



CIVIS Alliance – Open Lab Project

Impact Assessment Report

01 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Title of the project	CIVIS Sustainability Challenge: an interdisciplinary learning initiative for real-world impact.
Project coordinator	Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)
Universities	Proponent Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) Partners: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), University of Glasgow (UofG), and Makerere University.
Hub theme	Climate, Environment, Energy (mainly)
Duration of activities	Mar 2026 – May 2026
Place of the activities	Brussels (Belgium), Madrid (Spain), Athens (Greece), Glasgow (UK), and Kampala (Uganda). Activities outside of the EU were covered with other funding

02 – PARTNERS/TARGET AUDIENCE

Number of internal and external stakeholders involved in and impacted by the project

INTERNAL (All CIVIS universities)				EXTERNAL (All CIVIS cities/regions)	
Academics	Researchers	Students	Admin personnel	Citizens	Other - please specify
20+	5+	+/- 95	5+	/	15+ (mentors and jury)

Non-university associations and organisations that have been involved in the project

ASSOCIATIONS/ORGANISATIONS		
Name	Country	Description
DAP	Belgium	Insurance and wealth management SME (Private Business)
Hatzimichali Museum	Greece	Museum of Folk Art and Tradition (Cultural Institution)
Tangente	Spain	Cooperative group for ecosocial transformation (NGO/Business)

KCCA	Uganda	Kampala Capital City Authority (Public Authority - intended partner)
Glasgow Museums	United Kingdom	Museum
GalGael	United Kingdom	NGO
QuantaTrace	United Kingdom	Private company

03 – PROJECT IMPACT

Social dimension

Across the five local editions (ULB, NKUA, UAM, UoG, MAK), the CIVIS Sustainability Challenge demonstrated a strong capacity to enhance knowledge, foster collaboration, and promote inclusion within diverse academic and social environments.

A total of 95 students participated across the three universities (ULB: 16; NKUA: 36; UAM: 23, UoG: 15, MAK: 5), representing over 20 disciplines, multiple study levels (Bachelor, Master, PhD), and a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds. This diversity enabled rich interdisciplinary exchanges, as explicitly highlighted in ULB's "expertise exchange" session and NKUA's carefully curated team-formation strategy ensuring gender balance, disciplinary diversity, and inclusion across study levels.

The Challenge fostered new collaborations between universities and local stakeholders, including:

- DAP (Belgian SME) for ULB's decarbonization case
- The Municipality of Athens and the Angeliki Hatzimichali Museum for NKUA
- The Instituto Universitario de Ciencias de la Educación (IUCE) for UAM
- Prospective public authorities with Kampala Capital City Authority for University of Makerere
- Glasgow Museums, GalGael, and QuantaTrace for UoG

The activities promoted equal opportunities by welcoming undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral, and international students. The pedagogical design: icebreakers, SDG workshops, mentoring, peer-learning, and co-creation ensured that all participants could contribute regardless of prior sustainability knowledge. Social inclusion was strengthened through team-based problem solving, peer coaching, and co-creation with local communities, such as the museum staff in Athens or the SME representatives in Brussels. Students consistently reported feeling empowered, valued, and more connected to their academic community.

Cultural dimension

The Challenge contributed significantly to cultural awareness, cross-sector dialogue, and new learning pathways across all participating universities.

NKUA's edition was deeply embedded in a cultural heritage environment, taking place inside the Angeliki Hatzimichali Museum. Students explored the intersection of folklore, architecture, and sustainability, supported by guided tours and expert lectures. This created a unique bridge between cultural heritage and climate action.

ULB integrated design thinking, prototyping, and FabLab exposure, enabling students to experiment with creative methodologies and material-based learning. UAM linked sustainability to landscape education and geography, helping future teachers embed environmental awareness into their pedagogical practice.

At Glasgow, the challenge was showcased as one of the university's quarterly "ARC Success Stories," shared with researchers across all disciplines, and relayed through the College of Arts & Humanities' Sustainability Forum and Glasgow Goes Green Week. The winning proposal also engaged directly with cultural heritage, linking sustainability to the preservation of traditional boatbuilding craft at GalGael.

Makerere University added a culturally grounded perspective by focusing on local waste streams, informal recycling practices, and community-based entrepreneurship. The project reflects cultural realities of Kampala, where resource recovery and circularity are essential components of urban life.

Dissemination occurred through:

- social media, press releases, and institutional websites (NKUA, ULB, CIVIS)
- classroom presentations and recorded deliverables (UAM, ULB)
- WhatsApp communication channels (Makerere)

Together, these activities broadened accessibility to sustainability topics and created new cultural learning pathways aligned with local contexts

Economic dimension

At ULB, the challenge acted as a direct catalyst for organisational change at the partner company, DAP: one participating student secured a trial internship leading toward recruitment, and the challenge triggered the creation of a 25-member volunteer Sustainable Innovation Committee, shifting DAP's ESG strategy from a top-down to a participatory model. Several student proposals — including a carsharing scheme and an ESG-based responsible life insurance product — are under active development within the company. At NKUA, all participants gained a networking opportunity with the local business sector through free access to the ATHLOS Business Summit, offered as a company award. At Glasgow, the University's Innovation Directorate provided targeted internal funding for team prizes.

Added value for the beneficiaries

The Challenge generated significant and multidimensional added value for students, staff, universities, and external partners. Its impact can be observed across social, cultural, economic, educational, and technological dimensions, combining both qualitative outcomes and measurable indicators.

For students, benefits included:

- Strengthened sustainability literacy, including SDGs, climate adaptation, waste management, circular economy, and decarbonization strategies.
- Enhanced transversal skills: teamwork, leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and time management.
- Authentic learning experience through real-world cases, stakeholder interaction, and rapid prototyping.
- Interdisciplinary and international exposure, fostering cultural awareness and collaborative problem-solving.
- Increased self-confidence through pitching sessions, expert feedback, and public presentations.

Makerere University students particularly valued the opportunity to develop a practical, income-generating solution rooted in their immediate environment. UAM students highlighted the pedagogical value of integrating sustainability into teaching practice. ULB and NKUA participants emphasized the transformative nature of working with real stakeholders.

Across the alliance, more than 90 students took part in the Challenge, forming over 15 interdisciplinary teams that worked intensively on sustainability-related problems. Their work was supported by at least 15 external experts, who contributed through mentoring sessions, workshops, and jury evaluations.

For external stakeholders, the Challenge delivered:

- Concrete sustainability solutions tailored to local needs (e.g., museum sustainability strategies, district heating sobriety, school decarbonization pathways, circular economy models).
- Strengthened collaboration with universities, reinforcing their role in local innovation ecosystems.
- Visibility and outreach through communication campaigns, social media, and event dissemination.
- Access to young talent, fostering future recruitment and partnership opportunities.

External stakeholders were thus strongly involved: more than 10 organisations collaborated with the participating universities, and students collectively produced over 15 actionable solution proposals.

Finally, for universities, the Challenge contributed to:

- Strengthened inter-faculty collaboration, enabling interdisciplinary teaching and research synergies.
- Enhanced student engagement, with high participation rates and positive feedback.
- Reinforced partnerships with local stakeholders, aligning universities with societal needs.
- A replicable and scalable model for future editions, adaptable to different contexts and disciplines

At the institutional level, the 2026 edition mobilised five universities, facilitated the creation or consolidation of new partnerships, and engaged dozens of academic and administrative staff in facilitation, mentoring, and evaluation roles. Communication efforts resulted in multiple online publications and social media posts, increasing the visibility of both the Challenge and the participating institutions.

Relevance to the context

The project is highly relevant at local, national, and international levels, aligning with CIVIS's mission to connect universities with their surrounding communities.

Locally, each edition addressed a pressing contextual need:

- ULB: supporting a Belgian SME in its decarbonization roadmap
- NKUA: helping a historic museum respond to Athens' Climate Action Plan
- UAM: integrating sustainability into teacher training and school curricula
- Makerere: addressing visible paper waste and promoting circularity on campus
- UofG: connecting students with a community heritage charity in Govan, linking sustainability to local craft and urban regeneration

Nationally, the Challenge supported public priorities such as:

- Greece's cultural heritage sustainability strategies
- Belgium's SME climate transition
- Spain's educational modernization
- Uganda's urban waste management challenges

Internationally, the Challenge strengthened CIVIS's identity as a European alliance promoting sustainability, inclusion, and civic engagement. The participation of students from multiple countries (ULB: 69% non-Belgian; NKUA: Erasmus participation) reinforced its global relevance.

Makerere University's involvement expanded the Challenge's reach to East Africa, demonstrating CIVIS's capacity to operate across continents and adapt to diverse socio-economic contexts.

Explain how the project has fulfilled the goals and objectives of the European project CIVIS2 (Erasmus+, 2022 - 2026)

The CIVIS Sustainability Challenge has demonstrably fulfilled the overarching goals of CIVIS2 and, in particular, the objectives of Stream 1, by creating a structured, participatory, and socially engaged educational initiative that bridges universities with their surrounding ecosystems.

From its conception, the project was designed to strengthen cooperation between academia and local social, economic, political, and cultural actors. As outlined in the project description, each partner university engaged with local organisations, public authorities, NGOs, cultural institutions, and businesses to identify real needs and co-define the sustainability issues that students will address. This direct collaboration ensures that the Challenge is firmly rooted in societal realities and aligns with the Stream 1 objective of reinforcing connections between universities and their civic environments.

The project also fulfils the Stream 1 ambition of supporting participatory and citizen-driven research. The Challenge explicitly requires that cases be based on real-world scenarios and developed in dialogue with stakeholders, who contribute contextual knowledge, provide feedback, and participate in evaluation processes. This step is directly connected to the Open Labs goal: supporting participatory and citizen research by actively involving citizens and stakeholders in the research process to co-create knowledge and develop solutions. By integrating stakeholders throughout the process: from case design to mentoring and jury participation, the project operationalises the CIVIS vision of collaborative knowledge production.

Furthermore, the Challenge contributes to the CIVIS2 goals of fostering interdisciplinary and international collaboration. The project brings together students from diverse academic backgrounds, levels of study, and cultural contexts, creating a rich environment for cross-disciplinary learning and intercultural exchange. This collaborative dimension is central to the CIVIS mission of building a European civic space for education and innovation. The inter-university phase further strengthens transnational cooperation by enabling students from different partner institutions to work together, share perspectives, and compare approaches to sustainability challenges.

The project also advances CIVIS2's educational modernisation objectives by embedding a "learning by doing" model that integrates practical application, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving. Students are required to apply scientific and technological knowledge, engage in teamwork, and reflect on the societal implications of their solutions. This pedagogical approach responds directly to student demands for more practical and meaningful learning experiences and aligns with the CIVIS commitment to equipping learners with the skills needed to address contemporary sustainability challenges.

Finally, the Challenge contributes to the CIVIS2 priority of promoting the Sustainable Development Goals. Each case addresses at least one SDG, and the initiative as a whole aims to accelerate the social and environmental transition within partner universities and their communities. By integrating SDG-focused training modules, mobilising local expertise, and fostering innovation in areas such as circular economy, climate action, and sustainable cities, the project reinforces the role of CIVIS as a driver of societal transformation.

In sum, the CIVIS Sustainability Challenge embodies the core principles of CIVIS2 and fully realises the objectives of Stream 1 by strengthening university–society collaboration, promoting participatory research, enhancing civic engagement, fostering interdisciplinary and international cooperation, modernising education through experiential learning, and contributing directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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