



**EXPLORING ACTIVE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP:
AN EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT OF PROMOTION
AND COMMUNICATION**

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Abstract:

The European Union celebrates its thirty years anniversary in a peculiar historical moment characterized by crises and emergencies. Being able to count on an informed and active citizenship becomes increasingly necessary. Universities, schools and institutions are teaming up in order to propose projects for sharing information about and promoting the European Union involving all its citizens. Young people, in particular, are identified among the first interlocutors, to whom we entrust communication between peers, exploiting the potential of digital media. In a context often dominated by fake-news, complete and source-aware information about the European Union becomes an essential tool for citizens' empowerment. This article proposes a reflection starting from a multi-sited research conducted in the Italian cities of Bologna, Forlì and Ravenna through a project of the University of Bologna and the Emilia-Romagna Region entitled "Promoting active European citizenship in times of crisis". Through participant observation, the article reflects on the results emerged from word-café, workshops and meetings with citizens developed in three different territorial areas and with the involvement of three different targets: first and second grade high school students, university students and adult citizens.

Keywords: active citizenship; civic empowerment; European Union; young adults; ethnography

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1. Premises

European citizenship is approaching its thirty years anniversary perhaps in one of the most uncertain and difficult moments for the European Union. The migration crisis has now shown a weak solidarity between the Member States which, failing to find an agreement on a possible solution for modifying the Dublin regulation, have allowed a security approach to prevail; Brexit and its deep causes and consequences has demonstrated the fragility of EU institutions and the diversity of visions and future perspectives of the Member States; the climate and environmental crisis, an overall priority that led to the adoption of the Green New Deal, launched by Ursula von den Leyen; last but not least the health COVID-19 crisis that has been straining Member States and European citizens since the beginning of 2020. Italy has always been a central country for the stability of the Union. However, the last elections of the European Parliament (May, 2019) highlighted how the EU is still perceived as far from the daily life of citizens and how the European citizenship is still conceived “secondary” to the national one. The starting point of this research is the project "Promoting active European citizenship in times of crisis", co-financed by the Italian Region Emilia-Romagna and the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Bologna.

How should Member States re-activate and consolidate European citizenship? How could European citizens, especially the youngest, become “information multipliers”? Should they consider themselves gatekeepers of “good and correct” news in an era of crisis and fake news? Is peer-to-peer communication still effective when it comes to the European Union and its opportunities?

This research subsumes and tries to move beyond the questions raised above. The purpose is to reflect on the results of participant observation of several initiatives which aimed at informing and stimulating Italian citizens on European issues. In a context where European active citizenship is radically changing meaning, the above-mentioned project proposes a cross-analysis of different cities ((Bologna, Forlì and Ravenna) and targets (comprised of university students, up to older citizens). In other words, this article examines how initiatives aimed at the dissemination of information on European issues could foster active citizenship, turning citizens into "allies of institutions" (Arena 2006). In this sense, information becomes an empowerment tool (Rappaport 1987), a process through which the individuals, the organizations and the overall community could gain more power and therefore more control over individual and common issues.

2. Literature Review

The article starts by specifying key concepts that guided the project: it is essential to underline what we mean by active citizenship and, through a domino effect, including it in the European dimension. In Alessandro Pera's words, citizenship can be considered as *“the status that binds individuals to the political, civil and social community of reference, attributing to them rights and duties directly or indirectly connected with being part of that*

community"ⁱⁱ (Pera, 2019 : 23). However, the academic debate has pushed towards overcoming an interpretation of the concept of citizenship so centered on territorial-administrative belonging. In this sense, the merely normative vision of *citizenship* is supplemented by a substantial vision through an active exercise of it: "*being*" a citizen becomes "*acting as*" a citizen (D'Amico e Di Nuovo, 2010: 26).

Current social developments and ongoing political dynamics highlight the need to return to interpreting citizenship as not only ownership of rights but also as mobilization for the realization of those rights, taking on advocacy activities. Bassett underlines how:

"It is essential to overcome the limits of "Nation States" to step into more complete and complex concept of community, which includes local, national, regional and international contexts in which individuals live. As part of this interpretation, the notions of "citizen" and "citizenship" should no longer be limited to the exercise of the vote. Also include the set of actions performed by the individual that affect the life of the community (a local, national, regional and international level)"ⁱⁱⁱ (Bassetti, 2010: 202)

Over the years, territorial-administrative belonging, characterizing the traditional interpretation of the concept of citizenship, has been transformed and modified, introducing other dimensions of belonging: from the social dimension (Parsons, 1991) to "*cultural citizenship*" (Delanty, 2003) from "*lived citizenship*" (Lister, 2007) to "*multicultural citizenship*" (Rex, 1996; Kymlicka, 1995) up to citizenship bound to dimensions "*beyond*" the borders of Nation-States (Sassen, 2002) as "*global citizenship*" (O'Byrne, 2003), "*local*" (Holston and Appadurai, 1996), "*cosmopolitan*" (Osler A. & Starkey, 2018) and "*urban*" (Baubok, 2003). All these concepts express the need for integrated and multi-level actions, for a society that is becoming increasingly complex and differentiated (Campisi, 2016). Active European citizenship fits into this vein and to fully understand it we must take into consideration its dual-core: the active dimension and the European one. Active citizenship is understood as a set of collective actions and organizational forms aimed not only at the fulfillment of rights and duties but also safeguarding common goods, the support of co-citizens and in general, the sharing of common practices of responsibility and belonging. (Moro, 2013: 28).

Therefore, active citizenship becomes a responsible way of being in the world (Bassetti, 2010: 202). In this direction, several scholars have tried to list some indicators of active participation: Franceschi identifies a minimum set of skills and requirements that

ⁱⁱ Original citation: "*lo status che lega gli individui alla comunità politica, civile e sociale di riferimento, attribuendogli diritti e obblighi direttamente o indirettamente ricollegabili al suo essere parte di tale collettività*" (Pera, 2019 : 23). Translation of the author.

ⁱⁱⁱ Original citation: "*Si tratta di superare i limiti dello 'Stato nazionale' per passare al concetto di comunità, che comprende contesti locali, nazionali, regionali e internazionali in cui vivono gli individui. Nell'ambito di tale interpretazione le nozioni di 'cittadino' e di 'cittadinanza' non si possono più limitare all'esercizio del voto. Occorre includere anche l'insieme delle azioni compiute dall'individuo che incidono sulla vita della comunità (a livello locale, nazionale, regionale e internazionale) che in quanto tali necessitano di uno spazio pubblico in cui gli individui possano agire insieme*" (Bassetti, 2010: 202). Translation of the author.

citizens must have in order to participate actively and effectively in a democratic society^{iv}. In the same direction Guerra (2009) identifies specific competences. In both researches, the indicators underline the importance of having aware and "informed" citizens in order to effectively exercise his or her right of citizenship. But what does it mean to actively exercise European citizenship? The Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992 and entered into force the following year, established the citizenship of the European Union. From mid-90s, the European Union has been engaged in education for active European citizenship. The promotion of an "European passport" constitutes an example of such activities. The "European passport" informs Member States' citizens about European rights and duties, educates on the foundation of the EU and its political processes, and instructs them on possibilities and tools for exercising an active European citizenship. The project "Promoting active European citizenship in times of crisis" focused primarily on the perception of youth participation in active European citizenship.

3. Methodology

The applied methodology is composed by different techniques. It is multi-sited as it is considering several places - Bologna, Forlì and Ravenna - and targets, from middle, high school and University students up to all adult citizens of the three cities. In addition to the theoretical exploration and an in-depth analysis of the key concepts aforementioned, field research has analyzed active involvement of participants in the organized initiatives in the three cities.

While presenting comparable characteristics, Bologna, Forlì and Ravenna were chosen as representative of three different scenarios: Bologna, a historically university city, offers several opportunities for meeting and discussion about European issues, especially targeting University students; Forlì thanks to the University campus and Punto Europa Forlì^v, partner of the project, offers high quality workshop and conferences on European topics for University students, while still offering fewer meetings for citizens outside the University; Ravenna, on the other hand, offers a decidedly more limited number of events on European Union, targeted at students and citizens.

Participant observation activities were carried out by researchers actively involved in the project "Promoting active European citizenship in times of crisis". The project involved several participants in a dual role, both as beneficiaries of the initiatives, and as pro-active citizens for the successful implementation of the initiatives themselves.

In particular, the participants involved were:

^{iv} Franceschi M., Gli indicatori della cittadinanza attiva per la democrazia l'ambito sociale, culturale ed economico, trad. H. J. Abs e R. Veldhuis, "Indicators on Active Citizenship for Democracy – the social, cultural and economic domain", Paper by order of the Council of Europe for the CRELLNetwork on Active Citizenship for Democracy at the European Commission's Joint Research Center in Ispra, Italy, August 2006.

^v Punto Europa is an important information centre, part of the European information network of the European Community. Its main task is to provide information about the EU functioning - hence contributing to make it more visible, transparent and ultimately democratic - and to make European citizens aware of the EU's impact on their everyday life.

- The University community:
 - Professors, researchers, fellows and PhD students of the Department of Social and Political Sciences;
 - Italian and international students, including Erasmus exchange students;
 - University press office;
 - Administrators of the websites and social channels of the different Degree Programs of the Department;
- Teachers and students from two middle schools and three high schools, located in the three cities involved in the project;
- Citizens of the three locations;
- Institutions and research centers that have actively collaborated with the Department:
 - Centro Jean Monnet Punto Europa Forlì;
 - Forlì Institute for Central Eastern and Balkan Europe;
 - Europe Direct Emilia-Romagna Center;
 - Historical Institute of Resistance and Contemporary Age of Ravenna;
 - Classense Library of Ravenna;
 - Trisi Library in Lugo (RA);
- Journalists of national and local newspapers and radio podcasts.

The initiatives were based on a multidisciplinary approach, especially as it pertained to multiple involvement, training and information methods, which will be described more specifically in the following paragraphs.

The following analysis includes monitoring data of communication tools used for the promotion and the transmission of the initiatives of the project. Specifically, the social networking platforms - Facebook, Instagram and Twitter - provided useful statistics to quantify views and collect impressions of contents published during the project.

4. The project

Given the criticality of the historical moment in which the project took shape, it intended to promote activities, initiatives and paths as *ad hoc* tools to facilitate a process of awareness and re-connection with the European Union and its institutions. The main purposes of the initiative were not only to reflect critically on the future of the EU and on the concepts of European identity and integration, but also to develop a strong and authentic feeling of belonging. This is why several events have been created in three different territories of the Emilia-Romagna Region (Bologna, Forlì, Ravenna), with the active involvement of civil society actors (libraries, associations, institutions, universities, etc.).

The project design included, in all its stages, an initial explorative phase which in some cases proved to be fundamental for the construction of next steps, with particular regard to the initiatives designed for university students.

At the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Bologna, the Communicating Europe Laboratory - EuLab - was activated. The EuLab is a didactic path that involved 35 university and Erasmus students, involved in an exploratory and research path of the duration of 20 hours^{vi}. The working group, led by a teacher and two tutors, carried out an investigation into the presence of the European Union in media of the Member States. The media analysis considered specific period of times: the ten days preceding the European elections of May 2019 and from the 1st of October to the 30th of November 2019, coinciding with the stage of hearings for the selection of European Commissioners.

The students involved were organized into several observation groups, which examined following media: national and international newspapers (La Repubblica, Huffington Post, Open, El País); podcast (Radio 3 Mondo, Rai Play Radio, Il Post); Instagram profiles of "Open" and "La Repubblica"; news agency sites (ANSA and AGI); the News section of institutional websites (European Parliament, Italian Representative of the European Parliament and European Commission). What emerged from the observation and analysis of the contents contributed to structuring a set of actions for the dissemination of active European citizenship aimed at promoting and spreading knowledge on European integration processes in a historical moment characterized by skepticism, distrust and detachment from the EU institutions. The project covered by this article therefore took shape, characterized in particular by four thematic strands:

- The main challenges facing the EU in the new institutional cycle (2019-2024);
- The functioning of the EU political system;
- The forms of expression of an active European citizenship;
- The study, training and mobility opportunities offered by European programs to young citizens and in particular University students.

As mentioned above, the project identified the following targets: the university community, middle and high school students and teachers as well as adult citizens. The methods of involvement, training and information have been adopted following a logic and a multidisciplinary approach.

The hypothesis is that in order to promote active citizenship in times of crisis, an enlarged community of well-informed citizens must be built. Moreover, well-informed citizens should overcome the idea of information as a mere package transferred unidirectionally from an issuer to a recipient - as it was theorized by Shannon and Weaver (1949) with the old mathematical/postal model. Participants are asked to become allies for the dissemination and multiplication of information and messages in an era already characterized by a noisy overload of stimuli and information, from an information ecosystem, as the web, where it becomes increasingly complicated to defend oneself from fake news. From here emerged meetings, word-cafes and workshops designed according to participatory and "orchestral" logic. As already pointed out in 2005 by Pina Lalli while

^{vi} From October to December 2019, the EuLab involved students from the Bachelor course in Political, Social and International Sciences of the University of Bologna.

analyzing a first experimental path on the promotion of European citizenship among young people carried out with the Legislative Assembly of Emilia-Romagna:

"These are not single standing communication events that have a finite existence and which are based on the traditional communication channels, with a precise identification of objectives and a strict differentiation between speaker and receiver. Instead, these are a living process of communication played largely on the construction of dynamic relationships, through moments of direct exchange and real sharing. This process leads you to adhere constantly and promptly to the needs and requests that arise from time to time and expand on the comparison and cooperation between different actors, with the ultimate goal of achieving a concrete contribution to the development of an European identity in the young generations." (Lalli 2005: 20)^{vii}

Therefore, during these initiatives, participants feel as active members of a shared space where all together they can not only express themselves, but also confront each other through active and proactive listening.

4.1 Word-cafe and workshop for university students

University students were involved in two different types of activities: workshops and word-cafes.

"(Knowing) your European Union: workshop on the opportunities offered by the EU" is the title of the workshops organized on the three territories and dedicated to the promotion of training, study, work and international mobility opportunities for young generations.

The objective pursued was to put the participants in contact with experts^{viii} to foster and build a greater knowledge of the opportunities offered by the EU, the prospects of study and work, reducing and overcoming those limits (and forms of inequalities) which often undermine access to the same information.

The workshops were open to a limited number of up to twenty people in order to facilitate a continuous exchange of questions, comments and testimonials and to guarantee an expert-student interaction as customized and targeted as possible to the needs, doubts and requests expressed by each student, hoping that he/she will later become a spokesperson for good practices, correct information and reliable sources with their peers, in the context of a peer-to-peer communication process. Regarding the contents, each workshop began with the presentation of an overview of the opportunities

^{vii} Original citation: *"non si tratta di singoli eventi di comunicazione in se stessi conclusi, affidati ai consueti canali di comunicazione, con una precisa identificazione di obiettivi e una rigida differenziazione tra emittente e destinatario. Si tratta invece di un processo vivo di comunicazione giocato in gran parte sulla costruzione di relazioni dinamiche, attraverso momenti di scambio e condivisione diretta e reale. Cercare di aderire costantemente e tempestivamente alle esigenze e alle istanze che di volta in volta si manifestano e allargare al confronto e la cooperazione tra diversi attori, avendo come obiettivo finale il conseguimento di un contributo concreto alla maturazione di un'identità europea nelle giovani generazioni."* (Lalli 2005: 20). Translation of the author.

^{viii} Teachers and trainers of the Jean Monnet Center Europe Point - Forlì specialized in European issues and promotion of active citizenship.

and calls for proposals, with main focus on Erasmus + study mobility and internship mobility courses funded by the EU. The experts also shared links to accredited sites and sources where young people can find information with particular reference to deadlines, procedures and skills required (not only linguistic but also soft and hard ones).

"European citizenship: what do you think, how do you imagine it" is the title of word-cafes, an innovative format of debate conceived as a moment of confrontation for students of bachelor and master's degrees, both Italian and international. In fact, many students take part to Erasmus exchange experiences every year by moving to a European university for a period of 6/12 months, as well as incoming foreign students, who choose Italy for a period of study abroad.

The word-café methodology has been particularly useful in fostering a comparison between the young participants on the different declinations of European citizenship, their idea, their points of view and their aspirations, to arrive at a shared reinterpretation of the several opinions emerged in order to build shared meanings.

The meetings were in fact structured in two steps: the first focused on the expression of experiences and examples of European citizenship by the participants, coming from different countries, whose interaction sometimes also took place in English. A moment that represented an opportunity for mutual learning in which one learns from the experiences of others. And a second step dedicated to the collective reinterpretation and reflection on opinions emerged, in order to build shared conclusions. Everything was finally summarized in a final report.

Participation in word-café was on average high: 20 people in Ravenna, 15 in Forlì and 45 in Bologna. A moderator (leader-moderator) coordinated the different phases. In Ravenna the participants first dealt with issues that are inspired by current events: the economic crisis, migratory movements, Brexit and the electoral result of some European nations. These themes represented the starting point for a broader reflection on the sense of European citizenship and on the repercussions that Europe can have in everyone's daily life. In a second round of opinions stimulated by the leader's questions, attention has shifted to the future of the European Union, to the influence that the Union still maintains on individual States in an increasingly globalized scenario. At the end, the group focused on European citizenship starting from the definition of a scale of potentially more important rights and duties, thus coming to express its representation of active European citizenship. The word café in the city of Forlì took place at the university campus, thus promoting the participation of young people between 20-25 years old. Also, in this case, current affairs and the international political scenario summarize the topics of confrontation that emerged among the young participants. They expressed concern for the future of the community, noting an alarming "political vacuum" and "political indecision" that would limit the EU's ability to make its voice heard at a national level.

In Bologna there were a total of 45 participants in the word cafe. Among them there were also some Erasmus students, two journalists and a member of the Europe Direct Emilia-Romagna Center. The ideas for a first round of opinions were taken from

the research work previously performed by the EuLab Laboratory. The presence of the European Union and related issues in the media is still insufficient for most of those present. It is a shared opinion that this lack of information negatively affects the perception of the EU and the development of a sense of community.

The presence of journalists during the word-café has allowed the development of an articulated debate on the topic, useful for clarifying the publishing choices of news sites and newspapers, on the role of press offices and therefore on the consequent presence of European issues on the daily agenda of the media. Comparing the opinions shared by all the participants, a general conclusion was formulated as a summary of all the interventions. It has been agreed that the European Union is a complex organism with defects too, but it is an organism in constant evolution; therefore, the sense of European citizenship in the population must be promoted and raised so that everyone can participate consciously in its construction. This is why, according to young university students, it would also be useful to increase investment in training for active European citizenship from primary schools.

4.2 Meetings in secondary schools

Europe among the desks is the framework of the initiatives created for the schools thanks to the collaboration of young expert trainers on Europe, with whom the classes involved have been able to explore the history and functioning of the European institutions, with constant attention to concrete experiences of interest to each class, and a careful look at social and political current affairs.

The methodology tested is that of the two steps flow of communication (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) which provides for an in-depth study with a class and accompanying follow-up for the establishment of a peer-to-peer exchange communication, where the students and teachers themselves have become influencers, even before gatekeepers of good information, capable of contrasting the clichés of fake news through innovative channels and tools.

A total of 153 male and female students were involved in three territories: 50 in the Ravenna area, 75 in Forlì and 28 in Bologna. These were students from middle school and last year students from high schools.

The history, the birth and the functioning of the European institutions represented the main focus of each meeting, integrated in some cases by sharing documents such as the Schumann Declaration, the starting point for the debate and the comparison of points of view between students and teachers in the classroom. More frequent in year five of each participating school is the reference to events of stringent relevance such as Brexit or the Dublin regulation, topics considered of great interest for further study by the students themselves and by teachers, in view of the students' final exams.

4.3 Conferences debate with citizens

The meetings open to citizens have been designed to create real moments for debate and discussion, in which to deepen aspects regarding the European Union and its future challenges with the assistance of an expert. The participants were involved in three different lesson - debates which also became an opportunity for learning and using information based on research and away from the commonplaces often manipulated by the captivating style of the various fake news about Europe. Three scholars have been involved in these meetings.

In Bologna, the conference was a moment for balance, reflections and forecasts for an EU that faces the new 2019-2024 institutional cycle, bringing with it challenges and thorny issues that require immediate answers. "European Union: evolution of the species" was the title of Guido Lenzi's speech, who presented the EU as a non-static, but dynamic institutional body, like a path. Lenzi says how important it is that the EU is aware of its internal differences and the different social contracts that compose it to reaffirm the political and not only geographical space of its existence. Paola Subacchi's speech entitled "EU and Brexit: no return?" analyzed the causes and consequences of Brexit also in light of the most recent election results in England. Subacchi detailed the upcoming scenarios and the unknowns to be addressed in the near future.

Concluding her speech, she underlined how important and useful reflections can be made from Brexit: first of all she makes a reflection on the risk of using the European Union as a "scapegoat" to solve problems of internal politics; then, Brexit should teach us how technical issues, such as economic negotiations, cannot be resolved with a binary choice proposed in a referendum (yes / no); finally she mentioned something that is often forgotten: the strength of the European Union in international trade.

Forlì hosted Antonio Zotti, professor at the Catholic University of Milan, who initially focused his speech on the notion of "rule of law", starting from clear legal references such as Art. 2 of the Treaty of the European Union, Art. 3 of the Council of Europe and the Preamble of the European Charter of Human Rights (ECHR). Zotti then presented the intense and complicated relationship between democracy, the rule of law and human rights: three concepts with a strong connection in terms of concrete application but which conceptually do not equal and do not necessarily coexist, raising for about an hour an interesting and stimulating debate among participants about the historical forms of government.

The Ravenna meeting, hosted inside a library^{ix}, was entitled "Dissatisfied with Europe: the Visegrad countries and the challenge of illiberal democracies". The speaker stressed the democratic aspects of the various European Treaties and the high level of complexity of the important integration process of the European Union. Starting from the experience of Poland and Hungary, attention was also focused on the role of the media, the complex relationship between the executive and the judiciary institutions and the

^{ix} The meeting took place at the Trisi library in Lugo di Ravenna in collaboration with the Historical Institute of Resistance and Contemporary Age of Ravenna and its Province.

difficult process of building a national identity. Participation in the final debate was very high.

In fact, a lively interaction has developed between the professor and the audience, mostly made up of adult citizens. Among the topics on which the participants wanted to bring attention were: Brexit and populism; judicial system of the European Union; European parliamentary elections and parties; press and self-censorship within democracies; role of digital media in the European social context.

The discussions had a very positive response from the participants who have always been numerous, intervening and asking questions to the speakers, demonstrating a lively and real interest in the issue of European integration. An interest that demonstrates the need to increasingly eliminate the distances between the local territory and Europe and to find connections with the political history of our days.

4.4 Project communication and promotion in the territory

In order to communicate and to promote the project we prepared an Action Plan focused on the web, then integrated it with offline communication tools such as traditional posters and flyers distributed in the three initiatives. The tools for online communication were represented by a website with a responsive version and social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Conceived as an information space on the project and as a dynamic channel for a constant update on the planned initiatives, the website has been structured in sections with useful resources for the target audience. The structure reflects the macro-areas of the project which coincide with the three targets: schools, universities and citizens. The site includes information on the objectives of the project, the participants and partners involved, but also a press room with a press review and an agenda in which all the events scheduled in the cities involved and the related information have been included step-by-step.

The activation of social media profiles was useful in three different phases: promotion and launch of the initiatives, information coverage in real time, information and ex-post analysis. In order to increase the visibility and impressions of each content, as well as to potentially promote interactions and reactions, a strategy was followed mainly based on the insertion of tags and mentions of the profiles of the partners involved in the activities on the agenda.

This particular networking strategy was useful on the Facebook platform, where project partners and actively involved parties contributed to relaunching posts and events, promoting greater visibility on the net, so as to reach a coverage of 3,015 impressions and 468 interactions on a total of 20 posts published in the month of analysis.[×] Equally effective for the promotion and communication of the project was the use of Twitter, experimented mainly for real-time communication during the meetings carried out, through the practice of live twitting which allowed to follow interventions and

[×] Data collected from the insights of the Facebook page of the EuLab project, considering the period 20 November - 17 December 2019

debates even by those who did not attend. During the month of development of the project, 31 tweets were produced and 8,727 views were obtained.^{xi}

We also did a visual storytelling of the project through the Instagram platform, where images and videos of the interventions carried out in the area were published using all the formats made available by this social media: photo-post in the gallery, albums and video-stories. In detail, the Instagram Stories contributed to sharing contents in real time from each initiative. The posts in the gallery were effective for the presentation of the program of each event and for ex-post reports, through which to show some highlights of each meeting.

If Twitter has particularly improved interaction with public figures, with the so-called expert citizens (Schutz 1979) and newspapers, Instagram has proved to be fundamental for interacting with a younger audience, represented by high school students and University. In fact, 18-24 years is the age group most represented among the followers of the EuLab profile. Moreover, in the same period we shared 10 posts (including 5 albums with an average of 8 photos) and 23 stories. The posts achieved a total coverage of 1,035 people reached, while the stories achieved 1,473 people reached.^{xii} Information on the project was also disseminated with press release sent to local newspapers, blogs and radio stations.

5. Conclusions

The engagement we reached and which was observed during the initiatives demonstrates the existence of a real and strong interest in community issues. It has been observed that where the presence of events and opportunities for discussion and in-depth study is reduced, the project has achieved significant results in terms of attendance and active participation in the debate, sometimes above expectations. This is the case of the experiences observed in the Ravenna area.

The feedback collected in the city of Forlì is heterogeneous and evidently conditioned by a different urban and cultural substrate, and even more in Bologna, the University's headquarters.

The differences observed reflect what was already highlighted in 2005 by Pina Lalli, whose words help us in part to understand the reasons for a differentiated response to the same type of initiatives:

"That is, we place information in a context (or interpretative framework) that allows us to make it meaningful and more or less important for us. But where does this interpretative framework come from? Certain characteristics that distinguish us and define our concrete social relationships are revealed here: the different cultural context and the social

^{xi} Data collected by the insights provided by the Twitter platform regarding the EuLab profile in the time interval 20 November - 18 December 2019

^{xii} Data collected from the statistics provided by the Instagram platform on the EuLab profile for the period of time 20 November - December 18, 2019.

environment in which we receive information; the expectations that animate us about the importance we attach to this or that theme; how we can verify what image or consideration we have of the issuing source, for example to consider it more or less reliable, our emotional, ideal or ideological dispositions towards it; our unequal cultural or social resources and belonging, which place us differently in society". (Lalli 2005: 8)

Especially for the youngest, the project represented an opportunity for learning and direct interaction with experts, useful for the acquisition of civic skills, for the development of a greater and more mature awareness about their rights and duties as a citizen of the European Union. As stressed by Gaušis himself (2017), information, disseminated and shared also through new digital platforms, becomes in all respects an empowerment tool for young people who are preparing to participate and be involved in democratic processes and who often, also due to gaps in the training systems, know little about Europe itself.

Social media, as experienced during the project, can help to reach young people more effectively, make them feel part of a process where they themselves are protagonists and active actors for the dissemination of the same message. They can enrich their knowledge and stimulate their interest in the European Union through multimedia communication formats that are increasingly captivating and close to their language.

The communication aimed at them must also be concrete in face to face meetings. The meetings held demonstrate how sharing the same space, face-to-face interaction, trigger real relationship processes, mutual listening assumes a strategic value, a necessary lever for the subsequent construction of shared meanings and for an overall enrichment of its social capital. This was the case during the discussion-meetings with citizens and during word-café.

The same workshops, combined with in-depth meetings in schools, have helped to build links between the world of students and that of institutions, which increasingly asks for critical and proactive contributions from younger citizens, who in turn have expressed their will and desire to inclusion and participation.

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