



This project was funded by the European
Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values
Programme (CERV)



Citizen Z

*Strengthening the participation of young citizens
in democratic and civic life*

D9.1 Event Report: Final Findings and Recommendations from the second round of deliberations in Croatia

July 2024

INTERCULTURAL
**DIALOGUE
PLATFORM**
Mutual Understanding & Social Cohesion

 **Udruga
Prizma**

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11-07-2024

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Acknowledgement

This document was funded by the European Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV).

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EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	2 - UDRUGA ZA POTICANJE RAZVOJA LJUDSKIH POTENCIJALA I KREATIVNOSTI - PRIZMA (Udruga Prizma)
PIC number:	919017771
Project name and acronym:	Citizen Z: Strengthening the participation of young citizens in democratic and civic life - Citizen Z

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	9
Event name:	Second round of local deliberations with young people from Croatia
Type:	Pre-consultations, Workshops, Open Dialogues, Citizens' Jury, Fishbowl
In situ/online:	In-situ
Location:	Zagreb and Zadar, Croatia
Date(s):	January 16, January 17, April 19, April 20, May 17, May 22, June 27, June 29, 2024
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.citizenz.eu/
Participants	
Female:	48
Male:	38
Non-binary:	0
From country 1 Croatia:	83

From country 2 Serbia:	1		
From country 3 Pakistan:	1		
From country 4 Peru:	1		
Total number of participants:	86	From total number of countries:	4

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

I. Short Description

The second round of deliberations in Croatia took place in Zadar and Zagreb in April and June 2024. Prior to these events, pre-consultations with youth were conducted in January, April, and May 2024.

Activities in Zadar

Before the deliberations in Zadar, pre-consultations with youth were held on January 16, 2024, at the Udruga Prizma space, and on January 17, 2024, at the Vice Vlatković Vocational School.

On May 17, 2024, a consultation activity in the form of a quiz and one-on-one discussions with youth was organized at the Zadar City Library. Additionally, on May 22, 2024, a youth gathering in the form of a picnic included a quiz and focus group discussions to identify the topics young people wanted to address during the second round of deliberations in Croatia.

During these focus groups, the youth discussed several issues, including the problems young people in the Zadar area face, ways to improve communication between young people and decision-makers, the biggest challenges for a young person living in Zadar, their preferred fields of further education, and any lack of certain content or services for young people in Zadar. The conclusions and decisions regarding the deliberation topics were based on the results of these pre-consultations.

The deliberation topic was “Services and Activities in the Youth Centre.” To accommodate the availability of various youth groups and profiles, the deliberation activity was organized in four timeslots. An open call was disseminated through social media, newsletters, and regional media to attract a broad target group of youth to join the deliberation round. Participants included some youngsters from the first deliberation round and members of the Citizens’ Jury, whose involvement significantly enhanced the quality of discussions and active participation during the deliberation process. The deliberations were held on June 27 and June 29, 2024.

The *four corners method* was employed to initiate the discussion and ensure all participants were aligned regarding the topics to be addressed. The facilitator read a statement, and participants positioned themselves according to their stance: “agree”,

“disagree”, “don't know”, or “don't care”. Afterwards, the facilitator asked questions and requested clarifications to understand each participant's choice, fostering peer learning and opening up discussions. When necessary, the facilitator provided additional information (e.g. knowledge pills) and other inputs. The statements included recommendations and topics discussed in the first deliberation round, ensuring a seamless transition to the second cycle, rechecking and validating youth needs and attitudes.

After the *four corners activity*, the *fishbowl conversation* methodology was used to stimulate discussion and ensure every youth's voice was heard. During this activity, the facilitator documented ideas and sought clarifications and examples when needed.

Activities in Zagreb

Before the events in Zagreb, a questionnaire was created and distributed to young people to identify the topics they wished to discuss, based on the issues highlighted during the first round of deliberations. The respondents included high school students (33%), university students (24%), and other young individuals. According to the results, 66% of respondents emphasized the importance of discussing elective subjects and their role in fostering active citizenship from both Croatian and broader European perspectives. Additionally, 47% of respondents identified strengthening civic education as a significant topic for discussion.

Deliberative dialogue was chosen as the method for the events in Zagreb, held on April 18 and 19, 2024. After consulting with experts from civil society and academia and analyzing the questionnaire results, Udruga Prizma project staff and facilitators prepared a two-day deliberation program.

The program began with a brief introduction to the concepts of active citizenship and deliberative democracy. Facilitators explained the fundamental principles of deliberative processes, emphasizing their importance and providing illustrative examples such as the Irish citizens' assemblies and the Citizen Council of Eastern Belgium. They also discussed deliberative methodologies used at the European Union level, including the Conference on the Future of Europe and the European Citizens' Panels. Additionally, the Citizen Z project was presented to the participants.

The deliberation session started with an explanation of the topic and the methodology of deliberative dialogue. Afterwards, participants engaged in small group discussions, sharing their perspectives, experiences, concerns, and ideas related to education and active citizenship, particularly the role of elective subjects in fostering active citizenship. They participated in constructive dialogue, asking questions, seeking clarification from experts and facilitators, and building on each other's contributions in a collaborative manner.

In the latter stage of the deliberation process, participants reconvened as a collective to share key points, insights, and thematic elements from their earlier small-group discussions. A representative from each group presented a synthesized summary of their group's discourse, facilitating cross-pollination of ideas and the identification of commonalities and divergences. Facilitators assisted them in finding common ground

and building consensus by highlighting areas of agreement and encouraging collaboration through shared objectives and interests. They guided the group towards formulating practical solutions and informed recommendations by synthesizing diverse viewpoints and fostering mutual understanding and cooperation.

The collective assembly then engaged in a facilitated deliberation process to further explore and discuss the shared insights and perspectives. Facilitators guided the group towards identifying areas of common ground and consensus. Participants collaborated to distil key insights and potential solutions or recommendations that had emerged from the deliberation.

The deliberation process provided the youth participants with an invaluable opportunity to develop essential skills in communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Facilitators supported the process by offering constructive feedback, coaching effective communication techniques, and providing resources or information to broaden their knowledge base. Skillful facilitation during the deliberations helped participants gain confidence and enhance their capacity for active citizenship.

Across all events, safe and inclusive environments were cultivated to ensure that young participants felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and outlining their political priorities. Active participation was strongly encouraged, and critical thinking was nurtured with guidance from facilitators and subject matter experts. These measures were designed to create a conducive setting for productive dialogue and fruitful deliberation.

Following the events, the Udruga Prizma team and facilitators analyzed the collected data through several meetings and formulated findings and conclusions.

II. Aim of the events

The deliberation in Zadar, themed "Services and Activities in the Youth Center," aimed to:

- Amplify youth voices concerning youth spaces and needs.
- Involve young people in decision-making processes.
- Facilitate dialogue between youth and relevant stakeholders.

The deliberative dialogue in Zagreb, themed "Education for Active Citizenship - European Perspective," aimed to:

- Explore the role of elective subjects in fostering active citizenship.
- Address key conclusions from the November 2023 deliberations, particularly the need for more choices in extracurricular activities and elective courses.
- Build on the outcomes of the first round of deliberations.
- Approach topics important to youth from a European perspective.

In line with the results of the questionnaire previously administered, special attention was given to the role of elective subjects in fostering active citizenship. This focus also aligned with one of the key conclusions from the first round of deliberations held in November 2023, which had emphasized the need to provide pupils and students with

more choices for extracurricular activities and elective courses. The events in Zagreb built upon the outcomes of the first round of deliberations, addressing topics important to youth from a European perspective.

III. Events Programs

January 16, 2024

18:30 About the youth program
18:40 Quiz
19:00 Focus group
19:45 End

January 17, 2024

9:40 Introduction of Citizen Z project
9:50 Quiz
10:05 Focus group
10:30 End

April 19, 2024

16.45 Participant registration
17.00 Introduction to active citizenship, deliberative democracy, and Citizen Z project
17.30 Deliberative Dialogue: Elective subjects and active citizenship – youth perspective
18.15 Break
18.30 Continuation of deliberative dialogue and conclusions
19.15 Event evaluation
19.30 Dinner

April 20, 2024

14.30 Introduction to active citizenship, deliberative democracy, and Citizen Z project
15:00 Deliberative Dialogue: Education and Active Citizenship in European Context
15.45 Break
16.00 Deliberative Dialogue: Wrap-up and Recommendations
16.45 Evaluation
17.00 Dinner

May 17, 2024

13:00 Introduction to the Citizen Z project
13:15 Quiz and one-on-one consultation with youth
16:00 End

May 22, 2024

18:00 Introduction to the Citizen Z project
18:15 Quiz
18:40 Focus group

19:30 End

June 27, 2024

11:00 Introduction to the Citizen Z project

11:15 Four corners

11:45 Fishbowl conversation

13:00 End

18:00 Introduction to the Citizen Z project

18:15 Four corners

18:35 Fishbowl conversation

19:30 End

June 29, 2024

11:00 Introduction to the Citizen Z project

11:15 Four corners

11:45 Fishbowl conversation

13:00 End

18:00 Introduction to the Citizen Z project

18:15 Four corners

18:40 Fishbowl conversation

19:30 End

IV. Participants

Local deliberations in Croatia engaged a total of 86 participants, including 38 males and 48 females. Of these, 59 were aged between 15 to 25 years, while 27 were over 25. Participants hailed from diverse backgrounds, including Croatia, Serbia, Pakistan, and Peru. Those from Serbia, Pakistan, and Peru were primarily young individuals studying or working in Zadar, contributing valuable insights on inclusion, cultural learning, and awareness of the social obstacles they faced.

The diverse group encompassed local residents of Zadar and young people who had relocated from various parts of Croatia, such as Šibenik, Feričanci, Slivnica Donja, Jalžabet, Sisak, and Postira. This diversity provided perspectives from non-local youth with distinct needs. Participants varied in age, social status, education level, occupation, and interests, ensuring a rich spectrum of viewpoints.

Additionally, the Citizens' Jury included representatives from public institutions, civil society organizations, youth groups, and the academic community. This broad representation guaranteed a comprehensive range of perspectives and insights during the deliberations. For the deliberation in Zagreb, participants comprised high school and

college students, academic experts, and facilitators focused on specific themes related to education and active citizenship.

V. **Participants' feedback**

Following the deliberations in Zagreb, participants highly rated both events, expressing satisfaction with the content and organization. Many highlighted the need for more opportunities for young people to voice their opinions and engage in constructive discussions on relevant topics. For some participants, this was the first time to be involved in a deliberative democracy experience, and they were pleasantly surprised by its capacity to rejuvenate citizen participation. They appreciated discovering a pathway for ordinary citizens to contribute to political decision-making.

Following the deliberations in Zadar, participants widely praised the facilitator for the quality of his assistance. The facilitator successfully engaged participants through interactive activities and discussions, ensuring everyone's active involvement. Clear instructions and concepts were effectively communicated, making it easy for participants to grasp the material and understand expectations. The facilitator adeptly led the activities and discussions, maintaining a constructive approach and guiding opinions toward meaningful conclusions.

The atmosphere was friendly and conducive to the free expression of opinions. The introduction to the topic was informative and engaging, with the facilitator demonstrating a strong command of complex concepts presented in accessible terms. Activities were thoughtfully designed to be effective without being overly time-consuming, and the group size was conducive to fostering inclusive participation where everyone could share their views and contribute ideas.

Participants provided constructive feedback, suggesting areas for improvement. They expressed a desire for additional resources or sessions to reinforce learning and address lingering questions. There was also a request for more interactive elements, practical exercises, and smaller group breakout sessions to facilitate deeper discussions.

While the group size was small, some participants suggested further dividing into smaller groups for enhanced engagement. Others recommended providing materials before the activity to better prepare participants. Suggestions included the improvement of the setup for fishbowl conversations to enhance nonverbal communication, the implementation of immediate feedback systems during activities, and the incorporation of visual aids like digital content, flashcards, and whiteboards for visual learners. Participants also emphasized the importance of customizing activities for participants with disabilities.

Despite these suggestions for improvement, the activity had a significant impact on participants, enhancing their skills and knowledge. According to evaluation forms, participants gained a deeper understanding of the subject and felt more confident in applying these concepts. They reported improvements in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. The deliberations broadened their

perspectives on youth opportunities and local interests, encouraging them to listen to diverse viewpoints and express their opinions more confidently.

Participants also learned about the importance of youth work and youth clubs and centres in sparking creativity and creating new interests.

VI. Findings and Lessons Learned

Deliberations in April 2024 in Zagreb reaffirmed the idea that granting the youth greater autonomy in shaping their educational paths could lead to more fulfilling learning experiences, fostering initiative and responsibility—essential attributes for active citizenship. Participants advocated for reducing the number of mandatory subjects in primary and secondary schools to make room for elective subjects, citing Waldorf pedagogy as an example of an approach that encourages autonomy in students.

Additionally, participants emphasized the role of early volunteering in nurturing active citizenship among youth, advocating for its promotion starting from primary school. Discussions also highlighted the need to enhance civic education, drawing comparisons with national curricula across Europe. For instance, in Germany, civic education varies by region, encompassing a wide range of activities integrated into school curricula across most regions. In France, civic and moral education is mandatory throughout primary and secondary schooling, integrated into subjects like history, geography, languages, and philosophy.

In contrast, Croatia integrates civic education cross-curricular rather than as a separate subject, a point participants believed could be improved by establishing it as a standalone subject to better promote active citizenship.

Participants explored opportunities for improvement on both Croatian and EU levels, acknowledging the autonomy of member states in shaping educational policies while highlighting the benefits of EU cooperation through sharing best practices, policy advice, and support. They proposed a common EU framework for civic education to provide general guidelines while allowing for adaptation to national contexts. Indeed, participants emphasized the potential benefits of a common EU framework for civic education, suggesting that while each member state would retain the freedom to decide whether to adopt it, such a framework could provide general elements of citizenship education. These could include basic competencies for teachers, allowing for adaptation to national contexts.

Furthermore, participants stressed the need for greater synergy between formal and non-formal civic education throughout Europe, including Croatia. They noted that civil society organisations play a crucial role in promoting active citizenship but often face resource limitations, primarily relying on EU funding. Programs like Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps (ESC), and European Voluntary Service (EVS) were highlighted as significant avenues for fostering active citizenship and were recommended for increased promotion across EU member states.

Preliminary findings from the deliberations include:

- The Croatian primary and high school curricula are considered overly extensive.
- There is significant variation in approaches to civic education across the EU.
- EU programs aimed at fostering active citizenship often face challenges in reaching their intended audience.

Following the initial findings and recommendations from the first round of deliberations, youth attitudes and opinions on decision-making, their level of involvement, accessibility, and management of youth centres have remained largely unchanged. Young people expressed a pressing need for safe and autonomous spaces where they can develop outside formal education and actively participate in managing centre activities and programs.

Participants highlighted the necessity of professional support staff such as youth workers, social workers, and psychologists within the centres. They also emphasised the importance of peer-to-peer knowledge and skill-sharing based on their own competencies and formal education.

There is a consensus among young people that their involvement in decision-making processes concerning youth interests is insufficient, with inadequate youth-friendly mechanisms hindering their engagement. They acknowledge the importance of deliberation, dialogue, and communication but noted a pervasive lack of mutual trust between youth and decision-makers, which poses a significant barrier to meaningful dialogue.

Participants noted a recent decline in public spaces where young people can actively participate in decision-making and management roles. This trend limits opportunities for youth to engage actively, develop creatively, and participate in democratic processes by practising dialogue and building trust with decision-makers.

Despite these challenges, young participants welcomed efforts to involve them in decision-making processes regarding the Zadar youth centre. They expressed optimism that their voices would be heard not only locally but also within the broader European context of the project and beyond.

VII. **Final recommendations**

Recommendations for the theme "Education for Active Citizenship - European Perspective" include:

- Croatia should consider reducing the number of mandatory subjects in primary and secondary school to allow for more elective subjects (national level).
- Promote volunteering from primary school as it fosters an active citizenship mindset among youth (EU level).
- Implement a non-obligatory EU framework for civic education that includes basic curriculum and teacher training, benefiting member states (EU level).
- Member states should enhance the promotion of EU programs like Erasmus+, ESC, and CERV to supplement formal civic education efforts (national level).

The recommendations for the theme "Services and Activities of the Youth Centre" aim to ensure that youth centres both locally and across the European Union effectively meet the diverse needs and interests of young people, providing a safe and enriching environment for their personal development and community engagement:

- Services and activities at the youth centre should be accessible to a wide spectrum of youth, ensuring affordability through mechanisms such as a volunteer points system. This system could allow youth facing economic and social challenges to earn points that can be exchanged for paid services at the centre or donated to others. Additionally, extended operating hours and enhanced public transport options should be provided to enable young people from surrounding areas to easily access the centre's activities and return home via public transport.
- Participatory budgeting must form the foundation for engaging youth in developing and implementing activities and services at the youth centre. Establish mechanisms to enable participatory budgeting, such as monthly or quarterly forum discussions and open calls for projects. These processes should be clear, transparent, and designed to minimize administrative burdens for youth applicants.
- Establish continuous mechanisms for monitoring and assessing youth needs, incorporating regular feedback channels from the youth community.
- Communication with and for youth should be transparent, youth-friendly, and accessible in various formats, particularly for those facing health, geographical, and cultural challenges. Furthermore, it is recommended the establishment of an info-point within the youth centre that provides relevant information and services catering to youth interests.
- Youth centres should offer access to psychological counselling services in a confidential manner, with options for anonymous access when needed. Additionally, organize group counseling and therapy sessions led by young psychologists under supervision, to facilitate peer learning and engage youth with specific skills and knowledge.
- Allocate a dedicated physical space within the youth centre, such as a room, specifically for youth to self-organize and manage leisure activities. This space could include youth clubs or sections within the centre with a small kitchen, facilitating meal preparation and cultural exchange activities through cuisine.
- Offer free access to technology, including apps and paid programs for activities like programming, video production, graphic design, and communication at the youth centre. Ensure comprehensive support services are available for using this technology, such as assistance with sound production for concerts and using photography or video equipment for production and post-production needs.
- Create dedicated zones for quiet study, reading and relaxation with round-the-clock free access to youth-oriented print and digital publications.
- Provide advisory services for formal education, offering quarterly or yearly informative sessions on various learning opportunities, including high school options, study programs, and lifelong learning opportunities.

- Facilitate a wide range of opportunities for creative expression, encompassing visual art, music, video, photography, dance, theatre, and more. Provide both physical and digital spaces, including equipped art studios, rooms for sound and video production, music rooms, and relevant programs. Ensure supportive feedback and reflection on creative outputs from artists, musicians, producers, and other experts.
- Coordinate short-term and long-term non-formal educational programs focusing on digital literacy and safety, media and information literacy, project management, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy, aiming to foster inclusive communication skills, life-applicable skills such as writing CVs and basic home repairs, as well as creative development through workshops like ceramic and clay crafting.
- Facilitate volunteering opportunities within the youth centre to encourage peer learning, skill exchange, self-organization of leisure time, and the development of diverse skill sets relevant to the labour market.
- Support young people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, including foreigners, in integrating into society and familiarizing themselves with local culture. Organize activities such as cultural exchanges, language learning, communal cooking events, and social gatherings to facilitate integration and foster community understanding and cohesion.

These recommendations aim to create inclusive and supportive environments where young people can thrive, engage actively in their communities, and develop essential skills for their personal and professional lives.