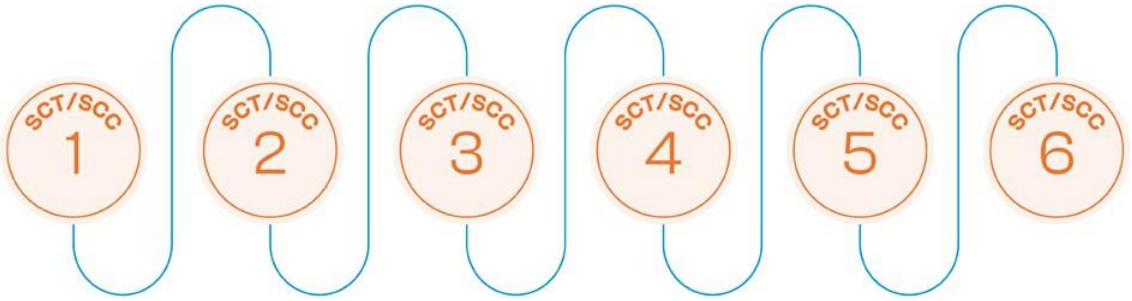
The ECF4CLIM hybrid participatory approach.

The ECF4CLIM hybrid participatory approach, rooted in participatory action research and partly based on the STAVE tool (Systematic Tool for Behavioural Assumption, Validation and Exploration) **encourages students, teachers, staff and external stakeholders to work together to assess sustainability competences and reflect on the impact of actions.** By emphasising creativity, transdisciplinarity and iterative reflection, it supports transformative change and enhances institutional capacity to address sustainability challenges.

In each of our 13 Demonstration Sites (DS) in Finland, Portugal, Romania and Spain, we have established two types of innovative organisational structures: **Sustainability Competence Teams (SCTs)**, composed of students, teachers and staff, and **Sustainability Competence Committees (SCCs)**, which also include representatives from the wider education community, such as families, experts, authorities, NGOs, etc.



Each of them meets up to six times over the course of the project to encourage reflexivity and deliberation.

Over 500 students, teachers, staff and representatives from the wider educational communities at our DS are actively involved in our SCTs and SCCs (130 SCT meetings and 50 SCC meetings).

SCT/SCC session 1:

Establishing the baseline of sustainability competences at our demonstration sites (DS).

- Employing a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methods, the project establishes the initial state of play at schools and universities in terms of the individual and collective competences and the environmental performance.
- The methods include: environmental KPIs, environmental audits, short surveys, interviews, documentary analysis, and reconvened focus groups.

SCT/SCC session 2:

Co-designing interventions to foster the acquisition of competences.

- Drawing on the empirical evidence from the baseline assessment and through the participatory and deliberative process in SCT/SCC session 2, each demonstration site co-designs a tailor-made initial set of interventions to foster sustainability competences and climate action.
- The co-designed interventions include behavioural (e.g., changing habits, routines, social norms, organisational structures, etc.) and structural (e.g. small-scale retrofitting solutions, green spaces, green procurement procedures) measures.
- Out of 159, 64 interventions were selected for implementation.

SCT/SCC sessions 3 & 4:

Co-implementing practical, replicable and context-adapted interventions.

- To support the participatory implementation of our interventions, several monitoring mechanisms are in place: intervention templates (the research team, in close collaboration with the DSs, collects information on the interventions); monthly reporting; and SCT/SCC sessions 3 & 4 (to promote reflection on the interventions and gather initial evidence on the impact of the interventions on sustainability competences).

SCT/SCC sessions 5 & 6:

Participatory evaluation of the interventions and of the project as a whole.

- The theory-based stakeholder evaluation guides our evaluation approach to explore the relationships between the interventions (and the whole project) and sustainability competences.
- On the one hand, we analyse the expected and observed outcomes of the intervention (and of the whole project), and on the other hand, the expected and observed relationships between the intervention (and the whole project) and its outcomes.

The ECF4CLIM experience shows that the hybrid participatory process fosters a culture of co-learning by establishing new relationships among students, teachers, and external participants, encouraging mutual exchange and collaboration. It strengthens teamwork through joint planning, decision-making, and implementation, while ensuring inclusive and empowering participation that gives everyone a voice. Learning becomes more active and engaging, helping participants develop a deeper, more holistic understanding of sustainability and see how small actions contribute to broader environmental goals. At the same time, it bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, making learning meaningful, practical, and impactful. The iterative nature of the process enables the development of long-term sustainability projects that extend beyond isolated, one-off actions.

Overall, the participatory approach - bringing together students, teachers, staff, and external actors in shared planning and decision-making - was highly effective in catalysing self-reflection, deliberation and co-learning, effectively turning evaluation into a competence-building process. As with the Roadmap, ECF4CLIM devoted particular attention to evaluating the quality of the participatory approach, in terms of both processes and outcomes. This was achieved through dedicated SCT/SCC sessions and short surveys conducted after each participatory initiative in our schools and universities.

To facilitate the uptake and implementation of the hybrid participatory method in schools and other educational institutions, two guides are available online: a comprehensive methodological guide and a shorter, more practical version.

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