

GROUNDUP

FINAL PUBLICATION is

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DISCLAIMER

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PROCESSES THE GROUNDUP TOOLBOX

1

a. From GroundUp

Introduction

From the GroundUp: Fostering Rural Youth Participation in the EU Agenda is a Network of Towns project under the CERV programme. It originated from a collaboration between Local Action Groups, municipalities, and civil society organisations across 14 EU Member States. The project, implemented over 21 months (January 2024 – September 2025), aimed to actively engage and empower citizens from rural and peripheral areas of Europe, with a special focus on young people. These communities are often underrepresented in EU democratic processes and considered less informed about European issues.

The European Elections 2024 were treated as a critical momentum – not only for European politics, but also for rural and peripheral territories whose future is deeply affected by European decisions.

The project recognised new threats to democratic participation:

- Hate speech, disinformation, fake news, misleading content
- Cybersecurity threats and conservative political shifts
- Resentments undermining trust in democracy

In this context, GroundUp sought to:

- Strengthen the role of youth in shaping local and EU agendas
- Create spaces for debates, dialogues, and exchanges across Europe
- Develop a toolbox of replicable methods for engaging citizens in democratic processes

By combining international conferences, citizens' dialogues, structured debates, and participatory formats such as the World Café, the project built both local and transnational platforms for exchange. The aim was not only to raise awareness but to transform young citizens into active participants in shaping their future.

b. International events & their content

Get inspired

GroundUp structured its activities into Work Packages (WPs) combining:

- Kick-off and webinars for knowledge-building and internal training
- European conferences (open to citizens and politicians)

- Citizens' Dialogues and Oxford Debates (with youth and decision-makers)
- Study visit to Brussels to get to know the EU institutional multilevel system
- World Cafés (ensuring inclusive, multi-perspective exchanges)

This multi-layered design allowed each partner to connect local-level citizen activities with international events, ensuring that outcomes from small towns and rural areas fed into the European debate.

WP2 — Poland

18–20 June 2024
LAG Dolina Rzeki Grabi

The first in-situ GroundUp event took place on 18–20 June 2024 in central Poland, hosted by LAG Dolina Rzeki Grabi. It gathered representatives of all 14 project countries and over 130 participants for a public European conference and a Citizens' Dialogue with youth. The meeting examined practical forms of civic engagement in rural areas, Community-Led Local Development, LEADER, and local participatory budgeting, while linking them with the 2024 European Parliament elections and the broader framework of EU values and democratic standards. It also included an internal Steering Committee meeting where partners refined the formats and topics for upcoming local youth activities.

The programme brought together national, regional and local decision-makers, experts, civil society actors and students. The CLLD expert panel, featuring senior representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, regional authorities and mayors, assessed the impact of LEADER and the role of LAGs in shaping community-led strategies. Youth moderated the debate on fair and equal elections, demonstrating strong interest in democratic participation. Contributions by Prof. Katarzyna Zajda on Smart Villages and by Przemysław Górski on participatory budgeting offered concrete tools for strengthening local democracy. Partners agreed on a common set of themes for all local activities and a list of approved participatory formats to be used across the consortium.

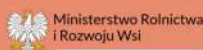
GroundUP Conference is UP

From Community-Led Local Development, LEADER and local
participatory budgeting to the European Citizens Initiative.

Citizens' Dialogue: Elections to the EP 2024 - why do we
need fair and equal elections? The role of youth in EU
democracy

Kolumna Park Hotel, Przygony

19/06/2024
9:00 - 15:15



From Community-Led Local Development, LEADER and local participatory budgeting
to the European Citizens Initiative.
Citizens' Dialogue: Elections to the EP 2024 - why do we need fair and equal
elections? The role of youth in EU democracy

9:30 Registration

10:00 - 10:30

Conference participants welcome

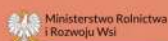
- Project Coordinator - LAG Sdruzeni SPLAV - **Kristina Holmová**, GroundUp project leader
- Project Partner - LAG "Dolina rzeki Grabi" - **Anna Doliwa**, President of the Board
- Welcome and presentation of GroundUp partners, the topics of the event, brief summary of the 2024 EP elections - **Dr. Małgorzata Wochowska**, Project Manager
- Speeches by invited Polish guests

10:30 - 11:30

Expert panel debate on Community-led Local
Development and LEADER

- **Adam Nowak** - Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
- **Łukasz Bartosik** - Member of the Bełchatów District Council
- **Bronisław Węglewski** - President of the Agricultural Chamber of the Łódź Voivodeship, mayor of Buczek Municipality, Chairman of the council of LAG "Dolina rzeki Grabi"
- **Robert Jarzabek** - Mayor of Dobroń Municipality, Vice-chairman of the council of LAG "Dolina rzeki Grabi"
- GroundUP Partners: **Dimitris Bogiatzis**, **Kristina Holmová**, **Fabrizio Cacciatore**, **Anni Linsemark**

Discussion Moderator:
Anna Doliwa



11:30 - 12:00

Coffee break

12:00 - 12:45

Social innovations for rural areas in Poland and
worldwide (Smart Villages concept) - **Dr. habil.
Katarzyna Zajda**, Prof. at the University of Łódź, Head of
the Department of Rural and Urban Sociology

12:45 - 13:15

Participatory budgeting - **Przemysław Górski** -
Advocacy Specialist at Habitat for Humanity Foundation

13:15 - 13:30

European Citizens' Initiative - **Dr. Małgorzata
Wochowska**, project manager

13:30 - 14:00

Coffee break

14:00 - 15:00

Civic dialogue: 2024 European Parliament Elections -
why do we need fair and equal elections? The role of
youth in EU democracy - **Igor Jędrzejczak**, Councilor of
the City Council of Łask in the current term, Marshal of the
Youth Parliament of the Republic of Poland (2023-2024)
and **Matěj Slesinger**, Project's Communication Manager
GroundUP, LAG SPLAV

15:00 - 15:15

Discussion and closing of the conference

Follow us on social media!

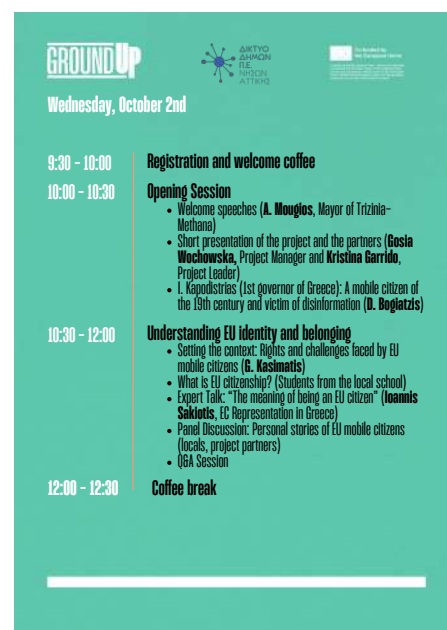


WP3 — Greece

1–4 October 2024
LAG of Attica Islands

The second international event, hosted by the LAG of Attica Islands under the auspices of the Municipality of Troizinia–Methana, took place on 1–4 October 2024 in Galatas and Methana. Delegations from all project partners and more than 100 students from six local schools participated. The aim was to deepen understanding of EU citizenship, the rights of mobile EU citizens, European identity and belonging, and the influence of misinformation on democratic participation. The event combined a public European conference, youth-led presentations, while partners continued project-planning discussions.

Highlights included expert contributions from the European Commission Representation in Greece and local political leaders, as well as analytical sessions on stereotypes affecting rural regions. Students played a central role by presenting their perspectives on EU citizenship and sharing experiences from European Parliament Ambassador Schools and youth parliaments. Inputs from specialists such as Clementine Diakomanoli on EU actions against disinformation and fact-checking practitioners provided a clear methodological grounding for addressing misinformation at local level.



WP4 — Sweden

5–7 February 2025
LAG Halland, Katrinebergs
Folkhögskola

The Swedish event, hosted by Community Led Local Development Halland at Katrinebergs Folkhögskola, focused on the question of how to create and maintain trust in the EU and its institutions in an era of disinformation, fake news and misleading content, in the aftermath of the European elections. Over 100 participants from 14 partner countries and the Halland region took part in a public European conference with a citizens' dialogue, followed by a study visit and internal networking activities for project partners. The event also served as preparation for the study visit to Brussels by deepening understanding of EU-level debates and equipping youth with arguments and examples.



EUROPEAN CONFERENCE:
HOW DO WE CREATE AND MAINTAIN TRUST IN THE EU
AND ITS INSTITUTIONS IN TIMES OF DISINFORMATION

Community Led Local Development Halland invites you to an event filled with interesting lectures, inclusive Citizen's Dialogue, engaging World Café and much more!

The event is part of the international GroundUp project, which engages young people from rural areas across Europe in both democratic processes and EU-related issues. We are proud partners of the project – together we are creating change for a more inclusive future!

**6/2/2025
9–15
KATRINEBERGS FOLKHÖGSKOLA**

TOPIC:
After the elections to European Parliament, how do we create and maintain trust in the EU and its institutions in view of disinformation, fake news, and misleading content?

PLACE:
Katrinebergs folkhögskola, 311 65 Vessigebo

LANGUAGE:
English

CONTACT:
Maria Wängsell
+4673-3301961, maria.wangsell@lluh.se

PROGRAM

8.00-9.00 REGISTRATION

9.00-9.10 WELCOME SPEECH

**9.10-9.40 PRESENTATION
A NEW EU PARLIAMENT, A NEW EU COMMISSION,
AND A CHANGING EU**
Sven Kastö, Head of the SBHSS office in Brussels, discusses the challenges the EU will face in the coming years and what they mean for the local and regional levels in Europe.

**9.40-10.10 PRESENTATION
DISINFORMATION**
Andreas Jahrehorn Önerfors, course leader at the Media Institute Fojo, talks about increasing understanding of disinformation and its impact on political trust.

10.10-10.35 COFFEE BREAK

10.35-12.15 WORLD CAFÉ
What do I need to achieve and maintain trust in the EU institutions in relation to disinformation and outcomes?

12.15-13.00 LUNCH

13.00-14.30 CITIZENS' DIALOGUE
Young people from rural areas meet politicians in discussions about digital transformation and youth engagement.

14.30-15.00 CLOSING AND COFFEE BREAK

CITIZENS' DIALOGUE
Young people from rural areas and politicians meet in a discussion about digital transformation and youth engagement.

Works as a flexographic printer, is actively involved in several volunteer organizations, including Hela Sverige Ska Leva, Lokalt Ledd Utveckling Halland and Mahults Bygdgård.

Oskar Öyläck

Communications Manager for Hylte Municipality, runs a business in digital design and photography, and, together with her partner has a small goat breeding operation.

Ida Karlsson Lander

Michael lives in Simlångsdalen and currently works as an insurance carpenter. He is also studying trauma medical care.

Michael Khumgoen

Emma lives in Morup, she is currently working as an instructor at Munkagård High School.

Emma Svensson

Head of the Rural Youth Parliament in Slovakia, he likes to travel, but especially abroad, where he meets new people and together they come up with new topics for projects.

Jakub Dvorsky

Young people from rural areas participating in the Citizens' Dialogue

Jan Nilze Green Party

Mikaela Wallerström Moderate Party

Miranda Budimova Social Democratic Party

Jenny Håkansson Centre Party

Rebecca Sellgren

The programme featured a keynote by the Head of the SBHSS Brussels office on the new European Parliament and Commission and the strategic challenges highlighted in the Draghi report, followed by a lecture on disinformation and its impact on political trust by a Fojo Media Institute expert. In a World Café, participants reflected on what they need to trust EU institutions in a context of contested information, and then moved into a citizens' dialogue where rural youth and politicians discussed digital transformation, youth engagement and the limits of social media as a dialogue space. The afternoon study visit to a LEADER-supported local brewery and a presentation by Europa Direkt Halland showcased how EU programmes and information centres can build everyday trust in the Union. Closing reflections stressed the importance of safe offline fora – particularly in schools – where young people and decision-makers can meet beyond polarised online environments.

WP6 — Belgium

7–9 April 2025
Brussels Study Visit

The Brussels study visit gathered over 45 participants from 14 countries to examine the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) in the context of EU citizenship rights and to link local GroundUp consultations with EU-level policymaking. Over three days, the group visited the European Parliament, the European Commission and regional representation offices, meeting MEPs, officials and civil society representatives to discuss youth participation, European Citizens' Initiatives and the implementation of CoFoE recommendations. The visit functioned as both a capacity-building measure and a channel through which rural youth voices from partner regions could be transferred to EU institutions.

Key moments included exchanges with MEP Merja Kyllönen on parliamentary work, youth engagement and combating misinformation, and a session with the ECIT Foundation on citizenship rights and ECIs. Meetings at the Łódzkie Regional Office and with Commission services helped participants understand how regional advocacy and programmes such as CERV can support local democratic innovation. Throughout the visit, partners and young participants shared experiences from preparatory local activities (World Cafés, Oxford debates, citizens' dialogues) and discussed possible follow-up actions in their territories. The main recommendation was to better connect such decentralised consultations with structured EU participation tools, ensuring that insights from rural youth feed into future policy debates.

WP7 — Czechia

11–13 June 2025
Rychnov nad Kněžnou

The final face-to-face GroundUp event took place in Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Czechia, and examined how conservative political shifts, disinformation and social polarisation affect the quality of life and democratic participation of rural youth. Young people from local schools, local stakeholders and partners from across Europe spent a full conference day together, followed by informal cultural activities. A distinctive feature of this event was that local students remained with the group throughout the day, taking part in discussions, the World Café and the Oxford Debate, which considerably increased the depth of youth input.

The conference opened with a keynote on “Left-behind places in Czechia and Europe”, focusing on youth challenges and opportunities, followed by a student-driven World Café on rural youth perspectives regarding depopulation, unemployment and disengagement. In the afternoon, expert inputs on conservative shifts in the political sphere, including the case of the Motorist Party, provided a theoretical and comparative framing. The Oxford Debate on the gender dimension of politics allowed young delegates to present researched arguments on representation, equality and power structures, strengthening their critical thinking and public speaking skills. Complemented by informal exchanges during a château visit and live music, the event fostered mutual understanding across regions and showed that interactive deliberative formats are particularly effective in engaging rural youth on sensitive political issues.

Thursday, 12/6 - Conference, Rychnov nad Kněžnou Chateau

9:00	Opening and welcome
9:10	Introduction to the conference topic
9:45	World Café with local students Tackling youth unemployment and depopulation in rural areas
11:15	Coffee break
11:30	What are Conservative shifts and how do they influence today's issues? How do the rural youth live and what do they want? Current trends in Germany and Western Europe: the Conservative wave
12:30	Lunch
13:15	Oxford Debate: Gender dimension of politics Introduction to the topic and the current affairs
13:30	Oxford Debate
15:00 - 16:00	Coffee break & wrap-up

Thursday, 12/6 - Post-conference informal program

16:00 - 18:00	Tour of the Chateau, Live music concert
20:00	Dinner Hotel Havel, Staré nám. 61, 516 01 Rychnov nad Kněžnou
21:00 - 24:00	Social evening

Friday, 13/6

7:00	Farewell and Departure to Prague (original pick up location) Packed lunch sandwiches before leaving to go!
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CONTACTS

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MATĚJ ŠLESINGER

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c. Online events

Inspirational webinars with experts

The project hosted online webinars to bring expert voices closer to youth and citizens. Examples include:

- Czech Republic (Feb 2024): Current political narratives impacting rural Europe
- Germany (Dec 2024 & Jan 2025): The Maastricht Treaty and rights of EU citizens – mobility, living, working, and political participation
- Austria (Sept 2025): Transnational cooperation of youth and municipalities, with a special focus on new technologies and e-democracy

These sessions were open to the public, combining expert insights with youth perspectives.

WP1 Online Webinar (Czechia)

The opening online event, hosted by Sdružení SPLAV, introduced partners to the project's thematic direction and set the groundwork for coordinated implementation. The first day was reserved for internal work, focusing on mutual introductions, review of the partners' initial survey, and a structured training on Project Management methodologies and tools. Partners discussed how the project will work toward its expected impact: empowering rural youth in civic and democratic processes, reinforcing mutual understanding through cross-cultural dialogue, and supporting local decision-makers in shaping long-term visions for European integration. The meeting also launched the idea of establishing a thematic Task Force that will jointly plan experts, formats, and content across the project's diverse topics, ensuring coherence between international events and local activities.

The second day was an open webinar addressing political narratives affecting rural and peripheral regions in Europe. Held in hybrid form—online for international participants and on-site in the Rychnov nad Kněžnou library—it combined expert inputs with youth engagement. The programme included a moderated debate on current political narratives, a workshop led by Million Moments for Democracy, and a lecture explaining the functioning of EU institutions. EU Commissioner

Věra Jourová contributed a dedicated video intervention highlighting the importance of democratic resilience. As part of the event, SPLAV organised the “Vote EU” video contest for secondary school students, with 18 submissions. Project partners voted on the winners, who will join the GroundUp study visit to Brussels in 2025. The initiative encouraged early civic awareness and creatively linked youth voices to the project’s European dimension.



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From the Ground Up: Fostering Rural Youth Participation in the EU Agenda

10:00

10:00 – 11:15

11:15 – 11:45

11:45 – 12:00

12:00 – 12:15

12:15 – 12:25

12:25 – 13:00

13:00

Opening

A MILLION MOMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY
workshop "I can never change anything"

Break, refreshment

Workshop reflection and introduction of the organization
A MILLION MOMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY

Introduction to the European Union institutions

Online entry of the European Commissioner Věra Jourová

Screening of competition videos and announcement of results

Discussion, Event closing



FOSTERING RURAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE EU AGENDA

Co-funded by
the European Union

Městská knihovna,
Hrdinů odboje 671,
Rychnov nad Kněžnou

Feb 29th 2024,
10 – 13 (CET)

WP5 Online Webinar (Germany)

This online event explored EU citizenship as a set of practical rights and responsibilities, with a particular emphasis on mobility, inclusion, and the tools available to citizens to influence EU policy. Designed for youth workers, educators, students, and local actors, the webinar examined how the right to live, work, travel, and study freely across the EU is implemented in practice and how these rights intersect with identity, diversity, and inclusion at local level. A central theme was the distinction between equality and equity in public policy, illustrated through examples from municipalities and Local Action Groups that apply human rights-based approaches in their daily work.

Participants were introduced to mechanisms enabling citizen participation, particularly the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), as a practical instrument for policy influence. The agenda included a session on diversity management in local communities, highlighting tools and methodologies to prevent exclusion and discrimination, and to support inclusive local governance. The panel on "European Citizenship and Education" underlined the need to embed EU-related content into school programmes, with the "Teach Me Europe" initiative presented as an emerging model for structured citizenship education.

Case studies from Austria and Italy illustrated how small municipalities can successfully implement DEI strategies, while interactive exchanges encouraged participants to reflect on their own environments. The event concluded with an Oxford Debate (January 2025) on whether EU citizenship as defined in the Maastricht Treaty provides sufficient protection and opportunities for Europeans today. Across comments, participants emphasised practical insights on human rights, digital literacy, motivation, and critical thinking as key to strengthening EU citizenship.

Webinar & Panel discussion

Free travel, living, working: The Maastricht Treaty. GroundUp on the rights of EU citizens

*Diversity management in local areas
European citizenship and education*

5 December 2024 & 17 January 2025

AGENDA

Registration link: registration form
THE REGISTRATION IS OBLIGATORY



Hosted online via zoom by
Connection:Berlin (Germany)

Overview

5 December 2024

This day is planned to reach out to external public's, beyond the project partnership.

Open for European Local Action Groups in Europe, NGOs, civil society organisations, educators, towns' and municipalities, policy makers, local actors and activists, youth workers, students. With a certificate of attendance.

10:00–11:30 CET

Webinar: diversity management in local areas

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the local area with examples from Local Action Groups and municipalities in Europe on diversity management. Facilitated by Eliza Gaust

12:00–13:30 CET

Panel discussion: European citizenship and education

GroundUp on the rights of EU citizens: free travel, living, working. Rights of EU citizens & the role of education. Moderated by Joanna Kopacka

17 January 2024

This day is dedicated to the project partners

Internal meeting of the international partners of the GroundUp project, accompanied by their close stakeholders and youth.

9:30–10:00 CET

Morning coffee with German treats and GroundUp project updates

10:00–12:00 CET

Oxford Debate part 1, introduction, examples and setting up the activity (required active participation)

Facilitated by Max Gede, political educator

12:00–13:00 CET

Break

13:00–14:00 CET

Oxford Debate: execution of the Debate (required active participation)

WP8 Final Online Conference (Austria)

The final online conference, hosted by the Municipality of Irschen on 15 September 2025, marked the International Day of Democracy and brought together 120 participants from 14 EU Member States. The event served as both a dissemination platform for GroundUp results and a forward-looking discussion on youth participation, e-democracy, and the digital–green transition. Moderated by Martina Maria Linzer, the conference opened with reflections on democratic values, followed by a keynote from Mayor Manfred Dullnig, who used the metaphor of diverse herb gardens to illustrate how democratic systems thrive through care, diversity, and shared responsibility.

The project dissemination session presented achievements across all Work Packages and showcased youth-produced materials and videos. The keynote address by Adam F.C. Fletcher, an international expert in youth participation, offered practical strategies for building youth-centred e-democracy. He highlighted varying patterns of online youth engagement, the risks of passive digital consumption, and the need for municipalities to treat youth as partners in governance. His four recommended steps—listening to youth, supporting community hubs, ensuring transparent digital spaces, and creating long-term engagement structures—were repeatedly cited by participants as the strongest input of the conference.

A panel with representatives from Austria, Czechia, Portugal, and Romania connected local challenges with EU-level opportunities and upcoming funding programmes. As the event’s outcome, participants reported increased understanding of youth cooperation and digital participation tools, and expressed interest in continuing collaboration beyond the project’s lifecycle.

Experts we recommend who contributed valuable insights

Event in Greece / October 2024

Elena Vatala

Journalist & Fact-Checker at Ellinika Hoaxes

vatala@ellinikahoaxes.gr

Elena shared with us her experience on how to recognize possible misinformation and ways to check it.

Klimentini Diakomanoli

EC official, Author of “Fake news, what does Europe do?”

klimentini.diakomanoli@ec.europa.eu

Klimentini spoke about the misinformation and hate speech and the EU approach to handle the issue

Online event hosted by Germany / December 2024

Eliza Gaust

Trainer in the area of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and anti-discrimination initiatives.

eliza.gaust@gmail.com

She contributed by explaining how equal treatment and human rights can become a policy

Event in Sweden / February 2025

Andreas Jahrehorn Önerfors

Course leader at the Media Institute Fojo

andreas.onnerfors@lnu.se

+46 480 44 67 67

Andreas spoke about increasing understanding of disinformation and its impact on political trust.

Sven Kastö

Head of the SBHSS office in Brussels

sven.kasto@sbhss.eu

+32 (0)488 90 49 43

Sven discussed the challenges the EU will face in the coming years and what they mean for the local and regional levels in Europe.

Event in Brussels / April 2025

Merja Kyllönen

The Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/124736/MERJA_KYLLONEN/home#detailedcardmep

Contact information: merja.kyllonen@ep.europa.eu / helena.taimisto@ep.europa.eu

Event in Czechia / June 2025

Josef Bernard

Head of Department, Local and Regional Studies, Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences

josef.bernard@soc.cas.cz

Josef Bernard spoke about the characteristics of peripheral regions and the political and value orientations of young people living there, providing a factual and analytical frame for the conference.

Jonáš Syrovátka

Researcher, Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

jonassyrovatka6@gmail.com

Jonáš offered a theoretical perspective on the phenomenon of conservative shifts, and presented the Czech Motorist Party as a striking example of illiberal tendencies in current politics

Max Gede

Designer and political educator, Germany

max.gede@gmail.com

Max reflected on conservative shifts from a German and wider European perspective, connecting his own experiences with broader trends and discussing their impact on young people and civic participation.

Online event Austria / September 2025

Adam F.C. Fletcher, Canada

Motivational Speaker

adamfletcher.net

Adam advocates for engagement for everyone, everywhere, all of the time. He has appeared at more than 1,000 events worldwide and consulted over 500 clients. Adam Fletcher's work is especially relevant in getting people to participate in the realms of politics and critical education.



Final Online Conference for International Day of Democracy

Join us for an inspiring celebration of youth participation and e-democracy across Europe!



Conference Highlights



Inspiring Inputs

Fresh perspectives on youth participation and democratic engagement across Europe.



Interactive Sessions

Hands-on workshops and collaborative activities with international participants.



Keynote Speaker

Adam F.C. Fletcher - Educational theorist who's taught 1,000,000+ people worldwide.



Event Details

Date & Time

Monday, 15 September 2025
09:00–12:30 CET

Location

Online via Zoom
Global accessibility

Partners

14 countries
European collaboration



Ready to Join Us?

Register Now

Secure your spot for this transformative event celebrating democracy and youth engagement.

[Register on Eventbrite](#)

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d. Participation methods used by GroundUp

Oxford-format Debates

RESOURCES

1 [Oxford debate guidelines - Oxford-style Debate The Oxford-style debate format offers opposing sides - Studocu](#)

2 [Oxford-Style Debate, Explained \(Video\)](#)

The Oxford Debate format was used in the online event (January 2025) and Czechia (June 2025). Unlike open dialogues, these debates followed a formalised structure around a motion. Two teams argued either for or against a proposition, with equal time to present evidence, counterarguments, and rebuttals.

During the online Debate, young people debated the motion: "This House believes that EU citizenship rights established by the Maastricht Treaty are sufficient to guarantee the inclusion and protection of all EU citizens across member states"

In Czechia, the debate centred on the gender dimension of politics and how gender affects rural youth's representation in decision-making.

Oxford Debates in GroundUp showed that structured, competitive debate can both sharpen youth critical thinking and give them a stronger voice when engaging with policymakers. The Oxford-style debate format involves a debate on a predetermined statement – also called a “motion” – from two opposing perspectives. The two sides either argue “for” or “against” the motion within a formalized structure.

- Debate:
- Purpose: The primary goal of a debate is to argue a position, persuade others, and win over an audience or opponent. It is inherently competitive.
- Nature: Debate is structured, adversarial, and focuses on presenting arguments and counterarguments. Participants aim to defend their stance and disprove the opposing viewpoint.

Approach: In a debate, critical thinking, logical reasoning, and evidence-based arguments are key. Participants often use rhetoric and persuasive techniques to make their case compellingly.

Outcome: The desired outcome of a debate is to convince the audience or judge of the validity of one's position. It aims to reach a clear winner and loser based on the strength of arguments presented.

While dialogue is about creating a shared understanding through cooperative and empathetic communication, debate is about arguing a position and persuading others through structured and competitive interaction. Both have their place in effective communication but serve different purposes and require different approaches.

International Citizens' Dialogues

The Citizens' Dialogue format was implemented in Poland (June 2024) and Sweden (Feb 2025). Unlike debates, these sessions are non-competitive, collaborative exchanges between citizens and politicians.

In Poland, the dialogue focused on election integrity – exploring why fair and equal elections matter, especially for youth. Local politicians and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) joined to listen directly to students' concerns.

In Sweden, the dialogue addressed trust in EU institutions after the European elections. Young citizens reflected on how disinformation and fake news undermine democracy and worked together with decision-makers to propose strategies for rebuilding trust.

Citizens' Dialogues were essential in the project: they created mutual understanding, strengthened relationships, and provided a safe space for citizens to express their ideas about the EU.

Citizens' Dialogues

1. Purpose: Dialogue aims to foster understanding, build relationships, and explore different perspectives. It is more collaborative and focuses on mutual respect and open-mindedness.
2. Nature: It is usually open-ended and non-competitive. Participants are encouraged to listen actively, share their thoughts honestly, and reflect on others' viewpoints.
3. Approach: Emphasizes empathy, patience, and the exploration of underlying assumptions and values. There is less emphasis on reaching a consensus or solving a problem.
4. Outcome: The primary outcome is enhanced understanding, improved relationships, and personal growth. It often leads to deeper insights and greater appreciation of diverse perspectives.

In summary, while dialogue is about building understanding and connections through respectful and open-ended conversation, discussion is about exchanging ideas and information to reach a specific goal or decision. Both are valuable communication methods, but they serve different purposes and are suited to different contexts.

Citizens' Dialogue session is intended to offer a space for citizens to present their ideas, thoughts, and opinions on what the European Union should be. Citizens' Dialogue were widely used by the European Commission to address the disconnect felt by citizens from the political

RESOURCES

1 European Commission. Citizens' Dialogues – Past Initiatives. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/get-involved/past-initiatives/citizens-dialogues_en

2 European Committee of the Regions. Citizens' Debate – Poland. Available at: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/events/pages/citizens-debate-poland.aspx>

3 Debating Europe. Democracy – Topic Overview. Available at: <https://debatingeurope.eu/topic/democracy/>

center in Brussels. Typically, these Dialogues feature a high-level politician, but in our case, we will focus on engaging with students and young people.

The goal of the Citizens' Dialogue is to foster a genuine dialogue with the participants, especially the young people. The event typically starts with an introduction by a moderator or facilitator who outlines the purpose, agenda, and rules of engagement for the dialogue.

The World Café in Sweden

A World Café session was organised in Halland, Sweden (Feb 2025) as part of the Citizens' Dialogue. The World Café methodology enabled small group conversations in multiple rounds, with participants rotating tables and hosts capturing insights.

This method proved especially useful for:

- Ensuring that every participant contributed
- Breaking old thought patterns and catalysing new ideas
- Building connections between rural youth and policymakers
- Exploring diverse perspectives on how to maintain trust in EU institutions

The Swedish World Café showed how this method can complement formal debates and dialogues by providing a creative, inclusive, and less formal setting for idea generation. What is a World Café? When should I use this method?

The World Café method is designed to create a safe, welcoming environment in which to intentionally connect multiple ideas and perspectives on a topic by engaging participants in several rounds of small-group conversation.

The World Café method is particularly useful when you want to be sure to explore a topic from multiple perspectives, to ensure that everyone in a room contributes in a conversation, and/or when you want to encourage participants to make new connections. The method can also be useful for gathering information from grantees and beneficiaries at the community level.

A Closer Look: Captured on Camera

To bring the project's atmosphere closer to you, we also filmed three short videos during our key international events. These videos offer small windows into conversations, emotions, and the energy that young people brought into each meeting. Through these videos, even those who could not join us in person can get a sense of what it felt like to meet, learn, and explore Europe together.



[GroundUp: EU
Citizenship and the rights
of mobile citizens, Greece
1-4 October 2024](#)



[From the GroundUp
Study Visit: Brussels 7-9
April 2025](#)



[GroundUp: Conference on
rural youth and
conservative shifts in
politics, Czechia 11-13
June 2025](#)

GROUNDUP GROUND WORK

2

a. Overview of Local Actions

Between mid-2024 and early 2025, GroundUp partners hosted a series of local activities focusing on the project's key themes: digital transformation, rural youth unemployment and depopulation, and climate action. These local debates, workshops, and youth dialogues provided not only valuable insights into the realities faced by young people in rural areas but also inspired ideas worth replicating. The main goal of Local Actions was strengthening local youth to collect opinions and suggestions to contribute to the future of Europe and their own territory.

Altogether there were 14 Local Actions in 13 countries of the EU. They were hosted by project partners locally, face to face.

Methods used

**LOCAL
DISCUSSIONS IN
PARTNER REGIONS**

**WORLD CAFÉ,
CITIZENS'
DIALOGUE,
OXFORD DEBATE**

**GUIDED BY THREE
COMMON THEMES**

**YOUNG PEOPLE
ANSWERED
PREPARED
QUESTIONS**

**RESULTS SHARED
AND COMPARED
ACROSS
COUNTRIES**

b. Examples of Citizens' Debates/Dialogues hosted by Partners

Italy (Maghweb)	EVENT	Ground Up discussion – fires, rising temperatures and water scarcity
	TOPIC	Climate action and environmental sustainability
	SUMMARY	Participants expressed concerns about the intensifying effects of climate change, particularly forest fires and droughts. There was a strong call for more education, youth-led awareness campaigns, and grassroots engagement in sustainability.
	SUGGESTED ACTIONS AND REPLICATION TIPS	Encourage youth to host workshops in schools and communities about climate adaptation. Enable access to micro-grants for local green actions (tree planting, clean-up days). Involve youth in local climate committees.

Sweden (LAG Halland)	EVENT	Young people from rural areas meet politicians
	TOPIC	Digital transformation, unemployment & depopulation
	SUMMARY	A youth-led dialogue with local politicians explored how to improve the attractiveness of rural areas. Young people emphasized the importance of digital inclusion and entrepreneurial opportunities.
	SUGGESTED ACTIONS AND REPLICATION TIPS	Proposals to improve business climate and access to high-speed internet. A campaign concept promoting “tranquility, affordability, and nature” to attract young families. Use local youth councils or school groups to co-design regional promotional campaigns. Link young digital entrepreneurs with municipal development offices.

Portugal (Municipality of Torres Novas)

EVENT

Digital transformation and youth engagement

TOPIC

Digital transformation

SUMMARY

An Oxford-style debate addressed the use of digital platforms in civic participation. Youth discussed the dual challenges of low engagement and exposure to disinformation. Participants requested clearer guidance on verifying information sources. Debaters stressed the need to “speak youth’s digital language” through social media activism.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS AND REPLICATION TIPS

Include media literacy modules in school curricula. Support youth-run digital campaigns for civic participation. Municipalities could provide training on fact-checking and digital content creation.

Italy (LAG Prealpi e Dolomiti)

EVENT

From the Ground Up

TOPIC

Youth unemployment and rural depopulation

SUMMARY

Young participants discussed the rural exodus and how to make rural life more appealing.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS AND REPLICATION TIPS

Events and activities that highlight the creative, social, and professional potential of rural areas. Promotion of local co-working hubs and artistic residencies. Encouraging entrepreneurial storytelling via social media (e.g., interviews with local youth who started businesses).

Bulgaria (No Frontiers
21 Century Association)

EVENT

Citizen's Dialogue: Climate Action and Environmental Sustainability

TOPIC

Climate action

SUMMARY

Held at the local town hall, this citizen dialogue welcomed ideas for practical climate initiatives.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS AND
REPLICATION TIPS**

Invite MEPs and local officials for joint workshops on climate policies. Disseminate eco-advice leaflets in schools. Launch green idea contests in rural schools.

c. Summaries of their outcomes and impacts at local level

Local events across GroundUp partner regions showed that young people want to engage – if given the tools, spaces, and respect. These localized activities offer clear pathways for replication and demonstrate that even modest initiatives can significantly empower rural youth.

Youth perspectives on digital transformation, youth unemployment and depopulation, and climate action and sustainability:

Digital Transformation and Youth Engagement

- | Social media - best when visual, short, interactive
- | Fake news - common challenge, hard to distinguish sources
- | Solutions - digital literacy, critical thinking, awareness over censorship

Youth Unemployment and Rural Depopulation

- | Job creation - improve business climate, support entrepreneurship
- | Campaigns - show peace, safety, culture, fun in rural life
- | EU programmes - Erasmus & internships useful, but not enough to keep youth home

Climate Action and Sustainability

- | Local action - awareness, clean-ups, inviting politicians
- | Debates - schools, municipalities, EU consultations
- | Role of schools - more environmental education, practical campaigns

Key Takeaways

Youth want to be included in local decisions

Digital skills and critical thinking are essential

Climate action is a shared priority

Rural regions should offer real opportunities, not just special occasions

Cross-cutting insights

Desire for real involvement - many youth expressed that they don't feel heard, even if youth councils exist on paper.

Need for simplicity - several comments emphasized that participation opportunities must be easy to understand and access.

Mismatch between formal and informal engagement - young people prefer informal platforms (like social media or events), while municipalities often focus on formal channels.