. Thirdly, it aimed to identify cross-cutting strengths and limitations, as well as the conditions that influence the transferability and sustainability of the DEMOCRAT approach in different educational contexts.

Situating the external evaluation as a transversal analytical layer complements the internal assessments presented in previous chapters, thereby reinforcing the robustness and credibility of the comparative findings.

7.2. Methodological approach of the external evaluation

The external evaluation comprised two distinct yet complementary exercises, each of which addressed a different level of implementation within the DEMOCRAT project. Both were designed to provide an independent perspective on the project, but differed in terms of scope, focus and methodological design.

The first evaluation focused on a sample of local pilot interventions, examining classroom-level practices, participatory dynamics, and perceived learning outcomes. The second evaluation focused on Living Lab processes, exploring their role in supporting the implementation, adaptation and sustainability of the

DEMOCRAT framework as collaborative and co-creative infrastructures. The following sections describe the methodological approach adopted in each exercise.

7.2.1. External evaluation of local pilot interventions

The external evaluation of the pilots focused on a sample of local interventions and was conducted by the International Parents Alliance (IPA), a DEMOCRAT partner that was not involved in designing or implementing the national pilot interventions. This ensured analytical distance from the interventions under evaluation, contributing to the independence of the assessment.

The evaluation was based on a stratified random sampling strategy designed to reflect the diversity of the DEMOCRAT project in terms of countries, educational levels, methodological approaches, and institutional contexts. The final sample comprised fifteen pilot interventions implemented in five countries: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Poland and Spain. Due to ethical and procedural constraints relating to informed consent and access to participants, pilot interventions from Ireland could not be included in this phase of the evaluation.

site_id	site_name	country	methodology
36	EEint37	Estonia	Simulation, Project-Based
37	EEint38	Estonia	Simulations & Role-playing
38	EEint39	Estonia	Simulations & Role-playing, as well as PBL
33	FIint33	Finland	Experiential learning
35	FIint35	Finland	Experiential learning; Community-Based; Project-Based
27	DEint27	Germany	Simulations & Role-playing
30	DEint30	Germany	Community-Based
21	PLint21	Poland	Project-Based
22	PLint22	Poland	Community-Based
23	PLint23	Poland	Project-Based
24	PLint24	Poland	Project-Based
25	PLint25	Poland	Project-Based
11	ESint11	Spain	Community-Based
13	ESint13	Spain	Case Study
14	ESint14	Spain	Simulations & Role-playing
9	ESint9	Spain	Project-Based

Table 13. Randomised sample

Source: DEMOCRAT Toolbox database[20]

Within each selected pilot intervention, semi-structured interviews were conducted with various stakeholders to capture different perspectives on the same educational experience. The interviewees were:

[20] The toolbox is still in development, but will be son available at DEMOCRAT's Agora https://agora.democrat-horizon.eu/

- students participating in the intervention;
- teachers responsible for its implementation;
- family members, where applicable;
- representatives of external organisations or community partners.

The interviews followed a shared interview guide aimed at exploring the following key analytical dimensions:

- The relevance of the intervention to the local context
- The degree and quality of student participation
- The perceived development of RDC competences
- The coherence between objectives, methodology and activities
- The perceived potential for continuity and transferability beyond the project framework.

The interview data were complemented by a documentary analysis of pilot descriptions and supporting materials provided in the national reports.

This evaluation did not aim to establish causal relationships or statistically generalisable results. Rather, it provides an analytically grounded external perspective that complements the internal assessments carried out by national teams and supports comparative interpretation.

7.2.2. External evaluation of the Living Lab processes

The external evaluation, which focused on the Living Labs processes, was carried out by FOGGS and NOTUS — two DEMOCRAT partners that were not involved in implementing the national Living Labs or pilot interventions in the countries they evaluated respectively. This evaluation aimed to assess Living Labs as collaborative and co-creative infrastructures supporting EfD. Particular attention was paid to how the Living Labs function, their relationship with the implementation of the pilots, their perceived added value and their prospects for sustainability in different national contexts.

Unlike the evaluation of local pilot interventions, this exercise did not seek to evaluate a predefined sample of cases; rather, it aimed to gather informed opinions from key stakeholders with direct experience of Living Labs processes in each of the participating countries. The evaluation therefore relied on semi-structured interviews with a purposive selection of participants from each country, including teachers, trained facilitators, educational institution representatives, civil society actors and other relevant stakeholders involved in or closely associated with Living Labs activities. Fourteen interviews were conducted in total across the six participating countries, with FOGGS and NOTUS each covering three countries.

In each country, the national teams supported the identification of potential interviewees by proposing profiles of stakeholders with knowledge of the Living Labs processes and facilitating initial contact. The design of the interview protocol, though, the conduct of the interviews and the analytical interpretation of the data were carried out independently by the external evaluators.

The interview guide was structured around a set of basic analytical dimensions, covering the following topics:

- Participants' overall experience of the Living Lab
- Participants' assessment of the Living Lab as an approach to improving democracy education in the local context
- Perceived strengths and limitations of the process
- Roles and forms of participation of different stakeholders
- Quality of cooperation and interaction between actors

- Relationship between Living Labs and implementation of local pilot interventions
- Expectations regarding continuity and sustainability beyond the duration of the DEMOCRAT project

The interview data were supplemented by a documentary analysis of pilot descriptions and supporting materials provided in the national reports.

Rather than attempting to measure results in a standardised way, the evaluation aimed to capture the participants' reflective assessments and empirical knowledge of the Living Lab processes.

This external evaluation provides an independent perspective on the role of Living Labs as facilitating structures within the DEMOCRAT approach. It complements the internal evaluations reviewed in Chapter 6.

7.3. External evaluation of local pilot interventions

This section presents the main findings of the external evaluation of a representative sample of pilot interventions, as described in Section 7.2.1. The evaluation shows significant heterogeneity in the way the pilots adopted the DEMOCRAT approach, as well as in the clarity with which the RDC competences were addressed.

1. Relevance and suitability to the context

In several schools, the pilots were perceived as highly relevant to addressing contemporary challenges, especially disinformation, intercultural dialogue and digital literacy. Teachers and students highlighted that the project allowed them to "finally talk about real problems" or critically question online information, thus strengthening critical judgement and democratic resilience.

However, this impact was not uniform. In some cases, the activities carried out were not clearly related to the DEMOCRAT framework: they were previously existing programmes that had been relabelled or initiatives that did not incorporate meaningful student participation. In these contexts, the perception of relevance was lower and no consistent development of competences was identified.

2. Methodological design and fidelity to the participatory approach

The pilots that followed the methodological guidelines most closely—especially participatory planning, stakeholder analysis, and the dialogic approach—achieved:

- greater student involvement in decision-making,
- more open classroom dynamics,
- better quality of debate and collective work.

In contrast, in schools where teachers were unaware of the existence of the guide or did not feel capable of applying participatory methodologies, the design tended to be more transmissive and the intervention was reduced to specific activities without methodological coherence. In some cases, teachers admitted to having planned activities unilaterally, without opportunities for co-design with students.

3. Development of democratic competence

In the pilot programmes implemented with greater pedagogical coherence, progress was observed in:

- critical thinking and assessment of the credibility of sources,
- argumentation and active listening,

- solidarity-based participation,
- self-confidence in expressing opinions,
- the ability to manage sensitive conversations.

Several teachers also reported changes in their own role, moving from leadership models to facilitation functions, recognising that "it is not necessary to have all the answers" to accompany democratic learning processes.

However, where the pilot did not apply participatory structures or did not start from the RDC competence framework, it was not possible to identify evidence of improved competences: neither the teachers could describe what competences were being worked on, nor did the students recognise changes in their ways of participating or deliberating.

4. Stakeholder participation and communication

Student participation was high in contexts where the pilot was designed with them, but limited where their role was merely receptive.

The role of families emerged as a cross-cutting weakness: most reported receiving little information and having little or no participation. The evaluation considers that this absence reduces the community coherence of the project and weakens the principle of educational co-responsibility.

External entities—NGOs, local associations, or cultural institutions—added value when they were integrated into co-design processes, but this collaboration was uneven across countries and schools.

5. Structural conditions and barriers

The main difficulties identified include:

- lack of time to sustain dialogue and participatory processes,
- insufficient preparation of teachers to apply co-creative methodologies,
- low adherence to the Teachers' Guide in some pilot interventions,
- a weak participatory culture in certain schools, which limited opportunities for student agency,
- lack of internal coordination, which hindered the mobilisation of key actors, such as families or external agents.

Despite this, the evaluation recognises the potential for scalability of the DEMOCRAT approach, provided that support conditions, teacher training and procedural clarity are reinforced.

The external evaluation confirms and refines the patterns identified in the comparative analysis in this chapter. In particular:

- The quality of participatory design is the most decisive factor for the development of RDC competences.
- Meaningful curriculum integration is associated with better opportunities for democratic learning.
- Critical media literacy emerges as an urgent need in all contexts.
- School culture strongly influences the degree of student agency and the viability of the approach.

Synthesis of external local pilot interventions

Overall, the external evaluation confirms and refines the patterns identified in the broader comparative analysis. In particular, it highlights that the quality of participatory design is the most decisive factor for developing RDC competences; that meaningful curricular integration enhances opportunities for democratic learning; that critical media literacy represents an urgent need across all contexts; and that school culture plays a central role in shaping student agency and the viability of the approach.

In summary, the external evaluation points to a mixed picture: some very strong local pilot interventions coexisted with others that failed to fully embrace the DEMOCRAT approach. This contrast reinforces the importance of sustained teacher training, methodological clarity, family involvement and constant support from national teams.

7.4. External evaluation of the Living Lab processes

This section presents the key findings of the external evaluation of the Living Lab processes. These findings are based on semi-structured interviews and written contributions from key stakeholders involved in the Living Labs in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain. From an external perspective, the Living Labs are widely recognised as a core component of enabling the DEMOCRAT approach, providing spaces for dialogue, experimentation and collaboration that extend beyond the implementation of individual pilot interventions.

1. The Living Lab as a space for collaboration and professional exchange

Stakeholders from all countries emphasised the importance of the Living Labs as secure, open and dynamic environments for educators, civil society representatives, researchers and, in some instances, public officials to exchange ideas. The Living Labs facilitate encounters between individuals who would not typically interact directly within formal education systems, thereby fostering mutual understanding and shared reflection on EfD.

In Spain and Poland, interviewees emphasised the role of the Living Labs in strengthening professional and stakeholder networks and enabling collaboration beyond institutional boundaries. In some cases, this has triggered new initiatives and pilot interventions directly linked to the Living Lab process. In Estonia, the Living Lab was valued for connecting schools, NGOs and public authorities, as well as for aligning innovative pedagogical practices with national curricular priorities.

Evidence from Ireland and Finland corroborates these findings, emphasising the Living Lab's role as a trusted space for dialogue spanning professional roles and educational levels, including initial teacher education, school leadership, and in-service training. The diversity of participants was repeatedly identified as a key asset, enabling democratic education to be discussed across subjects, sectors and institutional cultures. In Germany, Living Labs also connected schools, civil society actors and the national project team, supporting cooperation across traditionally separate domains.

2. Contribution to pedagogical innovation and adaptation of the DEMOCRAT framework

The external evaluation confirmed that Living Labs had played a significant role in supporting the contextual adaptation and pedagogical implementation of the DEMOCRAT framework. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of co-creation processes in translating abstract democratic competences into meaningful practices within local educational cultures, as well as in assessing EfD-related pedagogical outcomes through context-adapted tools.

The RDC competence framework was perceived as a useful reference for structuring reflection on democratic learning across the six countries, particularly when aligned with existing national or European frameworks. In Ireland and Finland, the framework's clarity and flexibility were emphasised as enabling its integration into existing curricula and teacher education programmes without being perceived as an external or over-prescriptive addition.

Living Labs supported experimentation with participatory methodologies, project-based learning, dialogue-based practices, and experiential approaches. This contributed to a shift from transmissive models towards student-centred, action-oriented forms of EfD. In Germany, theatre-based, role-play and peer-to-peer formats were highlighted in particular for their ability to make democratic processes tangible and engaging, especially for younger learners.

The importance of peer-generated practices emerged as a recurrent theme across contexts. Teachers and educators consistently reported greater trust in examples and experiences shared by their peers than in top-down guidance, which reinforced the relevance of the Living Lab approach as a bottom-up innovation space.

3. Support to pilot implementation and stakeholder engagement

From an external perspective, Living Labs contributed to the strengthening of pilot implementation by providing methodological guidance and opportunities for reflection and collective problem solving. In Estonia, Poland and Spain, for example, stakeholders noted that Living Labs helped maintain momentum during implementation and legitimised innovative practices within schools.

In Finland and Ireland, Living Labs indirectly supported pilots by facilitating the transfer of ideas, tools, and pedagogical principles into teacher education and professional training contexts. This extended the influence of the pilots beyond their immediate settings. In Germany, Living Lab activities facilitated collaboration between schools and external partners, as well as the delivery of experiential pilot activities, even in contexts where co-design at school level was uneven or still emerging.

At the same time, the evaluation revealed uneven levels of stakeholder engagement. While collaboration with civil society organisations, higher education institutions and local authorities added clear value where it was established effectively, the involvement of families and wider communities remained limited across most contexts. This limited the scope and consistency of EfD initiatives, as well as their potential to transform school–community relations.

4. Structural constraints and sustainability challenges

Despite their recognised value, Living Labs also face significant structural challenges. Stakeholders across all countries pointed to constraints related to time, workload and institutional conditions. Teachers' professional obligations limited their ability to participate over the long term, particularly when Living Lab activities required engagement outside of regular working hours.

In all national contexts stakeholders noted that, although Living Labs were effective in enabling experimentation, their reliance on individual commitment and project-based resources raised concerns about long-term sustainability. The evaluation also highlighted the risk of overburdening project teams, who often had to fulfil multiple roles, such as researcher, facilitator, coordinator and community builder.

A recurring concern relates to the institutional anchoring of Living Labs. While many pilot activities were expected to continue locally, stakeholders expressed uncertainty about the continuation of Living Lab structures in the absence of stable recognition, funding and coordination mechanisms. In Germany and Spain

in particular, doubts were raised about public administrations' willingness to allocate sustained resources to such collaborative formats.

Synthesis of external perspectives on Living Labs

Overall, the external evaluation confirms that Living Labs function as infrastructures for pedagogical innovation, professional learning, and cross-sectoral collaboration. They facilitate the contextualisation and adoption of democratic competences in various educational settings and institutional environments.

However, the evaluation also highlights that Living Labs are not self-sustaining mechanisms. Their effectiveness hinges on supportive institutional environments, adequate resourcing, leadership commitment, and recognition of the work of educators and facilitators. These findings emphasise the importance of integrating Living Labs into wider educational strategies and governance frameworks to ensure the long-term and scalable impact of the DEMOCRAT approach.

7.5. Cross-cutting findings from the external perspective

Several cross-cutting patterns emerge when the findings from the external evaluation of local pilot interventions and Living Lab processes are brought together. These patterns provide a consolidated external perspective on the DEMOCRAT approach. These findings not only highlight what worked across contexts, but also the conditions under which democratic learning processes were most effectively activated and sustained.

Participatory design emerges as a decisive factor.

Across both levels of analysis, the quality of participatory design was found to be the most significant factor in the development of RDC competences. Pilot interventions that were explicitly designed around student participation, co-design, and shared decision-making generated deeper engagement, clearer learning trajectories, and more sustained democratic practices.

Similarly, Living Labs that prioritised inclusive participation and horizontal collaboration among stakeholders were more successful in fostering professional learning, mutual trust, and ownership of the DEMOCRAT framework. From an external perspective, participation should therefore be understood not as an additional methodological feature, but as a structural condition for democratic learning.

Coherence between pedagogical practices, tools, and institutional context

A second cross-cutting finding concerns the importance of coherence across the different implementation dimensions. Where pedagogical approaches, assessment tools and institutional conditions were aligned, both pilots and Living Labs produced more consistent and recognisable outcomes.

Externally evaluated pilots demonstrated stronger outcomes when the RDC competence framework was explicitly employed to inform pedagogical decisions and when assessment tools were meaningfully incorporated into the learning process rather than being applied as supplementary elements. At the same time, Living Labs proved most effective when their work was connected to existing curricula, teacher education programmes, or policy frameworks, thereby reinforcing the relevance and legitimacy of the DEMOCRAT approach.

Living Labs' enabling role as meso-level infrastructures

The external evaluation confirms their central role in bridging the gap between classroom-level innovation and broader institutional environments. They supported pilots by providing methodological guidance, spaces

for reflection, and opportunities for peer learning. They also facilitated dialogue between schools, civil society actors, and public authorities in some cases.

This bridging function was particularly evident in contexts where Living Labs were recognised by institutions or aligned with broader educational strategies. Conversely, where Living Labs relied primarily on individual commitment and project-based resources, their impact was more fragile and dependent on short-term dynamics.

Teacher agency, professional learning and workload constraints

Teacher agency emerged as both a strength and a vulnerability across the external evaluations. Highly motivated teachers were often the driving force behind successful pilots and Living Lab activities, demonstrating an openness to experimentation and a willingness to adopt facilitative roles.

However, these efforts were consistently constrained by structural factors, including heavy workloads, limited time for reflection, and insufficient institutional support. An external perspective highlights that relying exclusively on individual commitment can reinforce inequalities between schools and contexts. It also underlines the need for systemic support mechanisms to sustain innovative EfD teaching.

Stakeholder engagement beyond schools was uneven

Another cross-cutting finding concerns the uneven involvement of stakeholders beyond the school. While collaboration with NGOs, universities, and local authorities added significant value where established, it was not consistent nor guaranteed in terms of long-term resource allocation. Moreover, the participation of families and wider communities remained limited across most contexts.

From an external perspective, this reduces the transformative potential of EfD by weakening the connection between school-based democratic practices and broader social environments. Therefore, strengthening community engagement appears to be a key challenge for the future development of the DEMOCRAT approach.

External evaluation is a complementary source of validation

Ultimately, the integration of internal and external evaluation processes was identified as a key strength of the DEMOCRAT project. While internal evaluations captured contextual depth and processual insights, external evaluations provided analytical distance, comparative validation, and critical reflection.

The convergence of internal and external findings reinforces the robustness of the overall analysis and supports the credibility of the conclusions drawn in this report. At the same time, the external perspective helped clarify limitations, blind spots, and conditions for transferability that might otherwise have remained unexplored.

7.6. Chapter summary

The external evaluation presented in this chapter provides an independent perspective that both confirms and refines the findings of the comparative analysis developed in the previous chapters of this report. Rather than producing divergent conclusions, the external evidence reinforces the analytical patterns already identified, while adding nuance regarding the conditions under which the DEMOCRAT approach is most effectively implemented.

Across the evaluation of local pilot interventions, the external findings align closely with the comparative analysis of pedagogical approaches and competence development presented in Chapter 3, the learning

outcome analysis in Chapter 5, and the assessment of Living Lab processes discussed in Chapter 6. In particular, the external evaluation confirms that RDC competences are rarely developed in isolation. As observed in the comparative analysis, solidary participation, deliberation, critical judgement and democratic resilience tend to be activated in interconnected ways, especially in interventions that are sufficiently long, pedagogically coherent and grounded in participatory methodologies. Where pilot interventions were explicitly designed around co-design, dialogue and experiential learning, external evaluators identified clearer learning trajectories and more consistent development of RDC competences, corroborating the patterns identified through national reporting and learning outcome analysis in Chapter 5.

At the same time, the external evaluation brings into sharper focus the risks identified in the comparative chapters when methodological coherence is weak. Pilot interventions that did not clearly build on the RDC competence framework, that relied on transmissive approaches or that short activities, tended to show limited impact. These findings echo the tensions described in Chapter 3 regarding curriculum integration and design decisions, and confirm that the mere presence of democratic themes is insufficient without participatory structures and intentional pedagogical alignment.

The evaluation of the Living Lab processes further strengthens the conclusions drawn in Chapter 6 regarding their functioned as meso-level infrastructures that enabled the interpretation, adaptation and appropriation of the RDC competence framework across diverse contexts. Their contribution to professional learning, peer exchange and stakeholder collaboration confirms the comparative finding that democratic education is most effective when supported by collective reflection spaces and coherent institutional environments. In contexts where Living Labs were aligned with curricular frameworks, teacher education or policy-level actors, their impact extended beyond individual pilots and contributed to broader educational dialogue.

Finally, the convergence between internal and external evaluations strengthens the overall robustness of the DEMOCRAT findings. While internal analyses captured contextual depth, processual dynamics and practitioner perspectives, the external evaluation provided analytical distance and validation. The consistency between both perspectives supports the credibility of the conclusions drawn throughout the report and highlights the relevance of combining multiple evaluation lenses when assessing complex educational innovations.

In summary, the external evaluation confirms that the effectiveness of the DEMOCRAT approach depends less on specific tools or activities than on the interplay between participatory design, pedagogical coherence, professional support structures, institutional alignment and, of course, resource allocation. These insights consolidate the evidence base developed across the report and provide a solid foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the final chapter.

8. Conditions influencing the implementation, development and expansion of DEMOCRAT tools

The implementation of the DEMOCRAT RDC competence framework and assessment tools in six different education systems shows that EfD learning outcomes do not depend solely on pedagogical design quality or teaching staff commitment. In all countries where work has been carried out, national teams have systematically documented a set of structural, organisational, relational and institutional conditions that directly influence the project's viability, the depth of learning and the potential for future expansion.

While previous chapters analysed the design of the interventions (Chapter 3), the use and adaptation of the assessment tools (Chapter 4), the learning outcomes achieved (Chapter 5) and the lessons learned from the Living Labs processes (Chapter 6), this chapter analyses the conditions that facilitate or hinder the sustainable and scalable adoption of DEMOCRAT tools by schools and teachers.

The information in the national reports reveals that these conditions do not act in isolation. Rather, they are intertwined in complex configurations combining organisational factors (time, resources and coordination), pedagogical factors (methodological alignment and teaching experience), cultural factors (school climate and shared vision) and external factors (institutional support and community partnerships). Each of these factors has a different impact on schools' ability to adopt the DEMOCRAT approach.

This chapter organises these findings into three categories: facilitators, barriers and conditions for replicability and transferability. This provides a comparative overview that captures both transnational patterns and country-specificities.

8.1. Facilitators

The DEMOCRAT project interventions showed better development, greater pedagogical depth, and more stable implementation when a set of structural, organisational, pedagogical, and relational facilitators coincided. Unlike barriers, which tend to appear even in diverse contexts, facilitators showed an uneven presence across countries and schools; however, when they converged, they generated conditions particularly conducive to the education for democracy promoted by DEMOCRAT.

The seven transnational facilitators identified are presented below, each broken down into the three key dimensions that explain their impact.

1. Pedagogical and institutional leadership

Leadership in schools seems to be decisive in providing stability and coherence to the project. Its impact is articulated in three dimensions:

a) Strategic orientation and internal legitimisation. Interventions that integrated the DEMOCRAT approach into their coexistence plans, citizenship programmes or innovation projects showed greater institutional ownership. In these cases, managerial leadership was not limited to authorising the intervention, but generated a stable framework that allowed teachers to work without curricular tensions.

b) Coordination and organisational protection. Leadership facilitated the organisation of timetables, the management of resources and the resolution of bureaucratic problems. Managers acted as mediators between curricular and pedagogical requirements and needs, preventing teachers from shouldering the organisational burden alone.

c) Generation of a shared purpose. In schools where leadership promoted a common vision of the project, teachers and students understood DEMOCRAT as part of the school's educational project, increasing commitment and motivation.

2. Co-design of teaching and collaborative professional culture

Collaboration between teachers was a decisive facilitator. Its influence is evident in:

a) Collective construction of the pedagogical design. Co-design made it possible to adapt activities to the context, distribute tasks and generate coherent itineraries between areas. The most solid interventions were those where teachers jointly designed the project sequence, integrating diverse disciplinary perspectives.

b) Methodological coherence and reduction of individual workload. Collaborative planning improved methodological quality, reduced duplication and alleviated overload. In countries such as Spain and Germany, where some schools have a tradition of cooperative work, this culture made it easier to normalise the project.

c) Stability in the face of internal changes. When there was a cohesive teaching team, the intervention did not depend on a single person. This mitigated the effects of absences, substitutions or late incorporations, ensuring continuity in the process.

3. Support from Living Labs and national teams

The role of the Living Labs was one of the most robust facilitators, with an impact on three levels:

a) Clarification and operationalisation of the RDC competence framework. Living Labs helped to convert the four competences into specific tasks, techniques and sequences. This support was essential to avoid superficial or confusing interpretations of the framework.

b) Support in the design, monitoring and resolution of difficulties. The support allowed for the adjustment of activities, the management of internal tensions, the redesign of parts of the intervention and the support of pedagogical decision-making. In several countries, the Living Labs even supported complex sessions related to disinformation, diversity or democratic memory.

c) Contextual and sensitive adaptation. The form of support was adapted to the specific needs of each intervention:

- ethical and dialogical support in some of the experiences in Ireland,
- methodological support in some of the pilot tests in Finland and Estonia,
- community and institutional accompaniment in some of the pilot interventions in Spain and Poland,
- intercultural and emotional mediation in some of the experiences in Germany.

4. Curriculum integration and continuity with previous practices

The integration of the project into the curriculum or existing structures seems to reinforce sustainability. This facilitator operated through:

a) Alignment with established practices. Schools or spaces with previous experience in school projects, project-based learning, media education or student participation were able to incorporate DEMOCRAT without methodological disruption.

b) Reduction of tensions between time and content. Curricular integration prevented the project from competing with subjects or the school calendar, reducing the feeling of "overload" and facilitating its continuity.

c) Pedagogical meaning for students. When the project connected with topics already present in school life (coexistence, public space, sustainability, media), students better understood its purpose and showed greater involvement.

5. Sufficient duration and temporal continuity

Duration was one of the facilitators most closely associated with the positive results observed. Its impact was articulated in:

a) The possibility of completing full democratic cycles. Long interventions allowed all phases to be completed: research, deliberation, decision-making, action and reflection. This continuity was key to deep learning.

b) Emergence of complex competences. Competences such as democratic resilience and advanced critical judgement require time for conflicts to emerge, emotions to be managed and arguments to be reviewed. Short interventions were unable to reproduce these conditions.

c) Building democratic routines and habits. The sustained repetition of democratic practices consolidated habits of listening, taking turns to speak, collective agreements and cooperative roles, which remained beyond the intervention.

6. Involvement of external actors and openness to the environment

Collaboration with external agents acted as a facilitator when it generated:

a) Authentic situations of participation. Collaborations with municipalities, NGOs, or journalists allowed students to experience real decisions, take on effective responsibilities, and connect with specific social issues.

b) Intrinsic motivation among students. Interacting with professionals and community actors increased students' perception of the project's usefulness and their emotional involvement.

c) Social and institutional recognition of the project. External collaboration strengthened the public legitimacy of the intervention and facilitated its sustainability, as the schools perceived that the project had an impact beyond the classroom.

7. Safe classroom environment and trusting relationships

DEMOCRAT interventions require openness, vulnerability and deep dialogue. This facilitator operated through:

a) Relational security between students and teachers. Students participated more authentically when they perceived a safe environment for expressing opinions, doubts or personal experiences.

b) Shared rules for dialogue. Schools with a history of coexistence or emotional education had established rules of interaction (respect, listening, care), which facilitated deliberation and the management of disagreements.

c) The role of the teacher as a democratic facilitator. Teachers who adopted a dialogical, non-directive role and were sensitive to the emotional climate created conditions conducive to exploring diverse perspectives and sustaining difficult conversations.

8.2. Barriers

Although the DEMOCRAT project generates significant learning and enables many schools and teachers to advance in EfD practices, its implementation was also marked by a set of structural, organisational, methodological and cultural barriers that conditioned the implementation of interventions and may condition their continuity. These barriers did not manifest themselves equally in the pilot interventions in all countries, but several patterns appear repeatedly in the national reports. Understanding these limitations is essential for interpreting the results obtained and, above all, for identifying the conditions that must be addressed to ensure the sustainability of the interventions and the emergence of new EfD initiatives in the future.

1. Time constraints and curricular pressure

The most recurrent barrier, documented in all national reports, was the lack of structural time to develop in-depth democratic processes. This limitation takes three complementary forms which, together, decisively condition the implementation of DEMOCRAT interventions.

a) Fragmented timetables.

In most countries, schools work with highly segmented timetables—45- to 55-minute classes, non-contiguous blocks, days with variable distributions—which make it difficult to maintain continuity in complex activities. Teachers point out that debates, simulations, collective research, or co-design processes were interrupted before reaching key phases, losing the thread of the argument, the group's concentration, or the emotional sequence necessary to sustain a meaningful democratic dialogue.

These interruptions particularly affect competences such as deliberation and democratic resilience, which require extended periods of time to argue, listen, review positions, or manage disagreements in depth.

b) Unforeseen changes in planning

The national reports highlight multiple situations that disrupted the continuity of the project: substitutions, external evaluations, special events, unexpected meetings, or schedule changes. This organisational instability forced activities to be rescheduled, reduced the consistency of group work, and made it difficult to complete processes that required prior preparation and emotional continuity.

In interventions dealing with sensitive issues (discrimination, memory, cultural diversity) or complex information analysis (media literacy), these interruptions caused setbacks, as students needed to resume debates, rebuild agreements, or regain the climate of trust that had been lost. In addition, they affected the correct ex-ante/post application of assessment tools, which explains part of the lack of comparable data.

c) Insufficient teaching periods for long activities

In several countries—especially in primary school interventions in Ireland and Finland and secondary school interventions in Spain and Poland—the teaching periods were too short to complete democratic learning cycles that require continuity. Activities such as structured debates, in-depth

analysis of sources, co-creation of proposals, or collective actions could not be fully developed in short sessions, forcing tasks to be simplified or excessively fragmented.

This time constraint limited the depth of critical thinking and the possibility of developing democratic resilience, a competence that requires time for real disagreements to emerge, be processed emotionally, and be reworked through dialogue.

2. Initial complexity of the assessment tool and associated workload

Although the DEMOCRAT tools were positively evaluated for their pedagogical potential, their initial complexity represented a significant barrier in most contexts. This barrier can be explained by three complementary dimensions:

a) Cognitive demands of language

The national reports from Spain, Germany and Poland highlight that certain items used abstract vocabulary—related to "processes," "positions," "argumentation," "integration of perspectives"—that was difficult for primary school students or students who had recently started learning the language of instruction to interpret.

Teachers observed that this difficulty led to mechanical, incomplete responses or responses that depended on constant explanations, reducing the usefulness of the tool.

b) Length and density of the questionnaire

In short interventions, especially in Ireland and Finland, teachers reported that the length of the tool competed with the limited time available, forcing them to devote several sessions solely to its application.

This affected student motivation and the perception of an "assessment burden" to the detriment of participatory activities.

c) Organisational and logistical burden

Applying the tool in large groups—a reality in interventions in Germany and parts of Spain—involved managing very different reading speeds, resolving individual queries and, in the case of the teaching tool, recording observations simultaneously while facilitating the activity.

Several schools reported that this dual focus created tension, reduced the quality of observation and detracted from the fluidity of the intervention.

3. Teacher turnover and internal changes in schools

Teacher instability was a cross-cutting barrier that affected the continuity of the project in several countries. This phenomenon had three main effects:

a) Disruption of pedagogical continuity. DEMOCRAT interventions require progression between sessions, accumulation of agreements and methodological continuity. The replacement of teachers midway through the process — frequent in Ireland, Spain and Germany — forced the restarting of explanations, the adjustment of planning or the rethinking of activities already in progress.

b) Loss of coherence in co-design. In schools where the intervention was led by a small group, rotation reduced the cohesion of the teaching team and forced Living Labs to repeat training, reintroduce the RDC competence framework and rebuild methodological agreements.

c) Difficulty in sustaining the pedagogical relationship. Learning depends on a climate of trust. Changing teachers in interventions based on debate, emotional work, or exploration of sensitive topics disrupted the bond with students and reduced their willingness to express themselves openly.

4. Difficulties in coordination between actors and organisational management

Internal coordination between teachers and the management of complex activities constituted a barrier in many schools. This barrier manifested itself on three levels:

a) Limited interdepartmental coordination. Interventions involving several departments (e.g., social sciences, language, tutoring) required joint planning. In schools where there was no tradition of collegial work, this coordination was difficult, resulting in disconnected or overlapping activities.

b) Logistical challenges in activities requiring special preparation. Interventions involving public debates, recordings, field trips or the participation of external actors required advance planning. In several countries (e.g. Germany, Estonia, Spain), teachers reported that rigid timetables or internal bureaucracy made it difficult to coordinate these activities.

c) Dependence on specific resources. Media activities or action projects required specific devices, software or spaces. In some schools, the lack of these resources forced the simplification of the design or the reformulation of activities that would have generated deeper learning.

5. Gaps in understanding the RDC competence framework

Although the conceptual framework was well received, several teachers pointed out difficulties in fully understanding how to operationalise it. This barrier can be explained by three factors:

a) Difficulty in differentiating between similar competences. Many teachers pointed out that deliberation and critical judgement overlapped in practice, especially in integrated interventions. This initial confusion affected the planning of activities and the interpretation of the tool.

b) Democratic resilience as a less intuitive competence. In all countries, democratic resilience was the least understood competence initially. Its pedagogical translation—managing disagreement, tolerance for frustration, persistence in participation—was not evident and required specific support from the Living Labs to avoid interpretations based on "individual resilience" or "generic emotional management."

c) Need for more explicit conceptual scaffolding. National reports show that when there was no solid introduction to the framework, teachers tended to focus on more familiar activities (participation, coexistence), relegating more complex competences.

6. Emotional and cultural barriers in working with sensitive issues

Interventions that addressed emotionally charged topics—historical memory, discrimination, political polarisation, inequality—encountered specific barriers directly related to school culture and social context. These barriers were expressed in three ways:

a) Emotional vulnerability of students. In experiences in Germany and Spain, some groups showed resistance to sharing personal experiences related to exclusion or discrimination. In democratic memory interventions, intense emotions (frustration, injustice, shame) emerged that required careful handling.

b) Teachers' reluctance to facilitate controversy. In several countries, teachers expressed fear of "opening debates that could not be closed" or of generating situations of conflict that would exceed their capacity for emotional management. This led to certain topics being avoided or treated superficially.

c) Family expectations and cultural tensions. In some communities, there were concerns about introducing topics considered sensitive or politicised. This external pressure limited the depth of the activities and necessitated careful mediation by the Living Lab teams.

7. Lack of institutional or regulatory support

The implementation of DEMOCRAT interventions depends largely on institutional support. Where this support was insufficient, three main consequences were identified:

a) Excessive reliance on teacher voluntarism. In Ireland and Spain, several pilot interventions noted that project implementation fell to individually motivated teachers. Without a formal structure assigning time and responsibilities, the intervention was vulnerable to team changes or work overload.

b) Lack of clear curricular spaces. In some contexts, the lack of institutional recognition made it difficult to integrate DEMOCRAT tools into existing subjects or projects. This forced activities to be carried out "at the expense" of other areas, creating tension with the official curriculum.

c) Limitations on the internal expansion of the approach. Without explicit management support, the pilot interventions were confined to a group of teachers, with no real options for becoming school-wide practice. This reduced internal transferability and compromised sustainability beyond the project period.

8. Limited family participation and school-community relationship challenges

Although it does not appear to be a barrier across all countries, several pilot interventions reveal that family involvement—especially in contexts with high sociocultural diversity—can influence the continuity of the project and the depth of some democratic processes.

a) Low family involvement. Some teaching teams noted significantly reduced family participation, especially in secondary schools. This barrier was particularly relevant in primary education, where family-school collaboration is more decisive in sustaining educational initiatives.

b) Need to improve communication and support for families. In some pilot interventions, teams noted that it would have been advisable to involve families from the outset, explain the objectives and detail what learning outcomes were expected. The lack of systematic communication with and be t families did not prevent the interventions from taking place, but it did reduce their level of understanding and support, affecting the sustainability of the project beyond the pilot phase.

c) Procedural difficulties related to family consent. In some interventions, some families were reluctant to sign authorisations, either because of mistrust of activities with a strong digital component or because of a lack of information about the intervention. This procedural obstacle reduced student participation in certain key activities, affecting the representativeness of the groups and the consistency of implementation.

8.3. Transferability and conditions necessary to facilitate the emergence of new initiatives

The capacity of the DEMOCRAT tools and their approach to be transferred and generate new initiatives in other schools and contexts depends on the dynamic interaction between the facilitators and barriers analysed in the previous sections. When favourable conditions are present—leadership, co-design, support, curriculum integration, and a democratic climate—and limitations are mitigated—time, coordination, teaching stability—the principles of the RDC competence framework can be naturally integrated into new schools, educational teams, and diverse institutional contexts.

1. Based on the transnational analysis, two complementary dimensions can be distinguished.
2. the areas that make it possible to replicate the approach, and the degree of transferability of the practices developed.

8.3.1. Areas that determine the replication of the DEMOCRAT approach

The transferability of the DEMOCRAT approach based on its competence framework does not depend on the capacity of schools and organisations to bring together a set of pedagogical, organisational, training and institutional resources that enable the adoption and maintenance of democratic practices. The national reports agree that these four areas are the ones that most influence transferability and the generation of new initiatives in different countries. They are discussed below.

1. Pedagogical resources: clarity, adaptability and diversity of materials

Transferability increases significantly when teachers have access to materials that are:

- clear and understandable,
- adapted to different educational levels,
- with concrete examples of evidence,
- and connected to methodologies familiar to teachers.

The pilot interventions found that it is easier to implement intervention when:

i. the competence descriptors use accessible language, which reduces the risk of divergent interpretations of the framework;
ii. there are different versions of tools, especially for primary, secondary and initial teacher training;
iii. the rubrics or scales include examples of observable practices, which allow teachers to identify real progress made by students;
iv. practical guides are provided for methodologies that are already in place, such as project-based learning, structured debates, case studies, critical reading, mediation, or cooperative action projects.

The pilot experience shows that pedagogical clarity is a driver for transfer and the generation of new initiatives. Where the materials were well adapted by national teams, the DEMOCRAT framework was more easily integrated and reduced the need for intensive support.

2. Organisational resources: time, internal coordination and continuity

Transferability requires a minimum organisational infrastructure that allows interventions to be integrated into the life of the school. It is not enough to have materials available; the school must be able to integrate them into its internal architecture.

In this regard, schools need:

i. dedicated time to plan, implement and review the tools, which avoids relying on improvised 'gaps' in the timetable;
ii. a designated person or small team to coordinate decisions, support other teachers and ensure continuity;
iii. temporal continuity to integrate the tools into complete sequences, especially in prolonged interventions;
iv. regular spaces for collaborative work, where teachers can agree on criteria, review evidence and resolve doubts.

Comparative evidence indicates that when these organisational resources are in place, the implementation of interventions can be more sustainable and less dependent on individual initiatives by teachers.

3. Training resources: light support and communities of practice

National reports show that training is one of the fundamental pillars of transferability. Replicability increases when schools have:

i. brief but practical initial training, focused on the actual use of the tools and specific examples;
ii. light but accessible support, in the form of ad hoc consultations, short online sessions or feedback on design;
iii. real examples of implementation at different educational levels, which help to visualise how competences are translated into activities;
iv. formal or informal communities of practice that support the continuity of teacher learning and encourage the exchange of strategies.

In addition, the existence of micro-training resources—short tutorials, short videos, fact sheets, mini-guides—reduces dependence on intensive support and encourages new schools to adopt the approach without requiring a large investment of time.

The replicability of initiatives requires that training not be a one-off event, but rather an element that nurtures a reflective professional culture around education for democracy.

4. Institutional resources: legitimacy, alignment and support policies

Transfer requires an institutional environment that recognises and supports it. The national reports highlight four key conditions:

i. alignment with school priorities, such as coexistence, citizenship, well-being, participation projects or mentoring spaces;
ii. explicit support from management teams, which facilitate time, recognition and coordination between areas;
iii. coordination with local or regional policies, which amplifies the legitimacy of the project and facilitates complementary resources;
iv. institutional visibility, which reinforces the importance of educating for democracy and motivates teachers.

When these conditions are met, initiatives do not depend on individual voluntarism: they become a school-wide project. Conversely, in neutral or unstable institutional contexts, replicability is weakened, even when there is individual motivation among teachers.

8.3.2. Degree of transferability of interventions

In addition to the areas that condition the possibility of transferring the DEMOCRAT approach, the analysis of the interventions and the assessment of the national teams show that not all the practices developed during the pilots have the same potential for expansion. Their transferability depends on the relationship between the methodological complexity of the practice and the actual conditions of the schools that wish to adopt it. Based on the experiences of the six countries, three levels of transferability can be distinguished: high, conditional and low.

1. Practices with high transferability

The practices that showed the greatest potential for transferability share three features:

1. Modularity: they can be applied in different formats and durations.
2. Organisational simplicity: they do not require extraordinary resources.
3. Pedagogical alignment: they fit into existing classroom dynamics.

Among these, the following stand out:

a) Brief deliberative activities. Dynamics such as opinion lines, structured debates, dilemma analysis, and guided conversations were highly transferable in all countries. They are simple to prepare, work in primary and secondary schools, and allow students to experience democratic practices without the need for a lengthy project. Examples include opinion lines, structured debates, moral dilemmas, and guided conversations.

b) Individual and collective reflection practices. These include short diaries, simplified scales, or self-assessments aimed at democratic awareness, which can be easily incorporated into tutorials, classroom projects, or reflection sessions. These practices help students recognise their progress and allow teachers to integrate the RDC competence framework without requiring curricular restructuring.

c) Simple cooperative projects such as tasks based on shared roles, small research projects or collaborative products (murals, short videos, classroom proposals) are supported by methodologies already present in many schools. Their transfer is natural because they connect with pre-existing cooperative learning dynamics.

d) Critical reading and case analysis. Exercises based on texts, images or videos allow critical judgement and deliberation to be worked on within core subjects such as language, social sciences or tutoring. Furthermore, their implementation does not require additional resources, which explains their high transferability.

All these practices allow RDC competences to be developed in core subjects without restructuring the timetable. They therefore constitute the core of transferability.

2. Practices with conditional transferability

This group includes practices that have demonstrated high pedagogical value, but their replication depends on the school having certain organisational, curricular or community conditions in place. When these conditions are present, transfer is feasible, but when they are not, the practices tend to be simplified or lose depth:

a) Long-term projects. Sequences involving weeks or months (e.g., environmental participation projects, community research, or complete cycles of deliberation-action) require temporal continuity,

teaching stability, and internal coordination. Schools with fragmented calendars or high teacher turnover have more difficulty transferring these types of practices without additional support.

b) Complex simulations or civic projects. Activities such as parliamentary simulations, participatory budgeting, or school elections require a considerable level of design, time resources, and often collaboration with external agents. Their transfer is possible, but only if the school has a minimum organisational infrastructure.

c) Interventions requiring stable external collaboration. Many powerful experiences depended on partnerships with NGOs, local councils, journalists or cultural organisations. The replicability of these practices is high in schools with existing networks, but much lower in contexts where such partnerships must be created from scratch.

d) Activities that require flexible spaces and times. Dramatisations, audiovisual projects, public debates, or fieldwork require large spaces, continuous time, or logistical permissions. Schools with space limitations or rigid timetables find it more difficult to replicate them.

These practices can be replicated with pedagogical fidelity, but only when the school has sufficient time, coordination structures and, in many cases, stable external partnerships.

3. Practices with low transferability:

Although educational and meaningful, some project practices have limited transferability, as they require very specific conditions or depend on factors that are difficult to reproduce in other schools.

a) Interventions deeply linked to specific community contexts. Projects linked to local museums, historical memory initiatives in a specific neighbourhood, or activities with very particular entities cannot be transferred without a profound reconfiguration. Their value lies in their contextualisation, not in their literal replicability.

b) Activities based on individual leadership. Some interventions worked thanks to the impetus of a particularly motivated teacher or an external technician. When leadership is not institutionalised, transferability is lost if the key person changes role or leaves the school.

c) Practices that depend on unavailable resources or infrastructure. Specialised audiovisual projects, complex theatre workshops or media activities requiring specific equipment cannot be transferred to schools with infrastructure limitations.

d) Models that are intensive in terms of time or coordination. Interventions that require weeks of preparation, multiple inter-institutional meetings or constant coordination between actors exceed the operational capacity of many schools.

In general, these practices can inspire simpler ones, but they cannot be directly replicated.

8.4. Chapter summary

The transnational analysis shows that the implementation and expansion of the DEMOCRAT approach, based on its framework of competences and tools, depend on a delicate balance between enabling conditions, structural barriers, and resources that allow for the transferability of the approach. Interventions become more robust when developed in contexts where pedagogical leadership, collaborative culture, Living Labs support, curriculum integration, and a safe classroom climate converge. These factors seem to act as an

ecosystem that enables the transformation of the RDC competence framework into a sustainable educational practice.

However, the documented barriers—time constraints, lack of teaching stability, internal coordination difficulties, initial complexity of the tools, or reluctance to address sensitive issues—show that adoption of the approach is not automatic. These conditions not only hinder the depth of learning, but also explain the variability in implementation and the need for support tailored to each context.

Based on this tension between facilitators and barriers, the analysis reveals that the transferability of the DEMOCRAT approach may depend on four key areas: the clarity and adaptability of teaching materials, the existence of stable organisational structures, the availability of teacher training and support, and institutional backing that gives the project legitimacy and continuity. Without these elements, sustainability becomes fragile and overly dependent on the individual motivation of teachers.

Furthermore, not all of the project's pilot practices have the same potential for expansion. Short deliberative activities, democratic reflection and simple cooperative projects are at the core of high transferability, as they can be easily integrated into different educational levels and subjects. In contrast, more demanding practices—long-term projects, complex simulations, or interventions dependent on external actors—have limited transferability, viable only when schools have adequate time, coordination, and partnerships. Finally, a small set of practices show low transferability, especially those dependent on very specific community contexts, particular infrastructures, or non-institutionalised individual leadership.

In summary, Chapter 7 shows that the potential for transferring the DEMOCRAT approach lies in creating conditions that allow the RDC competence framework to be adapted and sustained in diverse school cultures. Where there is leadership, methodological clarity, teacher coordination and institutional support, the approach can be extended naturally and generate significant transformations. Where these conditions are weak or unstable, transfer requires strategic support, simplification of practices, and an incremental approach.

9. Conclusions

This comparative assessment report has analysed forty pilot interventions implemented in six European countries within the framework of the DEMOCRAT project. The analysis has focused on the implementation of EfD initiatives through the framework of RDC competences defined by DEMOCRAT and the assessment tools, as well as on the Living Lab approach as a methodology for co-creation, experimentation and mutual learning. Although the pilots differ substantially in terms of age range, institutional environment, thematic focus, duration and pedagogical approach, the comparative perspective allows us to draw a set of cross-cutting conclusions regarding the potential, conditions and limits of the DEMOCRAT approach to promoting EfD in European education systems.

9.1. Education for Democracy as a practice-based and systemic endeavour

A first general conclusion is that initiatives seeking to promote EfD cannot be understood solely as the transmission of civic knowledge or democratic values. In different contexts, the pilots confirm that democratic competences are developed mainly through participatory, dialogue-based and experience-based approaches, integrated into real educational practices and institutional arrangements that enable students to participate, deliberate, make judgements and deal with disagreement or uncertainty.

Several pedagogical approaches consistently emerge as effective in these contexts. These include project-based learning, simulations and role-playing, peer methodologies, deliberative classroom practices, and community or service-learning approaches. These methods actively engage students in situations that require decision-making, collective problem-solving, and negotiation of disagreements, thereby activating multiple RDC competences simultaneously.

The four competences of RDC—solidarity participation, deliberation, critical judgement, and democratic resilience—did not emerge as isolated learning outcomes. Rather, they were activated interdependently on an ongoing basis. Participatory activities often triggered deliberative processes; deliberation required critical judgement; and moments of conflict, ambiguity, or frustration demanded democratic resilience. This confirms the internal coherence of the RDC competence framework and its alignment with the lived logic of democratic practices.

The three patterns of integration seem to correlate with the duration. Interventions with structural integration tends to a longer duration, the interventions with stable but limited curricular integration seem to prioritise a medium duration and the interventions with a functional integration a shorter duration. A comparison of these three patterns indicates that the duration of an intervention is not an independent determinant of its pedagogical quality. Rather, it is a factor that conditions the learning opportunities that can be generated. Long projects facilitate complete cycles of exploration and democratic action; medium-length interventions allow for balanced combinations of techniques; and short interventions function as intensive micro-experiences, particularly useful for introducing complex competences in contexts with rigid schedules. It must be acknowledged that the pivotal consideration does not solely encompass the number of weeks or sessions; rather, it is the manner in which the available time is intertwined with curriculum integration and co-design. This integration serves to metamorphose the internal architecture of each intervention, thereby imparting a distinct and significant influence on its efficacy.

At the same time, the analysis highlights that EfD initiatives are significantly more effective when integrated into broader school or institutional cultures that support democratic practices. Democratic learning is

reinforced when participation, dialogue and shared responsibility are not limited to isolated activities, but are reflected in the everyday organisation of schools and classrooms.

9.2. Effective approaches to developing democratic competences

The comparative analysis allows us to identify the key pedagogical principles associated with the successful development of competences. Interventions that were particularly effective shared several characteristics:

- They created authentic participatory situations where students experienced real responsibility and the consequences of collective decisions.
- They incorporated structured deliberation, allowing students to articulate positions, listen to others and revise their views.
- They connected democratic competences to meaningful issues relevant to students' lives, such as social justice, environmental sustainability, media literacy, or local governance.
- They allowed space for reflection and metacognitive processes, helping students become aware of their own learning and democratic practices.

These approaches were adaptable to different educational levels, but their specific implementation varied according to age, institutional constraints, and local priorities. This reinforces the idea that the success of EfD interventions does not depend on standardised activities, but on flexible pedagogical approaches that can be adapted to specific contexts.

9.3. The importance of context and local embedding

An important aspect of the comparative analysis is the decisive role of local context. The design, implementation, and outcomes of the pilot interventions were strongly influenced by national education systems, school cultures, community relations, and socio-political environments.

Interventions that explicitly addressed local issues, institutions, or stakeholders—such as municipalities, NGOs, or cultural organisations—tended to generate higher levels of student engagement and a perception of relevance. Conversely, approaches that were not sufficiently adapted to local constraints, curricular structures, or institutional capacities faced implementation challenges, regardless of their conceptual soundness.

This highlights that EfD interventions cannot be taken out of context. Therefore, transferability should be understood not as the replication of specific activities, but as the adaptation of fundamental principles to different educational ecosystems. Sensitivity to local conditions emerges as a prerequisite for both effectiveness and sustainability.

9.4. Observed educational effects and limits of the evidence

The comparative analysis suggests that most pilot interventions contributed positively to students' democratic learning, especially in relation to participation, deliberation and critical judgement. These effects were most visible at the level of students' self-perception, classroom dynamics and qualitative feedback from teachers and external observers.

However, the report also confirms the methodological limitations inherent in short-term, small-scale pilots. The interventions do not provide statistically generalisable evidence of impact, nor do they allow for long-term monitoring of competences development. Instead, their value lies in generating consistent indications,

plausible patterns and practice-based knowledge about how democratic competences can be fostered in diverse educational settings.

Democratic resilience emerged as the most conceptually challenging competence for both teachers and students. It was addressed less frequently in an explicit manner and proved more difficult to operationalise and assess. This finding is consistent across the different countries where the pilots were conducted and seems to point to the need for further conceptual clarification and pedagogical exemplification of this competence.

9.5. The central role of teachers, school leadership and the involvement of other stakeholders

One of the strongest findings in all national reports concerns the decisive role of teachers and school leadership. The success, depth and sustainability of EfD interventions depend largely on the ability of educators to translate abstract democratic principles into meaningful learning experiences and to adapt tools and methodologies to their specific contexts. This process of contextual adaptation and sustainability of initiatives appears to be richer when parents and other stakeholders are incorporated into the process.

Teachers acted not only as implementers, but also as designers, mediators, and evaluators of democratic practices. In many cases, they modified assessment tools, redesigned activities, and negotiated institutional constraints to make interventions viable within existing curricula and timetables. When school management actively supported these efforts—allocating time, legitimising innovation, and encouraging collaboration—the interventions achieved a higher level of integration and continuity.

Conversely, frequent staff turnover, a lack of institutional support and competing curricular pressures limited the scope and sustainability of several pilot interventions. In some cases, teachers indicated that they realised they lacked the knowledge and tools necessary to further develop the interventions.

This highlights the importance of considering EfD as not only a pedagogical issue, but also a matter of school governance, organisational capacity and teacher's professional agency. Therefore, one objective of such projects must be to initiate processes of organisational learning in schools so that learning for democracy becomes a cross-curricular concern for the whole school community.

9.6. Living Labs as infrastructures for co-creation and professional learning

The Living Lab approach proved to be a condition that favoured the implementation of EfD in the DEMOCRAT project. In all countries where interventions were carried out, Living Labs functioned as spaces for shared understanding of the EDC competence framework and collective reflection on educational challenges.

Living Labs contributed to the formation of professional learning communities that connected teachers, researchers, civil society actors and, in some cases, policy makers. Participants emphasised the value of these spaces for overcoming professional isolation, gaining confidence and experimenting with innovative practices.

The concrete experiences show also that the continuous engagement of a wide range of stakeholder over a period of three years is difficult as the focus of the living lab activities are changing in the course of time and so the interest of stakeholder. Social innovation processes are not linear processes. Not all stakeholders participate with the same intensity in all phases and all activities or events, so fluctuation among stakeholders is to be expected. Therefore, Living Lab administrators must make efforts to maintain the interest of the various stakeholders in the Living Labs, even though they do not participate in all activities.

The analysis highlights the resource-intensive nature of Living Labs. Sustained participation requires time, facilitation and institutional recognition, and their long-term sustainability beyond project funding remains an open question. Nevertheless, the Living Lab experience demonstrates the potential of participatory and dialogue-based infrastructures to advance EfD.

9.7. Assessment of democratic competences: challenges and learning opportunities

The pilot intervention showed the relevance of the developed RDC competence framework which are welcomed by all intervention as a structural element of their activities. The comparative findings confirm that assessing democratic competences is both necessary and inherently complex. The assessment tools designed by DEMOCRAT provided a common frame of reference, but the application of the student self-assessment tools and the teacher assessment tool was very different.

The teacher assessment tool was only used in minor number of cases. Its length, the need for systematic observation, and its coexistence with other assessment systems explain its lower use.

The student self-assessment tool was the one most widely used across the interventions. Its relative accessibility and its ability to generate direct reflection among students facilitated its adoption, although in cases of interventions with students younger then 14 years it required substantial modifications: simplification of language, reduction in the number of items, use of visual aids, or transformation into oral dynamics. These adaptations not only responded to practical limitations—such as the cognitive level of the students of the primary education and first grades of secondary education or the reduced duration of some interventions—but also reflected a genuine effort by teachers to preserve the pedagogical meaning of the tool.

Tensions arose between the need for comparability across contexts and the pedagogical relevance of locally adapted tools. In several cases, teachers prioritised qualitative reflection, group-level assessment or observational methods over standardised scales. Rather than constituting a weakness, these adaptations highlight that assessment in EfD also functions as a learning process, fostering reflection, dialogue and self-awareness among students and teachers. As the tools for the assessment of RDC competences are thought for the use in classrooms, they should maintain a degree of flexibility for its use in different education context.

The interventions showed that the assessment tools served as catalysts for reflection and as a starting point for new assessment practices on EfD. Far from weakening the tool, the adaptations made offer valuable information to guide a future version that is for be tailored and consistent with the diversity of contexts and specific educational needs. The results suggest that future work on assessment should focus on providing clearer guidance, age-appropriate tools and examples of good practice, while maintaining flexibility to accommodate contextual diversity.

9.8. Transferability, scalability and policy implications

Many of the pedagogical approaches and topics tested in the DEMOCRAT pilots are transferable to other contexts, provided that certain conditions are met. These include curriculum integration, teacher training, institutional support, and sensitivity to local social and cultural contexts. Transferability should therefore be understood not as a replication of activities, but as the adaptation of underlying principles and design logic.

Scaling up initiatives requires moving beyond project-based innovation towards systemic integration. This involves aligning EfD and RDC competence framework with curriculum frameworks, teacher training and professional development, school assessment and governance structures. Without such alignment, EfD risks remaining marginal and dependent on individual commitment rather than institutional accountability.

9.9. Final remark

Overall, the comparative analysis confirms the relevance and viability of the DEMOCRAT approach to EfD. The project demonstrates that democratic competences can be developed meaningfully across educational levels and national contexts, but also that such development depends on coherent institutional environments, empowered educators, and participatory infrastructures.

EfD should not be conceived as an optional addition to education systems, nor as a short-term response to political discontent. Instead, this report presents it as a long-term structural effort that requires sustained investment, professional capacity building and democratic school cultures.

The key to transferring the DEMOCRAT approach lies in creating conditions that allow the outline of the European EfD curriculum, the RDC competence framework and assessment tools to be adapted flexible and sustained in diverse school cultures. When there is methodological clarity, teacher coordination and organisational support from the head of schools, the approach can be extended naturally and generate significant transformations. In situations where these conditions are found to be weak or unstable, transfer requires strategic support, simplification of practices, and an incremental approach.