

# Creating a Next Generation Participatory Contest for Young People to integrate Circularity in School Curricula

CircularCityChallenge



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CREATING A NEXT-GENERATION PARTICIPATORY CONTEST FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
TO INTEGRATE CIRCULARITY INTO SCHOOL CURRICULA

## Deliverable D5.2

## Workshops summary report



This project is part of the ERA-NET Urban Transformation capacities which has received funding from the European Union's H2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101003758.

## Project

Acronym: **CircularCityChallenge**

Title: Creating a Next-Generation Participatory Contest for Young People to integrate Circularity into School Curricula

Coordinator: SYNYO GmbH

Reference: 101003758

Type: Research and Innovation Action (RIA)

Program: HORIZON 2020

Theme: ERA-NET Urban Transformation capacities

Start: 06. May, 2022

Duration: 30 months

Website: [www.project.circularcitychallenge.eu](http://www.project.circularcitychallenge.eu)

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Stadtgemeinde Trofaiach (TROF), Austria

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## Deliverable

Number:	<b>D5.2</b>
Title:	<b>Workshops summary report</b>
Lead beneficiary:	SYNYO
Work package:	WP5 Conduct: Planning and execution of challenges and award ceremony
Dissemination level:	Confidential (CO)
Nature:	Report (RE)
Due date:	31.03.2023 (first draft, to be updated in M22)
Submission date:	31.03.2023
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**Acknowledgment:** This project is part of the ERA-NET Cofund Urban Transformation capacities (EN-UTC) which has received funding from the European Union's H2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101003758.

**Disclaimer:** The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the authors, and in no way represents the view of the European Commission or its services.

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## Executive Summary

Co-creation workshops were organized in three countries by three partners (UM, IUIASM, SYNYO) with different groups of stakeholders to outline a challenge concept, involving education experts and young people. They were organized to collect inputs and provide feedback on the overall challenge concept, and to raise awareness and foster collaboration.

Overall, the workshops revealed a high awareness of sustainability among the youth and a strong interest in engaging in educational competitions such as the CCC. The workshops' participants are not only driven extrinsically (receiving (monetary) recognition and benefits for their future success and professional career) but also very much intrinsically. They care deeply about what is happening in their environment and globally while interacting and exploring the unknown lies at the center of their interests. They wish to be heard, to be taken seriously, and to contribute to climate action themselves. In this regard, the general concept of supporting circular projects and promoting exchange with like-minded peers and local actors was positively received. However, also impediments to successful participation could be identified, which need to be addressed in the contest design. Structural burdens limit the possibility to invest time and effort beyond the school curricula. Besides connecting the competition to the existing curricula and teaching activities, clear communication, easy access, and sufficient support will be vital. For the competition to be inclusive and an empowering experience for the participants, its design needs to account for the everyday realities of all involved stakeholders, in different school settings and regional typologies.

The co-creation workshop results are being integrated into the revised version of the draft 3.1 Challenge concept draft, Deliverable 3.4.Challenge concept.

## 1. Introduction

The consortium partners organised co-creation workshops for each city (Bucharest, Maastricht, and Vienna), involving education experts, schools, and young people. Through these workshops, the project team was able to refine the challenge concept to better meet the projects' objectives and the specific needs of all involved stakeholders. The conducted co-creation workshops focused on the overall challenge concept, topics of interest, learning and submission formats, prizes, and incentives. In terms of the applied methods and questions, each workshop was adapted to the local context and to the target groups involved. Through this context-sensitive approach, the workshops brought valuable insights for the design of the challenge, as well as for the promotion strategy to reach the desired target audiences and to encourage a wide range of stakeholders to participate.

## 2. Key insights workshop Bucharest

*Organized by UAUIM*

*11th of November 2022, Focus Group Workshop 1 with 25 university students*

*19th of November 2022, Focus Group Workshop 2: 16 university students and NGOs representatives*

### **Motivation and interest:**

According to more than half of the UAUIM students present at the workshop, the topic of circularity itself is the best motivation for taking part in the CCC. Students care deeply about the actual implementation of their idea and about learning the required skills. In addition, the awards and the competitive environment are important incentives to participate.

### **Learning resources:**

When it comes to learning materials, most of the students propose dynamic, unconventional, and creative resources such as **videos, art, comics, and ted talks, while less than half of them opted for mainstream learning resources such as PPTs and essays**. Students were very interested in how circularity can be related to their cities, daily lives, and school curricula. In this vein, it was emphasized to establish the relation to their local environment and address the specific local challenges of resource use as well as existing achievements through creative formats such as treasure hunts, exhibitions, puzzles, or quizzes.

### **Awards and prizes:**

As potentially motivating prizes and incentives, the UAUIM students stated:

- **field trips or longer class journeys to interesting cities (e.g., summer schools)**
- **setting connections to local businesses, orientation visits (e.g., architecture offices)**
- **recognition at the local level (e.g., visibility at city events)**
- **access to cool events or support to organise events (e.g., hackathon)**
- **vouchers for (online) courses (e.g., skill share)**
- **internship opportunities (if good options are possible within legal constraints)**
- **money**

### **Mentorship and guidance:**

The students were in favour of providing high-school pupils with guidance along the journey and showed interest in becoming tutors themselves. They would propose opportunities to exchange internationally with other high schoolers and university students registered as mentors (e.g., by a form, including pictures and explanations of relevant actions in the field). To support mentorship relations, virtual meetings and testimonial videos were proposed. Importantly, **scepticism towards the phrase ‘mentor’** was observed, as the phrase was associated with mentors/influencers present in the media which are perceived as too superficial to provide helpful guidance.

According to the workshop outcomes, the tasks of finding mentors, doing teamwork, and connecting different actors could be embedded in the participation conditions (including proof of the process). However, highschoolers would need guidance, especially on how to: look for a mentor, work in a team, and present. For this purpose, the platform should provide different forms of support content, e.g., videos. In order to prepare students well for teamwork, inputs about the different roles in project work (e.g. “researcher”, “facilitator”, “communicator”, “visual materials designer”, ...) and skill specialisation could be included in the challenge concept and on the platform.

### **Engagement channels and messages:**

In regard to engagement channels, the most popular social media channels among youth were stated to be TikTok and Instagram. Relevant images, videos, and short messages are key for engaging with

teenagers. **Keywords collected by the students show their attention toward change, fresh ideas, and approaches, such as “innovation”, “future”, “change” and “originality”.**

**Barriers:**

Students expressed doubt about teachers' motivation and ability to engage in circular teaching beyond the existing curricula due to **lack of time**, the extent of obligatory content to teach, and the difficulty of creating interdisciplinary cooperation between teachers. To address these issues, it was proposed that **teachers receive personnel support** on a regular basis so that involvement in such teaching activities is possible without extra work.

Also, several issues of fairness were addressed:

- **teachers' positive bias towards the “good” pupils, who often receive more family support than others, which would make it easier for them to win prizes**
- big differences among high schools within the same city and between urban regions and more rural territories, e.g. as regards entry conditions (marks) for students
- different levels of English proficiency among students

### 3. Key insights workshop Maastricht

*Organized by UM*

*11th of November 2022, focus group discussion in person and on Zoom with three young people aged 18-20, members of a sustainability working group from a foundation in NL, who give guest lectures to young people.*

**Motivation and interest:**

To the participants a variety of sustainability topics are relevant: air pollution, mobility, housing (e.g., high-quality student housing), consumption (esp. clothing and diet), green infrastructure, waste, and ideas and initiatives on how to share, swap, reuse, renovate, or design buildings and goods in a more adaptive, multi-functional way.

As a motivational approach, participants mentioned **the importance of connecting to real-life experts**, who communicate in a teenager-friendly language and help young people to discover their own interests, opinions, and strengths as well as potential future capabilities by asking the right questions. Other motivations to participate in the challenge are having a chance of winning, **having mentors for networking and practical leadership, seeing their own ideas put into practice**, and seeing other peers' activities in the challenge.

**Learning resources:**

The materials on circularity as well as the contest instructions need to be age-appropriate, relatable to teenagers' lives, flexible, collaborative, and interactive. **For students to not be discouraged from the challenge, the often quite overwhelming topics of sustainability and circular cities need to be broken down into small, practical, and simple issues.** In this vein, the focus on problems and solutions in the students' local environment is helpful to make the topic practical and relatable.

**Submission:**

In regard to submission formats, the workshop participants proposed offering the freedom to **choose flexibly whichever format is relevant for the content**, e.g., videos or diaries of personally achieved challenges in daily life.



**Awards and prizes:**

For awards as incentives to participate, the workshop participants stated that the award should be meaningful and relate to the overall circular city theme of the challenge. Also, young people would welcome support for their professional, academic but also personal development. In this vein, the following proposals were gathered:

- **support in actualizing their ideas by networking and funding opportunities**
- **subscriptions/access to products or memberships related to the circular economy**
- **sustainable trips with all (international) winners**
- **exchange programs among high schools and including universities to meet like-minded people**

To ensure the relevance of the award for the winning students, it was mentioned that they should be given the possibility to choose their award.

**Mentorship and guidance:**

Mentorship by experts who are locally available and accessible is important. Therefore, a local networking approach should be created. It was also stated that **more focus should be put on collaboration among same-aged people (peers)**, than on expert mentorship.

**Engagement channels and messages:**

To attract young people, social media needs to be actively used with expert promotion as well as a promotion by young people. To reach different groups, trying different social media channels was stated as a key requirement. Also, making the topic relevant to everyone and representing different groups is critical. It was brought forward that schools (systems) are diverse and each type of school should be addressed. The best channels can be found where students are, such as their schools and youth organizations, who directly communicate with underrepresented groups at schools by going to schools from various contexts.

**When it comes to the message, young people show interest especially in regard to people's lives (see influencers and vlogs). To successfully communicate the challenge, it could therefore be a strategy to put more focus on the involved persons and their everyday life than on the challenge itself, e.g., showing persons of interest (also with different cultural backgrounds and ages) day by day, participating in the challenge. Overall, students appreciate the effort of creating visible examples of collaboration and ideas in an inclusive and clear manner.**

**Barriers:**

The most restated obstacle is having adults leading the process of participation rather than young people in charge. In other words, **not having ownership is a key concern**. Another key challenge mentioned is how to reconcile the time and effort required to develop a project with the busy school and social life of young students. For this reason, the importance of **integrating the challenge into existing school projects was emphasised, so that students do not have to participate in an extracurricular way. This would also be an important step towards inclusivity, making the challenge more accessible to students with little extra-curricular (e.g., parental) support or other impediments (e.g., family responsibilities and difficult backgrounds).**

**Also, there is the danger that the challenge is not clearly presented as a good opportunity and could be regarded as too complex or difficult to participate in. In this regard, clear communication and guidance is key, to not make the challenge seem overwhelming or vague, but as a great, comprehensible and easy opportunity for every student.**

Another issue mentioned is the difficulty to account for different scales (city, town, rural setting, etc.). In this vein, it should be clearly communicated that submissions from different local environments are welcomed.

## 4. Key insights workshop Vienna

*Organized by SYNYO*

*20<sup>th</sup> of October 2022, workshop with 10 high-school students and 2 teachers from the high school with an environmental focus.*



### Motivation and interest:

When it comes to problems and positive features of their local environment, students and teachers identified a variety of relevant issues: **mobility** (less car traffic, good public transport system, and bike infrastructure), **built infrastructure** (buildings, parks, public and green spaces), **food** and **waste**. Besides environmentally relevant issues, the workshop participants **cared deeply about the social dimension in their local context**, such as the standard and cost of living, social policies, and the way people interact with each other.

For students, there are a variety of motivations to enter the CCC:

- being already very involved in nature, sustainability, and related activities
- wanting to help and **make a difference in the community**
- spreading awareness about environmental issues
- wanting their voice to be heard
- proving themselves
- planning a career in relevant fields
- applying skills, they already have, **working with what they already do**, and enjoy
- being able to learn more about their field of interest
- receiving nice rewards or **recognition** in the form of certificates

Also, teachers, especially those already engaged and experienced in teaching sustainability, could be motivated to realise the challenge at their school.

#### **Submission:**

For submission formats, the students brought forward a variety of options that show the importance of providing the freedom to choose, in regard to which format fits their project idea and their personal abilities the best. In particular, they showed interest in the following formats:

- Youtube/video submissions
- crafted items (e.g., recycled furniture)
- PowerPoint presentations (to present more information-based contributions)
- pictures/photos taken (e.g., to raise awareness about the environment)
- blueprints (e.g. for sustainable buildings)

#### **Awards and prizes:**

The awards brought forward by the workshop participants reflect the different motives that drive their motivation to participate in the challenge. The suggested awards provide possibilities to develop their knowledge and skills and stay engaged:

- nature related awards (e.g., plants)
- recognition (e.g., certificates)
- financial support (e.g., direct money, scholarships)
- supportive tools (e.g., laptop, software)
- awareness for their own project (e.g., promotion of their (youtube-) channels)
- networking and prestige (e.g., to meet and connect with interesting or well-known people (e.g., the president))

#### **Mentorship and guidance:**

For their endeavours, the students would welcome support from people working in the relevant fields with knowledge and hands-on expertise, such as:

- park rangers / outdoor practitioners
- architects and city planners
- city administrators / decision-makers
- teachers

#### **Engagement channels and messages:**

To reach students for the challenge promotion, students emphasised social media (e.g. Instagram) and other internet platforms as well as direct information through the school, teachers, other students and friends.

#### **Barriers:**

Several obstacles and potential fears were mentioned that could impede the participation of students in the challenge. Some students might feel anxious about entering the challenge and do not feel comfortable about being put on display. Also, there might be **limited belief in the actual impact of their contribution** and peoples' willingness to listen to their voices. For this reason, it will be of key importance to communicate and make sure that their contribution matters. On an organisational level, it is a challenge for students to engage in extracurricular work against the background of burdens and deadlines of school education and other (social) priorities in their life.

When reflecting on impediments for children from minorities, less advantageous socio-economic backgrounds, refugees, or teenagers with low parental aid, students emphasised to incorporate support in the form of **money, scholarships, or certificates that relate to their specific needs**.

Teachers are confronted with barriers when including the CCC in their teaching activities regarding their expertise and limited time resources, and would therefore need the CCC to accommodate their schedules.

## 5. Conclusion and next steps

This deliverable 5.2 presented the first round of co-creation workshops with results integrated into the final challenge concept, as seen in deliverable 3.4 Challenge concept.

The second round of workshops will be held in the school year 2023/24 in selected schools and urban events in partner countries to discuss any open questions, foster collaboration and collect feedback on the contest. This physical attendance will create awareness and increase the number of interested teachers, students, and schools to join the contest.