



HEIs as Innovative Triggers of Sustainable Development in European Cities in Post Covid-19 era



Summary of Students Survey Research

*Analysis of the Evaluation of the Pilot Course Conducted as Part of the
HEIsCITI Project – HEIs as Innovative Triggers of Sustainable Development
in European Cities in the Post–COVID-19 Era*

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I. Introduction

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the survey study was to determine the opinions of pilot participants regarding the conducted classes and their impact on students' awareness and participatory competencies. The study aimed to identify key trends, preferences, and areas requiring further development in the field of social participation and civic engagement. The results support the assessment of the quality and usefulness of the educational materials developed within the project.

Scope of the study

The study included a group of 100 respondents representing various stakeholder groups, including student and academic staff representatives, local government representatives, and other key participants in participatory processes. The questionnaire consisted of eight closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The questions addressed issues such as the effectiveness of the classes, the development of participatory competencies, and potential opportunities for respondents' involvement in future initiatives.

Research methodology

The study was conducted using paper-based questionnaires distributed to participants—observers of the pilot—both during the pilot and after its completion. This method enabled direct contact with respondents and the collection of real-time responses, which further increased participant engagement. The questionnaire design included closed-ended questions with responses coded using letters (e.g., a, b, c, d). Each response was marked with an “x” in the appropriate column, which facilitated data analysis.

A quantitative approach was applied in the analysis of results, taking into account the percentage distribution of responses for each question.

As a result of the study, reliable data were obtained, providing a solid basis for further analysis and the development of recommendations regarding directions for the advancement of education in the field of public participation.

II. Discussion of Survey Results

Question 1: Represented group

Distribution of responses

Table 1. Target groups represented in the study

No.	Target group	Responses (%)
a.	Representative of a local government or public institution	12
b.	Representative of a non-governmental organization	8
c.	Student / pupil	45
d.	Lecturer / teacher	24
e.	Other local stakeholder	11
Total		100

Source: survey results

The study ensured the participation of diverse groups of respondents; however, due to the specific nature of the project, the largest groups of respondents were teachers and lecturers as well as students and pupils.

Question 2: Did the observed classes contribute to increasing students' awareness in line with the objectives of the classes?

Question 2 was a single-choice question.

Below are the answer options and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers:

- a. Definitely yes – 65%
- b. Rather yes – 23%
- c. Neither yes nor no – 4%
- d. Rather no – 8%
- e. Definitely no – 0%

The results indicate that the vast majority of respondents positively assessed the impact of the classes on increasing students' awareness. Only eight respondents gave a negative response, and in some cases additional comments appeared, such as: insufficient time for observation; not all students are interested in this type of activity, etc.

Question 3: Did the observed classes encourage students to increase their participation in participatory processes related to inclusive and sustainable urban development?

Question 3 was a single-choice question.

Below are the answer options and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers:

- a. Definitely yes – 69%
- b. Rather yes – 27%
- c. Neither yes nor no – 4%
- d. Rather no – 0%
- e. Definitely no – 0%

A clear majority of respondents (96% in total) positively assessed the impact of the classes in encouraging students to participate in participatory processes. This indicates an overall positive evaluation of the classes and their effectiveness in promoting engagement in participatory processes.

Question 4: Did the observed classes teach students how to use specific participatory tools, e.g. public consultations, public debates, etc.?

Question 4 was a single-choice question.

Below are the answer options and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers:

- a. Definitely yes – 72%
- b. Rather yes – 19%
- c. Neither yes nor no – 8%
- d. Rather no – 2%
- e. Definitely no – 0%

The results show that almost all respondents positively evaluated the classes in terms of teaching specific participatory tools.

Question 5: Should the observed classes also be disseminated in other schools and higher education institutions as a model approach to education in the field of public participation and the building of civil society?

Question 5 was a single-choice question.

Below are the answer options and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers:

- a. Definitely yes – 77%
- b. Rather yes – 21%
- c. Neither yes nor no – 1%
- d. Rather no – 1%
- e. Definitely no – 0%

The results indicate that an overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) assessed the classes as suitable for dissemination in other schools and higher education institutions.

Question 6: In which areas should participatory competencies of pupils and students be developed and used in order to build civil society?

Question 6 was a multiple-choice question.

Table 2 below presents the answer options and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers.

Table 2. Areas in which participatory competencies of pupils and students should be developed and applied to build civil society

No.	Area of activity	Responses (%)
a.	Public consultations on strategic documents	36
b.	Planning and implementation of revitalization programs	12
c.	Preparation of new public projects	55
d.	Preparation of new social projects	71
e.	Preparation of new business projects	16
f.	Sessions of city councils / municipal councils / district councils and village councils	21
g.	Meetings of local government committees	9
h.	Youth city councils / youth municipal councils	14
i.	Ongoing evaluation of local government authorities	6
j.	Election campaigns	7
k.	Participatory (citizens') budgets	78
l.	Activities aimed at equalizing opportunities, e.g. universal design	53
m.	Activities supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), e.g. social actions raising awareness of climate change	86
n.	Activities related to the revitalization of neglected urban areas	21
o.	Activities related to social life in the post-COVID era	88
p.	Other	0

Source: survey results

The results indicate clear priorities in building civil society through the participatory competencies of pupils and students.

The areas of highest priority (social and global engagement) result from indications by a

decisive majority of respondents, who believe that participatory competencies should be applied in areas directly related to quality of life and the challenges of the contemporary world.

With regard to activities related to social life in the post-COVID era, indicated by 88% of respondents, this result is consistent with the objectives of the HEIsCITI project, which emphasizes the need to rebuild social ties weakened by the pandemic.

The high number of indications (86%) concerning the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals points to a strong level of environmental awareness among the younger generation and a desire to have a real impact on global problems.

A large proportion of respondents also see a need to use educational materials in projects related to participatory (citizens') budgets (78% of indications), an area that provides a sense of agency and direct influence over the allocation of public funds.

Pupils and students want to be agents of change, which is one of the foundations of the methodology developed within the project, as indicated by 71% of respondents.

The study also analyzed areas of activity related to practical design and equality. A significant share of respondents see the need to engage in project-based and inclusive activities, such as the preparation of new public projects (55%) and activities aimed at equalizing opportunities, e.g. universal design (53%). In these areas, the tools developed and recommended within the project—such as Observations, Spatial Mapping for analyzing residents' needs, and Prototyping of new solutions—may be particularly useful.

With regard to areas requiring strengthening related to formal local politics, relatively low scores were recorded for areas associated with traditional, institutional politics: ongoing evaluation of local government authorities (6%), election campaigns (7%), and meetings of local government committees (9%). These areas are of limited interest to respondents in terms of using the educational materials developed within the project, or respondents may not know how to apply these materials for such purposes. This indicates the need to change the model of communication between public authorities and young citizens—from formal

participation to a model based on co-creation, as suggested by the project guidelines for local governments.

Question 7: Who should be involved in similar projects aimed at developing participatory competencies of pupils and students and raising their awareness of inclusive and sustainable urban development?

Question 7 was a multiple-choice question.

Table 3 below presents the answer options and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers.

Table 3. Target groups that should be involved in projects developing participatory competencies of pupils and students and raising their awareness of inclusive and sustainable urban development

No.	Area of activity	Responses (%)
a.	Local government	76
b.	Schools and higher education institutions	82
c.	Public institutions operating in the given area	61
d.	Entrepreneurs and their associations	33
e.	Local non-governmental organizations	72
f.	Media	39
g.	Other	0

Source: survey results

Interpretation of results

By far the most important groups that should be involved in participatory projects are schools and higher education institutions (82% of indications), which confirms that the educational and academic environment is perceived as the primary space for shaping civic attitudes.

Universities act as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and the practical challenges faced by cities, including sustainable development and urban revitalization.

The high rating of local governments (76% of indications) underscores the need to move away from a model in which universities and schools operate in isolation toward systematic cooperation with public administration. Local governments are essential to ensure that pupil and student projects can be realistically tested and implemented in urban space. In addition, local and regional authorities can provide topics for such projects and actively participate in

their implementation, benefiting from the innovative approaches of young people to solving local problems.

With regard to non-governmental organizations (72% of indications) and public institutions (61% of indications), respondents recognize the significant role of these entities, which possess specialized knowledge and operational flexibility. NGOs are perceived as key intermediaries that help engage minorities and marginalized groups, which is fundamental to inclusivity. Their experience in social mobilization is crucial for the success of local projects in which school pupils and students may also be involved. Public institutions operating in a given area—such as libraries, cultural centers, or sports facilities—provide platforms for dialogue and a material base for young people’s activities within their local communities.

Media (39% of indications) and entrepreneurs (33% of indications) received slightly lower ratings, although these groups complete the structure of a modern participatory ecosystem. The role of the media is primarily to increase the visibility of successful cooperation between young people and cities, thereby motivating further participants to engage. Entrepreneurs and their associations are seen as partners who can support projects through corporate social responsibility programs and by offering internships, thus linking civic participation with professional development.

Question 8: Do you see the possibility of personal involvement in the future in similar projects aimed at developing students’ participatory competencies and raising their awareness of inclusive and sustainable urban development?

Question 8 was a single-choice question.

Below are the answer options and the percentage distribution of respondents’ answers:

- a. Definitely yes – 72%
- b. Rather yes – 21%
- c. Neither yes nor no – 5%
- d. Rather no – 2%
- e. Definitely no – 0%

Interpretation of results

The results indicate that the vast majority of respondents (92%) see the possibility of personal involvement in similar projects in the future.

Question 9: Would you like to add anything?



Question 9 was an open-ended question.

Below is a summary of the most representative responses provided by respondents.

Statement 1 (teacher)

This educational material should be disseminated quickly among teachers, as planning how to use it during classes may take time.

Statement 2 (teacher)

There is a lack of information on how to encourage pupils to attend such classes; a single homeroom or civic education lesson is not sufficient.

Statement 3 (local government representative)

We would be willing to implement this approach; however, I miss clear guidelines on how to establish communication with schools and universities. Who should be our partner: the rector or an individual lecturer? Who should decide this?

Statement 4 (student)

An interesting form of classes—I would be happy to take part—but I assume they would replace other lectures. If one combines studies with work, there is not much time for additional classes.

Statement 5 (student)

If I study outside my place of residence, should I look for such classes where I live, or engage locally at the university even though I do not plan my future in this city and am not interested in what happens here?

Statement 6 (NGO representative)

We would be very happy to join this project. I will also try to encourage the municipality to cooperate with the university.

Statement 6 (lecturer)

I conduct classes using the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method. I will use elements of this syllabus to enrich the themes of the projects prepared by students. I believe this approach should be disseminated systemically at universities, as it is a lesson in local democracy for students and lecturers alike—and, of course, for other local decision-makers, with local governments at the forefront.

Statement 7 (lecturer)

The material is very useful. Implementing these workshops could certainly be planned within the course schedule as an elective subject; however, it may be more difficult to persuade representatives of the City Office to cooperate.

III. Summary

The study aimed to evaluate the pilot course and its impact on students' awareness and participatory competencies. The survey included 100 respondents, primarily pupils and

students (45%) as well as teachers and lecturers (24%), along with representatives of local government, non-governmental organizations, and other local stakeholders. The survey was conducted in paper form during and after the completion of the classes.

The pilot classes were rated very highly across several key dimensions:

- **Increase in awareness:** 88% of respondents confirmed that the classes contributed to raising students' awareness.
- **Encouragement of activity:** 96% of respondents stated that the course encouraged greater participation in participatory processes aimed at sustainable urban development.
- **Learning participatory tools:** Over 90% of respondents positively assessed the teaching of specific tools such as public consultations and public debates.
- **Dissemination potential:** As many as 98% of participants believe that the model approach presented in the pilot should be disseminated in other schools and higher education institutions.

Respondents identified priority areas in which participatory competencies should be applied:

- **Highest priority:** social life in the post-COVID era (88%), implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (86%), and participatory (citizens') budgets (78%).
- **Project-based areas:** preparation of new social projects (71%) and public projects (55%).
- **Lowest interest:** traditional institutional politics, such as election campaigns (7%) and ongoing evaluation of local government authorities (6%).

According to respondents, participatory projects should primarily involve:

- **Schools and higher education institutions (82%),** perceived as the main environments for shaping civic attitudes.
- **Local governments (76%),** essential for realistically testing and implementing projects in urban space.
- **Local non-governmental organizations (72%),** seen as key intermediaries supporting inclusivity.

Respondents emphasized the need to rapidly disseminate educational materials among teachers, as integrating new content into curricula requires time at the instructional planning stage. Attention was also drawn to the lack of clear strategies for encouraging pupils to participate in such initiatives; respondents noted that a standard homeroom lesson may be insufficient.

Students and lecturers suggested that such classes should replace existing lectures rather than constitute an additional workload, as students who combine studies with employment have limited time resources.

The academic community highlighted the need for systemic implementation of the educational methods included in the Methodology (e.g. Problem-Based Learning) within course schedules. At the same time, challenges were identified, such as limited time availability among working students and difficulties in persuading municipal authorities to engage actively in cooperation.

Lecturers perceive the HEIsCITI syllabus as a valuable tool for implementing the Problem-Based Learning method, serving as a practical lesson in democracy not only for students, but also for lecturers and local decision-makers.

Local government representatives declared willingness to implement the participatory approach; however, they reported a lack of precise guidance on how to establish cooperation with the education sector (e.g. uncertainty as to whether the partner should be the rector or an individual lecturer).

An additional issue identified concerns non-local students—those studying outside their place of residence. These students often do not associate their future with the city in which they study, raising questions about the rationale for engaging them in local civic matters.

Representatives of non-governmental organizations demonstrated strong enthusiasm and readiness to act as intermediaries supporting closer cooperation between municipalities and higher education institutions in joint initiatives.