

Article

Innovative Co-Creative Participatory Methodologies for a Dreamt-of Quality Education in Europe

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to collect evidence-based experience on a co-creation multi-stakeholder participatory process in a non-formal academic environment. We use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the “6i model,” and a participatory approach as background methodologies. Within the long-lasting process of collaboration with Eurochild (Eurochild advocates for children’s rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. A network of almost 200 organizations internationally recognized for its work to promote children’s rights and well-being. It influences policies, builds internal capacities, and facilitates mutual learning and exchanges of practice and research), the event started with an open session followed by a World Café dynamic with 50 participants from different age groups (13–81), cultures (Spain, United Kingdom, Finland), professions, academic fields, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Several types of data were collected: participant observation during four months (20 h), informal communication with participants, and three in-depth interviews. Based on overall analysis, the application of both the 6i model and the child participation approach had an impact on three different levels: (1) in the functioning of the core group; (2) in the experience of the participants in the event; and (3) in the final outcome of the whole process.

Keywords: quality education; active methodologies; Sustainable Development Goals; 21st-century skills; educational innovation; ecosystem learning; institutional change

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all United Nations Members in 2015 is a reflection of interest or a concern about a number of fundamental and urgent current and future societal challenges such as democracy, ecology, justice, and care. It is a basic roadmap as the topics that it encompasses are existential: they concern life, not just survival. Accordingly, all individuals, in line with their own capabilities and opportunities, must assume responsibility for reaching those goals.

Engaging everyone in building a more sustainable world entails two main issues. The first is the need to understand citizenship as a process and civic learning as a “subjectification,” underlining present experiences and participation in the experiment in democracy underway [1]. This involves emphasizing public spaces and motivating people to learn to transform their individual desires into collective needs, under the democratic values of equality and freedom. From this focus, the concept of citizenship is understood as a recognition of the different ways in which any individual, independently of their characteristics, involves themselves in actions in a variety of spheres (from private to public and from conventional to alternative) [2–5].

The second issue, in line with what has been postulated so far, involves responsibility for engaging people in the construction of a more sustainable world and underlines the need to generate opportunities

that enable democratic practices and learning from the average person's experience [2]. Education faces the challenge of making spaces available that envisage the democratic values of equality and freedom in the context of diversity. Proposals from international bodies such as Active Citizenship [6], Democratic Citizenship Education [7], and Global Citizenship Education [8] seek to respond to this challenge through their educational proposals for a democratic project by underlining the importance of lifelong learning in different spaces and by stressing the role of education in participative processes based on human rights and social justice.

The definitions of participation provided by these international bodies and experts in the field also highlight the responsibility of adults in participative processes. The word "process" becomes prominent everywhere, underlying the importance of the participative experience prolonged over time. Moreover, adolescents should be able to take part in decision-making in the course of the process. This requirement reflects the importance with which both authors and institutions regard the political dimension of citizenship, understood as "the relationship between individuals and their taking decisions of public interest" [1]. However, the competences needed to take part in such processes do not come naturally but must be learned.

Thus, 21st-century skills should go beyond employability. To reach real high-quality education, people must have the opportunity to learn the skills needed to face a liquid reality [9], characterized by diversity and mobility due to globalization. In this uncertain reality, it is essential to develop a feeling of belonging to get involved in public life and to maintain interest in it [10]. To that end, education must be capable of implementing critical thinking [11], thinking about feelings and wondering about certain attitudes so as to unlearn them [12], and trusting each other while being self-confident with one's cultural identity [13,14]. It is equally important to integrate the concept of "sustainability justice" in education that would address issues like allocation of resources, unfair trade, environmental racism, economic exploitation, and many other issues that are at the intersection of economy, nature, and society. [15] From the democratic aspect, learning citizenship emphasizes the feeling of belonging to a community, developing personal autonomy and joint responsibility with a diverse group, and reaching social experiences, especially in regard to those who are disadvantaged [16,17].

Non-formal education emerges as an alternative to formal education with a view to carrying out these processes, thanks to its flexible methodology. Under the non-formal education umbrella, community organizations represent an emerging context for researchers because they stand out over other day-to-day contexts influencing teenagers as places where methodologies and strategies are implemented in such a way that they can be significant agents in their own development [18–20]. The Council of Europe [21] considers these organizations as enablers for training in democratic citizenship reinforcing civic society.

The aim of this paper is to collect evidence-based experience on a co-creation multi-stakeholder participatory process in a non-formal academic environment. Specifically, it seeks to detect and analyze the core group's members' perception of their experience in planning, staging, and evaluating the event to demonstrate the effectiveness of the initiative from an organizational point of view and the educational impact deriving from it. The lessons learned will be useful in producing, planning, and testing new, integrative methodologies for overcoming barriers to participation in formal and non-formal education settings.

In May 2020, the European Union marked the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, and as part of the "Europe for citizens" program, a number of grassroots events were organized across the continent under an initiative called "Schuman 2.0: A New Momentum for Europe," where European citizens got the chance to reflect on the future that they desire for Europe.

The event was organized in cities other than the capitals of each country, and closer to the border of another country. This led to Bilbao being the city selected in Spain.

The University of Deusto (recognized as one of the 20 best universities in the world in promoting SDG No.16: peace, justice, and strong institutions—University Impact Ranking conducted by the prestigious British institution Times Higher Education) was tasked with planning, facilitating,

and assessing the Schuman 2.0 event in Bilbao. The organizing committee decided to use the SDGs as a framework for discussing the future of Europe, relating local needs and aspirations to the 2030 global agenda. A selection of five SDGs guided the planning and staging of the event, where participants discussed the future of Europe on the basis of good health and well-being (SDG3), quality education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), reduced inequalities (SDG10), climate action (SDG13), and partnerships for the goals (SDG17). This last SDG 17 was used as a transversal aspect, reflected in all the others. The event was organized in the form of co-creation, with an initial open session with over 80 participants followed by a World Café with 50 participants from various age groups (between 13 and 81), cultures (Spain, United Kingdom, Finland), professions (students, professors, experts, politicians), academic fields (education, social sciences, engineering, law, communication, etc.), and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The intervention was part of a long-lasting process of collaboration with Eurochild, a network of almost 200 organizations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. Eurochild-Deusto collaboration focuses on promoting the participation of children and young people (e.g., Deusto's decisive role in backing two under-age members of the Eurochild Children's Council).

2. Materials and Methods

A case study was used with a qualitative research methodology. Aimed to be exploratory in nature, data collection was carried out using three main techniques, i.e., participant observation, pre-tested and semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of documents and information taken from the event. The data was analyzed using both the previously established dimensions of the 6i model and dimensions based on the participation theory.

2.1. Research Instruments

2.1.1. Participant Observation

The core group was observed during the planning of the event (during 3 months, 20 h) and during the staging of the event, with notes being taken in the field book according to the observation guide (see Appendix A Table A1). To factor in the intergenerational perspective, the core group comprised: one current under-aged member (16) and one former member (18) of the Eurochild Children's Council (ECC) (The Eurochild Children's Council is comprised of 11–16 year-olds and represents children from 12 European countries. It works toward mainstreaming children's voices through all of Eurochild's work, with a focus on events, advocacy, and strategy planning. It supports the Eurochild network), 2 final-year students at the Department of International Relations, 1 researcher and lecturer from the Faculty of Psychology and Education, an external expert on the SDGs, and 3 members of the International Research Projects Office (IRPO). The event was organized in the form of co-creation, with an initial open session with over 80 participants followed by a World Café with 50 participants from various age groups (between 13 and 81), cultures (Spain, United Kingdom, Finland), professions (students, professors, experts, politicians), academic fields (education, social sciences, engineering, law, communication, etc.), and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The categories were the conditions listed by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child [22], based on General Comment No. 12 as Basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard" (see Appendix A Table A1): transparent, voluntary, respectful, relevant, friendly, inclusive, safe, supportive, and responsive.

2.1.2. Key Informant Interviews

Key informants from the core group were interviewed in May 2020 to gain a more comprehensive perspective of the process and their experience through their perceptions ($n = 3$). The criteria to select them were the age and background.

- Two students were selected representing the 4 youngsters of the core group (a boy and a girl). The opinion of the other two had been recorded in the Host observation guide.
- 1 Scholar, the director of the International Research Projects Office (IRPO), representing the other four adults of the core group. The opinions of the rest of the adults were collected through the field notes at the event evaluation meeting. The in-depth interview with the selected person allowed to deepen these perceptions by having a broader view of the event and the group.

The interviews were recorded with an electronic video call recorder and were conducted in Spanish by two research team members. Each interview took approximately 60 min. The guide for the interviews was based on the literature review on participation theory [10,23–26].

The questions covered the actors' understanding of how the event was organized, what barriers were encountered and how they were overcome, and what benefits were obtained from them (see Appendix A Table A2). Before the interview, the objectives of the study and their contribution to it were explained to all of the participants, and their informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and interviewees had the option to refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any time. The respondents' names were removed at the transcription stage, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

2.1.3. Literature Review and Other Sources of Information

The review included Host's ($n = 10$) participant observation (see Appendix A Table A1) during the co-creation and the reflections of the 10 groups taking part in the co-creation moment on the five SDGs selected. The information obtained helped to complete the information collected from the participant observation and interviews. Documents were analyzed using different categories:

- For the Host's participant observation document, the categories were the same as for the researcher's participant observation.
- For the reflections of the groups about the various SDGs, Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory [27] was used to categorize the information, identifying barriers and drivers in each system.

2.2. Type of Data Analysis

Descriptive methods and descriptive codes were used to interpret the data extracted from different sources. These methodologies set out elementary information regarding the situation with more methodological rigor, according to the criteria established by the researchers [28]. According to Goetz and LeCompte [29], the strategies used provide phenomenological data in that they represent the conception of the world of the participants who are being researched, from which the constructs that are to structure the research are derived.

To examine the different characteristics of the Schuman Event in relation to data analysis, we used some key categories from the literature on each term about the 6i model system (Table 1) and dimensions of participation according to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (Table 2).

Co-creative multi-stakeholder intergenerational participatory processes, in which all actors may express their voice and agency, cannot be achieved through a siloed and compartmentalized approach. Alternatively, these endeavors may only be accomplished through collaborative and inclusive processes and concrete actions. To support these objectives, the 6i model is proposed. Originally conceived in the university setting, it embodies 6 principles—international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral, impactful, innovative, and inclusive—which can serve as a guide when planning (defining the strategic vision), implementing (adopting operational yet adaptable mechanisms), and evaluating (defining and adapting indicators) of a given plan or activity. The 6i model emerged in 2010 at the University of Deusto as a response to bottom-up and top-down interest in expanding the scope of research and innovation activities in the university, with the 6i principles emerging in various phases. Today, it has evolved into a singular strategy for the design and conduct of research and innovation activities. However, the transversality and salience of the principles embodied in the 6i present

opportunities for the framework to be adapted for use in different settings (formal, non-formal), levels (program-level, institutional, regional, national, supranational), and for a wide range of purposes (long-term institutional strategy, one-off event, etc.). The first three i's—international, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary—characterize the interaction and collaboration processes to build capacity and excellence. Engaging with international peers, committing with non-academic stakeholders, and crossing disciplinary boundaries are the driving elements for generating integrative participation processes. These dynamics are complemented with a purpose and direction to work towards, where the last three i's come in. Calibrating the process and output of the action towards innovation, impact, and inclusion.

These categories helped explore how the participatory process was carried out and determine the educational impact derived from it.

Table 1. Key dimensions of the 6i model analyzed in the study.

DIMENSIONS	DEFINITION
Internationalization	The efforts carried out by universities to promote the diversification of the actions inherent in the functioning of a university and dedication to long-lasting international cooperation, which elevates the quality of teaching and research.
Interdisciplinarity	Issues of different kinds can be addressed by applying a mix of scientific and academic approaches.
Intersectorality	Academic activity to go even further beyond merging disciplines and include industry in the process too, which leads to a new type of collaboration.
Impact	The impact that the research can have in social terms, providing demonstrable benefits to society at large [30].
Innovation	Universities' efforts to enhance the production of innovative research, education and exploitation of results, and initiatives and solutions addressing social and environmental challenges [31].
Inclusion	The participation of people with different identities and origins and from different social groups who contribute to the education process with their unique perspectives.

Source: drawn up by the authors based on the references.

Table 2. Key dimensions of effective child participation analyzed in the study.

DIMENSION	DEFINITION
Transparent	There is clear and complete information available
Voluntary	Arising from children's free will
Respectful	Everyone gives due consideration to what is expressed
Relevant	It makes sense for children why they are participating
Friendly	Experience is adapted to the needs and interests of each child
Inclusive	Everyone should feel they can participate, in their own way
Safe	Children feel protected from any harm
Supportive	Everyone involved feels they are prepared
Responsive	Children must know what is done with their views

Source: drawn up by the authors based on [22].

3. Results

The core group had two objectives: one was internal and consisted of experience in the first person the process of working intergenerationally during the planning, staging, and assessment of an innovative event; and the other was external and comprised offering an intergenerational, intercultural, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary space where people can reflect, debate, and agree on the "Europe we want." These reflections were later analyzed based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, with a declaration that was then sent to Brussels as the deliverable.

3.1. Inclusion

The profiles of each member of the core group and the meeting times are the two core elements that reflect the inclusive character of the whole process.

The invitation to IRPO to lead the preparation of the Schuman 2.0 declaration was the first step toward creating an educational and participatory process. The director of the office had a clear idea from the beginning that the declaration should have a democratic component, bearing in mind the recommendation of the Council of Europe to introduce participation as one of its priority areas in its 2016-2021 strategy on the rights of the child. To that end, an intergenerational and interdisciplinary driving group was needed to agree on the steps that were to follow.

Creating the space and the channels of communication between the members of the group was a key aspect in guaranteeing inclusion. In the words of the director of the IRPO, two fundamental requirements should be guaranteed: on the one hand, that the composition of the group should be based on heterogeneity to enrich decision-making, and on the other hand, that members should feel a personal benefit. The time allocated to planning (physical meetings, online work, contacts) needed to be organized in such a manner as not to affect people's daily routines.

The meetings were held at a round table in the director's own office and followed a three-phase structure: the first was a relaxed time when the different members greeted each other informally and spent a few minutes enquiring about each other's lives. The second phase focused on event planning: it began in most cases by giving the floor to the two young students, who had been delegated as leaders. They summarized what had been done and set the agenda for further work. A topic was initiated in a debate format that would lead to a compromise and a decision. The processes involved were democratic, with all members having the opportunity to express their ideas while the others listened actively and with respect. If anyone, regardless of age, had a question about something, or about the implications of a certain proposal, they spoke up and everyone agreed on the answer. The third and last phase of the meetings was based on dividing tasks between the members, and the meetings ended on a personal note with goodbyes and gestures of affection such as hugs or pats on the back. The safe environment generated created a climate of trust so that all participants could express themselves without fear, especially adolescents. This was expressed during the interview when one of the youngest participants in the core group revealed feeling protected at the time of the event:

"I looked ahead and saw many unknown faces, but I also saw my companions. This made me feel . . . I did not feel under as much pressure when I had to speak in English in front of more than 100 people". (Girl, 16)

3.2. Internationalization

The agenda entailed the inclusion of different actors in the process of co-creation. This led to the incorporation of people of different nationalities and from different cultures. This was initially a way of assuring the diversity of perspectives and richness of both the organizational process and the final product, i.e., the Declaration. Initially, the involvement in the organizational team of a student from Serbia who was completing his Master's thesis at the University of Deusto and conducting an internship at the International Projects Office contributed to the key decisions regarding the event and assured the diversity of ideas. Outside of the organizational team itself, the infrastructure relied heavily on support from the Union of European Federalists, a youth organization from Brussels (Belgium) which was one of the initiators of the event at the European level. Members from Italy and Spain attended the final event, along with "Schuman Ambassadors" representing other participating universities, who provided an overview of the event in Bilbao (students from Georgia and Estonia). Finally, the participants, students, and citizens who were working on the draft of the Declaration also contributed to the international nature of the event. A group of students from Helsinki (Finland) who were visiting Spain as part of a study trip and many other students who were studying abroad at the University of Deusto at the time participated in and contributed to the event.

The idea behind the event was to imagine the future of a united Europe and to use creative potential to overcome certain challenges that affect the EU as a whole and particular countries within it.

The effects of this approach were evident:

- (1) In the discussion at the tables, e.g., people from the Nordic countries were eager to share ideas with their Spanish peers about the social-democratic states that they came from, where certain policies are showing great results;
- (2) In the character of the Declaration itself, which does address issues related not just to Spain but also to Europe and the whole world;
- (3) In the feedback from participants, who felt the benefits of participating in an English-language event where their ideas could be challenged and debated on an international level; and
- (4) In the image of the University of Deusto as an inclusive, international educational institution where foreign students can participate in extracurricular activities alongside their Spanish peers.

3.3. Interdisciplinarity

To adopt the approach of both bottom-up and top-down transversals, the organizational team included members who were studying law, international relations, education, and cultural studies. The participants in the event also contributed with their unique perspectives from even broader fields of studies.

At an organizational level, this resulted in:

- (a) Mixed approaches to the participation of young people from a psychological perspective (keeping in mind the process of acquisition of knowledge, individual experiences, and learning techniques);
- (b) Delineation of the EU as a political project (the structure of the EU, institutions, and procedures) and
- (c) Creative aspects of the event (facilitating political imagination and innovative ways of imagining the future European project). Such a multifaceted approach to the event was made possible only by including researchers and students with different scientific backgrounds in the organizational team.

3.4. Intersectorality

Another major trait of the event was the inclusion of non-academic entities throughout the process. Making sure that the university does not act and function in isolation from its social and economic context is another goal pursued by the organizational team. Efforts were thus made to build bridges between our work and civil society, private companies, and local and regional government bodies.

For the Schuman 2.0 event, we had support from EURIKER and its founder. This organization strives to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations in the Basque Country, working closely with public institutions and other social entities. It also seeks to facilitate international European networks. Due to the nature of the activities conducted by EURIKER, the organizational team felt strongly that its founder and director should be included in the organizational team.

This collaboration had two major benefits: (1) the introduction of the SDGs into the structure of the event; and (2) the professional experience of the founder of EURIKER, which assured smooth facilitation of key logistics during the event and helped to structure the process clearly and ensure its meticulous implementation.

Thanks to the skills and experience of the director of EURIKER, the event gained a clear structure that resulted in a highly competitive proposal for the new, updated Schuman Declaration that includes contributions from an external partner dedicated to issues of global importance.

3.5. Innovation

Universities are historically recognized as knowledge institutions. They strive for social improvement and transformation through research and by training future specialists. Given this experience, the University of Deusto went one step further and democratized its space, making adolescents part of the group and space, reducing the hierarchical relationship and power dynamics of adults, and creating a relationship based on mutual interests and trust. During the meetings, decisions were often delayed. This was part of the process because it ensured that everyone's contributions and needs were taken into account.

In this space, an opportunity was provided to build interpersonal skills, which were strengthened as adolescents worked together with their peers and adults. The skills developed included problem-solving, creative expression, and improved oral and written communication.

Although the outcome (the creation of the event and the final Declaration) was important, it was observed during the meetings that listening was given more priority than imposition.

3.6. Impact

Three characteristics helped to create a participatory, educational space in the academic context: (a) the people who made up the core group participated voluntarily; (b) the process throughout the planning sessions when the interests and needs of each member were taken into account; and (c) building trust and transparency as no information was hidden regardless of its nature. Such an environment enabled both adults and youngsters to challenge and deliver information, views, and suggestions in an open and respectful manner.

The youngest members of the core group stated that when they did not understand something or needed more clarification, they always found support to guide them through it. During the interviews, they highlighted language as a key element in making them feel like equal members and enabling them to make real contributions to the event:

“They did not speak to you as adults usually speak, or as they are expected to speak at university, words that we may not understand ... those you are looking at, you affirm, but you do not understand anything ... No, I have felt one more, I asked, just as the lecturer did”. (Boy, 17)

In turn, feeling recognized not only by the adults who accompanied them in the core group but also by other adults and peers from different sectors and countries on the day of the event led to an increase in their self-esteem and sense of responsibility, which are essential elements for empowerment processes. Although the acquired knowledge was not measured nor evaluated, it was demonstrated through the interaction between participants and the community.

The benefits go beyond those perceived by adolescents. The university also benefits from the event because many researchers, students, and graduates got the opportunity to collaborate for the first time, thus creating meaningful connections that can be cultivated in the future. Other actors also recognized the impact of the whole process. According to the Head of the IRPO, this experience was an important impulse for the future initiatives that will include this type of the organizational methodology, since it generates a space of citizens' education, where the new type of processes can be exercised, such as those related to cognitive learning (SDGs and the Declaration created with inputs of the participants), skills (conflict resolution, public speaking, decision-making), and emotional processes (unlearning).

4. Discussion

The working dynamics of the core group resembled the educational approach known as “alliance between adolescents and adults,” which involves people of different ages working together to bring about changes in the environment [32]. In line with the key dimensions of participation and the 6i model reported in the literature, the preparation of the “Schuman 2.0” event seems to have been a successful co-creation experience.

4.1. Internationalization, Interdisciplinarity, and Intersectorality

The challenges often talked about including the need for a renewed sense of unity, the cohesive social and economic model, the importance of diversity and cosmopolitanism, and the question of climate change and energy [33]. Students who reside in or originate from Bilbao may have certain ideas concerning politics, the economy, and society that are intrinsic to the society that they come from, but when working in teams with participants from other cultural backgrounds they encountered different perspectives, which resulted in nuanced, insightful solutions to challenges on an international

level. The idea stems from the Standpoint theory, which explains that we as individuals take on certain features of the environment where we grow up and reside, of the social circles that we inhabit, which determine the way in which we understand the world, develop ideas about it, and form knowledge. We construct our points of view by living them through our culture, gender, nationality, etc. [34].

Another challenge was to ensure a diversity of academic approaches in the event and the question of the integration of Europe. Europe and the history of its integration have long been seen through the lens of politics, diplomacy, and international relations, but it has become obvious that a single approach and a single theory cannot encompass the complexity of social, cultural, and political realities around the continent. A complex, interdisciplinary approach is called for that can tackle the totality of issues [35].

The SDGs have long occupied an important place at universities around the globe due to the potential of academia to provide solutions, resources, knowledge, and capabilities for the fulfilment of goals and indicators. Universities can provide knowledge and solutions to underpin the implementation of SDGs, produce current and future SDG implementers (people with specialist skills and capabilities), and provide cross-sectoral leadership in implementation. On the other hand, SDGs demonstrate the impact of universities, capture demand for SDG-related education, and help higher-education institutions build new external and internal partnerships [36]. The event was thus mutually beneficial: the idea of SDGs was promoted to participants, who also learned some things about the issue related to global challenges, and at the same time the IRPO office at the University of Deusto was able to establish a network with external entities, primarily EURIKER, and thus integrate more closely into the community that works to implement the SDGs.

4.2. *Inclusion, Innovation, and Impact*

The way in which the group was originated and the way of working remind of an educational and participatory process, which began from an initiative proposed by adults but with the inclusion of youngsters in decision-making [37]. This was intended to make all members feel that their contribution and that of the others was essential in attaining the objective set [38]. This experience reminds of those levels of participation that are considered effective to involve adolescents for effective participation [37].

Fostering participation means fostering active citizenship and democracy, which takes time to achieve. In general, the space and climate generated were conducive to training for active participation and citizenship since the organization of the group allowed for the real participation of all members, understood as a process of social construction [17].

The side agenda of social events organized followed the maximum model of Kerr [39]. This is a fundamental aspect of avoiding authoritarian relationships [11]. The way of working, in addition, is in line with the requirements that a participation experience must have to start agency processes [40]. On the one hand, the fact of having very present the available times of each one of the members of the group. Feeling that personal interests are not at stake is one of the fundamental requirements to start a commitment [10]. On the other hand, the quality of relationships, based on effective verbal and nonverbal communication, was conducive to a climate of trust among the members of the group. As adolescents expressed, a climate was generated in which they did not feel constrained or pressured when giving their opinion. On the contrary, they were confident enough to ask for help if they did not know how to express something, or they were not afraid to ask if they did not understand something. This highlights the importance of the age variable when participatory education is under discussion because unlike early adolescents, who seek a safe environment, those in late adolescence seek supportive relationships from adults [41].

These characteristics were crucial in making everyone feel more willing to participate, especially in the case of adolescents. This feeling is essential to feel part of a group, and therefore, get involved and participate actively [1].

The event made a major contribution to the strategic goal of the university of nurturing collaboration between research departments, core groups, and individual researchers. This feature is pertinent to

the activities of the university and was developed precisely through international research projects that acted as boundary objects around which different parties involved connected and operated and as a key mechanism for building sustainable, grounded collaborations [42]. The experience left an impact on all members of the group—not only on adolescents—to practice and learn the fundamentals of democracy [43].

5. Conclusions

Based on overall analysis, it can be concluded that the application of the 6i model and effective child participation had an impact on three different levels: (1) in the functioning of the core group; (2) in the experience of the participants in the event; and (3) in the final outcome of the whole process, i.e., the proposal for the new Schuman Declaration.

Members of the core group expressed their satisfaction with the event as it affected their understanding of the co-creation process, which included people from different nationalities, different academic backgrounds, different generations, and different sectors of society, thus giving them communication tools that they could apply in future projects of the same nature. The imperative of innovation, as one of the i's, led the core group members to think outside the box and express their creativity in imagining different ways that the event could unfold and different structures for the deliverable, which they recognized as something valuable to them that enriched their imagination and pushed them to provide bold, new ideas while working in teams. Similarly, each of the i's had an impact on the participants in the event. Not only were they able to gain new knowledge on the most important international social and economic challenges (e.g., SDGs), but they also gained experience of working in diverse teams where their point of view could be challenged and where they had to express their ideas to different audiences.

Both of these aspects contributed to the final Declaration which, for us, is the pinnacle of the whole process that indicates the success of the 6i model. The whole process received verbal acclamation from the members of the Union of European Federalists who had been present at every previous Schuman 2.0 event: they described it as being among the most engaging, large-scale, productive events in the project. The final Declaration ended up being very competitive. It addressed a wide variety of issues and solutions, it was written eloquently, and it encompassed different points of view regarding the challenges that were addressed. In that regard, the application of the 6i model was the link that brought together all of the pieces of the project with a major educational impact, and as such was essential to its success.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Participant observation guide.

Guide Questions:		
How is participation addressed?	Communication: Dialogue and consensus vs. adult's voice (educational strategy). Interaction rules: Consensus vs. imposition by adults. Moments and spaces for giving voice: Adults facilitate vs. missing. Decision-making: Without children's voice // considering children's voice.	
How is group creation promoted?	Relationship: horizontal relationship vs. vertical relationship. Youngsters during interactions: seeking adults as a referent vs. not seeking Relationship of respect and collaboration between them vs. almost no relationship. Leadership: different roles among participants vs. no different roles. Roles are created naturally vs. Roles are imposed.	
CATEGORIES	YOUNG	ADULT
Transparent: There is clear and complete information available	Expresses his/her opinion Knows how his/her participation will turn out and what impact it can have on individuals and everyone else	Provides information requested by youngsters Considers the opinion of youngsters as just as important as that of adults The information (written and spoken) is adapted to the age, language, culture
Voluntary: arising from children's free will		Youngsters are (not) forced to express their opinions against their will Youngsters are (not) allowed to leave the table if they wish
Respectful: Everyone gives due consideration to what is expressed	Shows respect toward the voice of others Has the opportunity to have his/her own ideas and start a topic or debate question	Shows respect toward the voice of others
Relevant: It makes sense for children why they are participating	Expresses him/herself using the usual vocabulary and based on his/her experiences, knowledge and capacity Has the possibility to push for topics that he/she finds important	Discusses topics that are important for the lives of youngsters
Friendly: Experience is adapted to the needs and interests of each child		Respects times for reflection and expression Gives help when needed (how?)
Inclusive: Everyone should feel they can participate, in their own way		The minors who participate less are given space to express themselves.
Safe: Children feel protected from any harm		Positive non-discriminatory verbal and non-verbal language is used
Supportive: Everyone involved feels they are prepared		Each minor is included in all parts of activity as one of the group.
Responsive: Children must know what is done with their views		Responds to questions related to the future implications of current participation Explains the implications of the present participation without waiting for youngsters to ask.

Source: drawn up by the authors based on the references.

Table A2. Interview guide.

Name:	
Age:	
Employment/Training:	
Profile	<p>Do you like participating, saying what you think, proposing ideas, doing the things you have in mind ... ? Why?</p> <p>Do you think your friends participate or get involved in the same way that you do?</p> <p>Do you think that your interests and hobbies are different if you compare them with friends who do not participate? Why?</p>
Methodology	<p>What was the objective of the group? How was created?</p> <p>How did you organize yourself?</p> <p>What was your role?</p> <p>In the group, were you given an opportunity to speak your mind?</p> <p>In addition, do you think this is important, that the opinion of adolescents matters? Why?</p> <p>Do you think the things you do here have anything to do with the lives of teenagers?</p> <p>With what? Let's see, explain it to me ...</p> <p>Are there times when you were asked to comment more? What were those moments?</p> <p>Did you make decisions within the group? What type?</p> <p>How did you make the decisions? Tell me the process ...</p> <p>Do you like the way decisions were made?</p>
Barriers	Is there anything that prevented you from participating or getting involved more than you would have liked? Could you explain what those things are?
Drivers	<p>Does the experience you lived seem important to you? Why?</p> <p>For you, what is most important or what would you highlight from the experience?</p> <p>Looking back, seeing what the experience was like: If you wanted to encourage a friend to participate in the motor group, what would you say?</p>
Benefits	<p>Do you think there have been benefits from this experience? Can you tell me which ones?</p> <p>Is there anything you want to add that has not been covered so far?</p>

Source: drawn up by the authors based on [10,23–26].

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