

# The didactical ideas behind Europe at Work

The EU legislative process is an important part of the curriculum in nearly all EU member states, but that is not all it is. Everyone might know that a large part of our laws is decided in the EU, but how this actually happens is far from common knowledge. From a democratic point of view, it is a problem if people don't know how their laws are being made, or how the process can be influenced.

That's why new methods are needed in youth education to make the EU accessible and relatable to all students, not only to a small elite. We see two challenges in particular:

The EU deals with complicated issues in complicated ways. To not drown in detail, and start out by confirming one's worst ideas about the EU, simplification is needed.

Also, the EU as a subject is far from the everyday experience and knowledge of the students. In the learning process, the students should gradually experience the EU making sense – not only as an educational subject but also for the students as citizens.

This is not a task that can be solved with a quick fix such as a roleplaying game. What is needed is a comprehensive course where students engage the subject in several ways.

The first part of the course, **Law Making in the EU**, reviews the main institutions of the EU's legislative process, and the basic tenets of the Lisbon Treaty's ordinary legislative procedure. At the same time, legislation regarding the free movement of workers is presented as a case.

The second part consists of the roleplaying game **Europe at Work** where the students themselves enter negotiations to fix problems and disagreements.

The third and final part, **Job done!**, is a reflection phase where the themes from the game are discussed.

## Keep up motivation

To succeed, we need to take on the challenge that is motivation. Live Action Role Plays (“edu-LARPs”) do this well. Simulations engage students and activate their knowledge. Each student has their own, well-defined role in a team. The digitised platform adds something crucial by, throughout game day, challenging and helping every student to fulfil their role as technical advisor, parliamentarian, journalist, lobbyist, etc.

The LARP/web app combination allows us to motivate students in several ways, and to keep motivation high for a long time. The students have individual tasks, they have to move around physically, it is not unlike playing, your team can win, you get a different role from the one you usually have, you can make mistakes without losing too much prestige – and your fellow students depend on you! At the same time, the deadlines and the narrative create a hectic atmosphere.

All in all, it is a powerful cocktail that draws in even the insecure and reserved students.

## Simplifications

Simplification is part of the foundation of learning. In Europe at Work, we simplify in many ways. The number of member states has been reduced, just as those of political parties, media, and lobbyists, leaving the students with no more than necessary to understand the key concepts. The member countries do not look like the actual ones. At least for a while, students should leave their national perspectives and focus on the EU as a “machine for compromise”.

At the same time, EU negotiators are met with demands and expectations from their constituencies, national or political. In taking on their roles in the negotiations, the students should reach a better understanding of these demands and their consequences. What's coming out of the EU is already clear – what goes into the EU less so.

The EU as a distant and byzantine construction is also a type of simplification but as our purpose is to make the EU accessible and relatable, it is of course one we try to avoid.

In media and political debate, there are often narratives portraying the EU as a project for the elite, or as an organisation governing us but not easily influenced by us. The edu-LARP demonstrates that this is not the whole story. Rather, the EU works with the very basic needs of ordinary people, and a lot of voices are being heard in the legislative process – partly because European law requires a very broad majority to be adopted.

### Training and transfer

From a didactical point of view, the course looks as follows. In the weeks leading up to the game, the key concepts, actors, and conflicts are presented to the students. This preparation lets them go into the game a bit further ahead than “square one”.

The students should learn some fundamental terms of the EU glossary. If you do not know the meaning of words like European Parliament, directive, or internal market, you will feel a disconnection from the beginning. To counteract this disconnect, the first step towards accessibility and relatability is being able to recognise and recall some of the key concepts in the EU vocabulary (or semiotic domain).

This requires training. The basics will be repeated in different ways, and the students have to use the concepts in several settings, such as discussions where they must understand and respond to other people's arguments.

This makes them achieve what in pedagogical parlance is called transfer – that the learner can use their knowledge outside the specific learning context.

### Transformational learning

Training and transfer both work to make the EU more accessible, but not necessarily relatable. For the majority of students, this relatability is particularly achieved in the last part of the course – the reflection phase, **Job done!**

In this phase, students discuss the themes they have met during the game. Some of them may be close to their personal aspirations of working or

studying abroad. Others involve discussions about principles many young people also care about. How can we protect human rights and a society's vulnerable groups against discrimination? How can regulation on vital cross-border issues be just and effective?

If students experience the EU as having the potential to influence on issues important to them, they relate to the European process. They expand their frame of reference and see more of the world – or see that more of the world makes sense to them. This is what American learning theorist Jack Mezirow has called transformational learning because it also adds a new (European) dimension to their identity.

The opportunity to achieve this goal is within reach with Europe at Work, but the teacher's efforts are at least as crucial. For this reason, onboarding of teachers should be a top priority.

**The materials, including a teacher's manual, can be found on [www.europealive.org](http://www.europealive.org)**