



e-Living Annex to VEG (Virtual Exchange Guidebook)

Version 2.0

ERASMUS+ CLUVEX Project Number 101111959

Work Package 02

Deliverable 2.5

17 December 2024



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



CLUVEX



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This document is titled "e-Living Annex to the Virtual Exchange Guidebook (VEG)," which serves as a resource for students participating in the Climate University for Virtual Exchange (CLUVEX) Virtual Exchange (VE) Weeks. This annex compiles the Climate University content library relevant to VE, including observations and suggestions for improving VEG from team members. It also reflects the results of evaluations and questionnaires from the Training for Moderators, as well as feedback collected from both students and moderators after the 1st VE Week.

The e-living annex has been collaboratively authored by the CLUVEX teams from the University of Helsinki (UH, Finland), University of Copenhagen (UCPH, Denmark), Mechnikov Odessa National University (ONU, Ukraine), Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (TSNUK, Ukraine), Yerevan State University (YSU, Armenia), and the BioArt Society (Finland).

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Acknowledgements: ERASMUS+ CLUVEX Project Number: 101111959

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FOREWORD

The Climate University for Virtual Exchanges (CLUVEX; <https://www.atm.helsinki.fi/cluvex>; 2023-2026) orchestrates a 3-year project delivering a series (in total 5) of Virtual Exchange (VE) Weeks for students. These interactive online workshops, hosted in Zoom, delve into various aspects of climate change. Each VE Week (comprising three hours online work per day) features a blend of brief lectures in joint sessions and moderated discussions in small groups of students. These are structured around a CLUVEX Climate Horizon Group Exercise tailored for academic students from diverse scientific disciplines and geographical origins.

Learning outcomes during the VE Week:

- ❖ Students will gain an understanding of both foundational and cutting-edge knowledge regarding climate change, its impacts in historical and contemporary contexts, and strategies for envisaging environmentally sustainable futures.
- ❖ Students will acquire web-based tools for visualizing and analyzing of climate-related data.
- ❖ Participants will experience working online within an international team comprising of up to 10 students and 1 moderator, focusing on the Climate Horizon exercise. Students will engage in discussions to brainstorm climate solutions and actions toward a sustainable future, incorporating a wide range of perspectives.

Students who actively participated in the VE Week, including attending lectures and completing the Climate Horizon exercise and associated tasks, will earn 1 credit point (ECTS) granted by the Institute for Atmospheric and Earth System Research (INAR) at the University of Helsinki (UH). Upon successful completion of the VE Week, students will also receive a certificate designating them as "Climate Messengers." This certification acknowledges their competence in fostering climate awareness and developing sustainability strategies within their home organizations and throughout their professional lives. Students will be well-versed in the basics of climate change, science communication, problem-solving skills, and cross-cultural dialogue.

1. CLUVEX Trainings for moderators (observations and suggestions for improvements)

The UCPH team prepared a set of observations and suggestions for improvement of virtual exchanges (VE) based on analysis of comments and remarks from the CLUVEX trainings for moderators.

Observations:

1. Some moderators lacked confidence in speaking English. We are aware that many of us are not English native speakers, but it is important that people feel confident in talking and moderating the course in English.
2. The training did not yet sufficiently cover moderator-specific skills, such as handling (managing) difficult situations during breakout rooms.
3. During the last two training sessions, we noticed that some participants in the breakout rooms remained silent either due to a lack of specific tasks or shyness. This might also be due to lacking English proficiency.
4. There is still confusion about the UTOPIA exercise, how it will look, its role and outcome for moderators.
5. The 14-18 October 2024 period coincides with the fall holiday in Denmark, making it less attractive for student participation.
6. We frequently receive two/three emails containing the same information from different colleagues at the University of Helsinki (UH). This leads to people not reading the emails again and possibly missing information.

Suggestions for improvements:

1. Emphasize the importance of English proficiency for all moderators & students and convince them to be not shying and active in discussions.
2. Randomly select a moderator for breakout rooms to encourage practice.
3. Assign specific tasks for breakout room moderators and make sure everyone understands the tasks.
4. Provide the lecture on UTOPIA (introduction and brief details) to all moderators, along with all recorded lectures and questions either soon or at least a couple of weeks before VE.
5. Schedule VE sessions during summer and early fall (June and Sep 2024) to avoid seasonal week holidays and exams.
6. Solicit feedback from students on their preferred timing.
7. Send reminder emails from a single email to avoid cross posting.
8. Create a checklist of important tasks for moderators to keep handy (for example, a one page that moderators could print out before the VE).
9. Schedule training sessions closer to the course start date to ensure retention. This gap between the sessions would not be preferred for next time.
10. Arrange an extra session for moderators to ask questions about the lecture videos and the VE.
11. Gather feedback on the moderator trainings from all teams/partners using a simple unified template (three questions using for example Microsoft forms).

2. Overall Feedback from 1st VE Week

2.1. Moderators' feedback in details

The survey feedback analysis (34 answers from moderators) highlights **several challenges encountered during the virtual exchange week, primarily related to language proficiency and participant engagement.**

One key issue was the low **English proficiency level among participants.** In one group, for example, at least four individuals neither spoke nor turned on their cameras throughout the sessions, even when directly invited to introduce themselves. This lack of participation likely limited their ability to benefit from the exchange. The language barrier also impacted the quality of discussions and presentations. For instance, one participant could not present their prepared material due to language difficulties, necessitating a moderator to present on their behalf. This scenario underscores the need for a potential language proficiency prerequisite to ensure effective communication and equitable participation.

Engagement challenges were also prominent. Attendance issues were observed, with some students failing to attend sessions or disengaging after the first day. For example, in one group, only three out of seven participants were present on the first day, and among these, only one actively engaged. Subsequent sessions saw a decline in participation, with students intermittently joining or leaving without meaningful involvement. Such disengagement not only diminished the experience for the moderators but also negatively affected the active participants, who were deprived of opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration.

Despite these challenges, **the concept of the virtual exchange week was positively received as an innovative platform for networking and skill development.** However, the feedback emphasizes the importance of addressing language and engagement barriers to enhance the effectiveness of future programs. Potential solutions could include **establishing minimum language requirements, providing preparatory resources, or implementing strategies to encourage consistent participation and interaction among all attendees.**

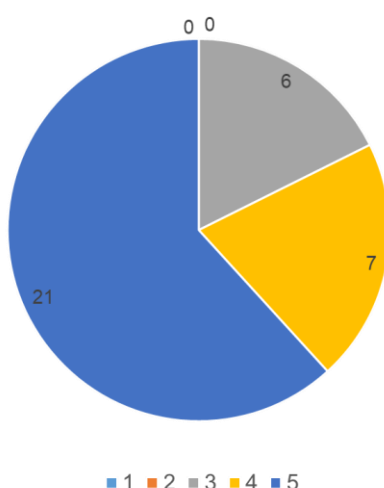


Figure 2.1. Overall rating of the virtual exchange experience, 5 to 1 (average)

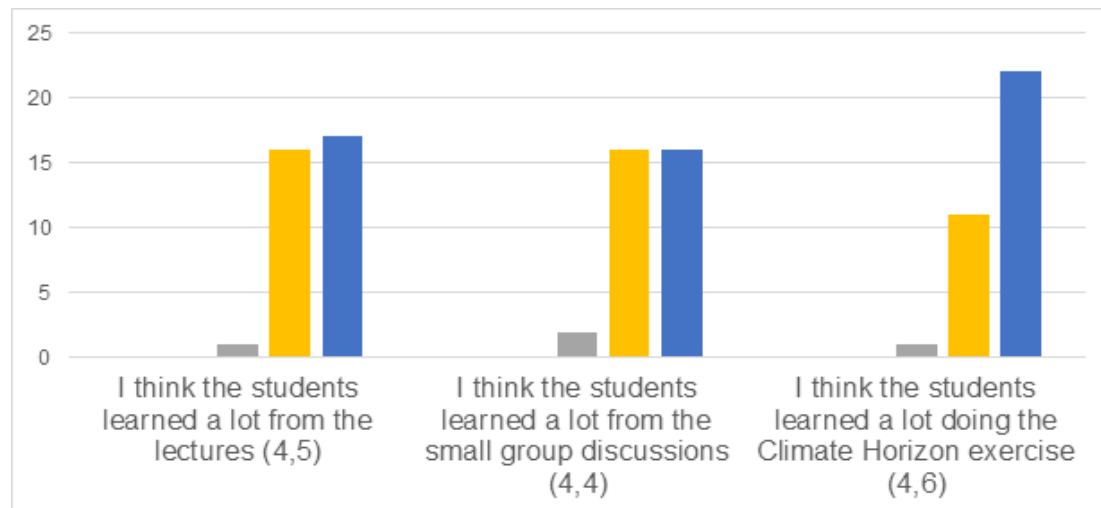


Figure 2.2. Students' learning, 5 to 1 (average).

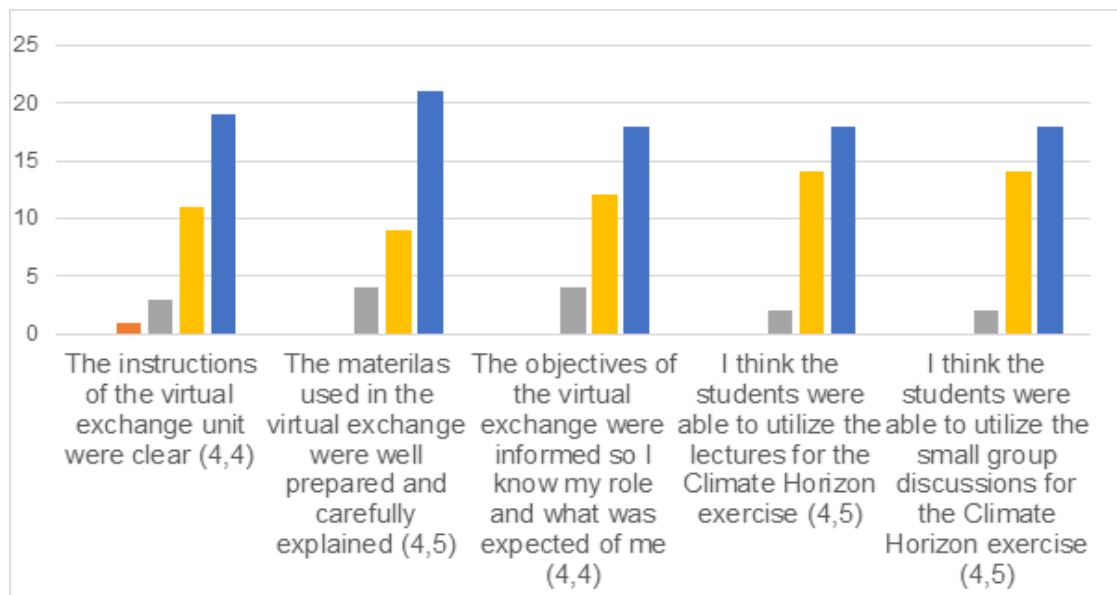


Figure 2.3. Organization of the unit, 5 to 1 (average).

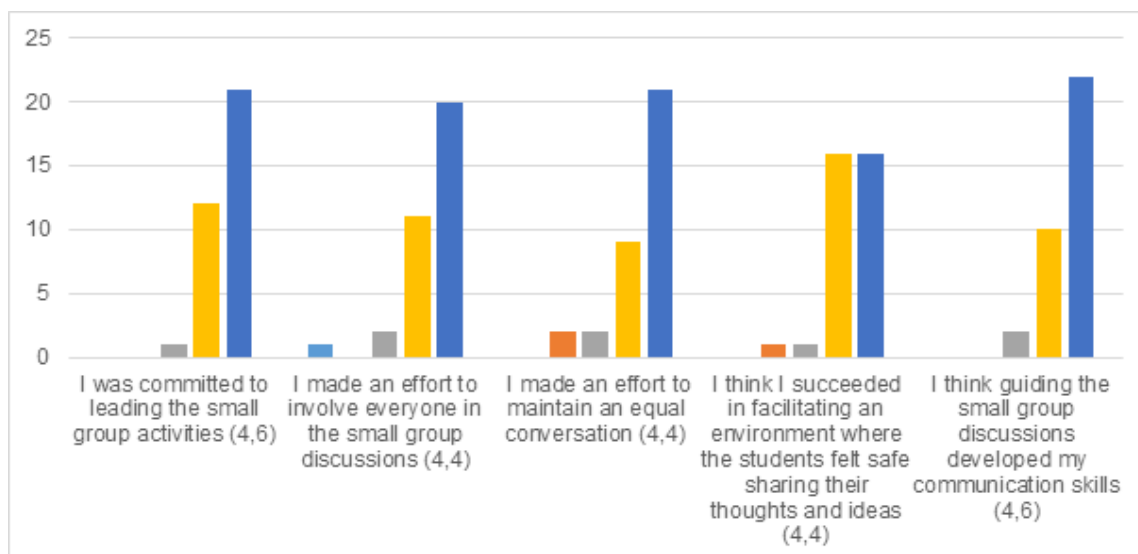


Figure 2.4. Self-evaluation, 5 to 1 (average).

2.2. Suggestions for the development of training

The analysis of the feedback on the moderator training highlights areas for improvement, particularly in tool familiarization, practical preparation, and the depth of discussions during the sessions.

One of the recurring themes is the need for a comprehensive introduction to the tools utilized during the virtual exchange week. While the training sessions included some guidance, participants noted that not all tools were practiced, leaving moderators less confident in their use during the program. Specifically, tools like Miro were mentioned as requiring more hands-on preparation during the training to ensure effective facilitation later.

Another point raised was the limited connection between the training content and the topics covered in the virtual exchange lectures. Participants suggested that the training could benefit from integrating lecture topics to better prepare moderators for discussions in breakout rooms. Familiarity with the lecture content would enable moderators to engage more effectively with participants and facilitate meaningful dialogue.

Additionally, the feedback highlighted concerns about the **social and communication skills of moderators during the training.** Some participants observed that moderators were often quiet and uncommunicative in breakout sessions, which could hinder their ability to lead discussions effectively. Encouraging moderators to develop stronger social and facilitation skills through targeted exercises could address this issue.

Finally, the structure of the training sessions was critiqued. Some participants found the sessions repetitive, and the small group discussion prompts overly simplistic, making it difficult to foster engaging conversations. Suggestions included incorporating **more in-depth content related to lecture topics, providing advanced training on tools, and designing group activities that are more challenging and relevant to the program's objectives.**

Overall, the feedback suggests that enhancing the practical and content-related aspects of moderator training, along with emphasizing communication skills, could significantly improve preparedness and performance during the virtual exchange program.

2.3. Students' feedback in details

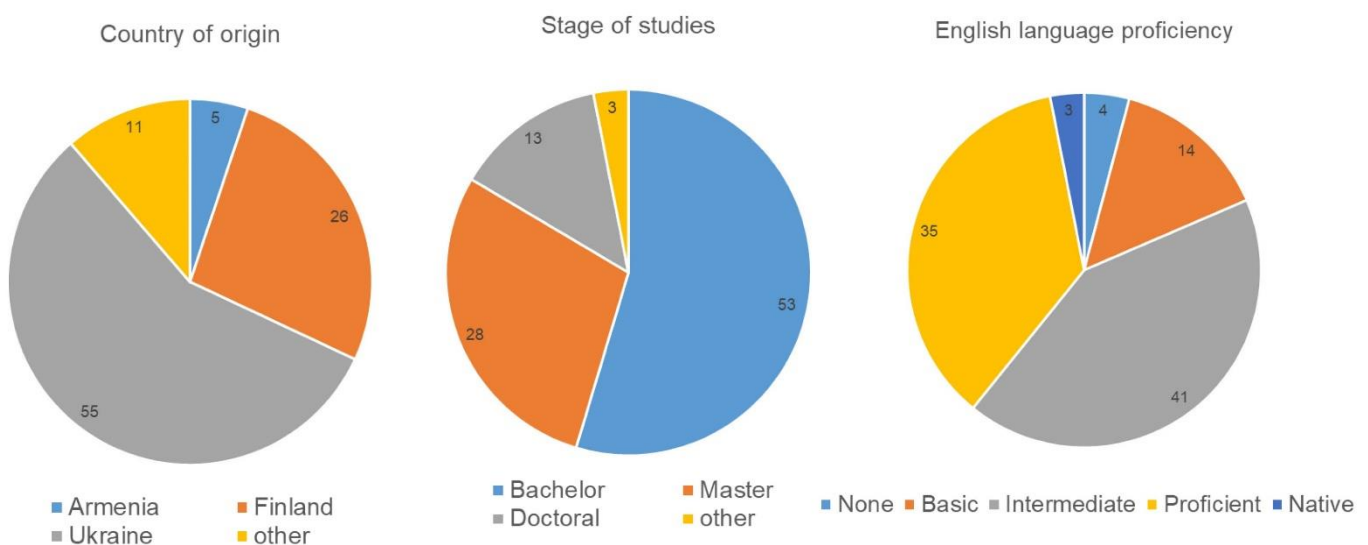


Figure 2.5. Students' (97 answers) demographics (country of origin, stage of studies, English language proficiency).

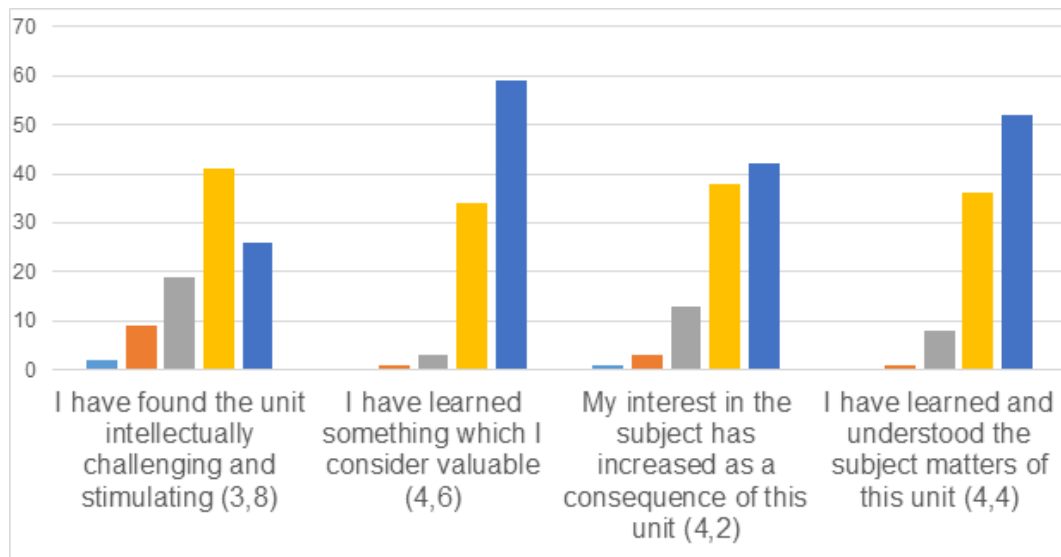


Figure 2.6. Individual's learning experience, 5 to 1 (average).

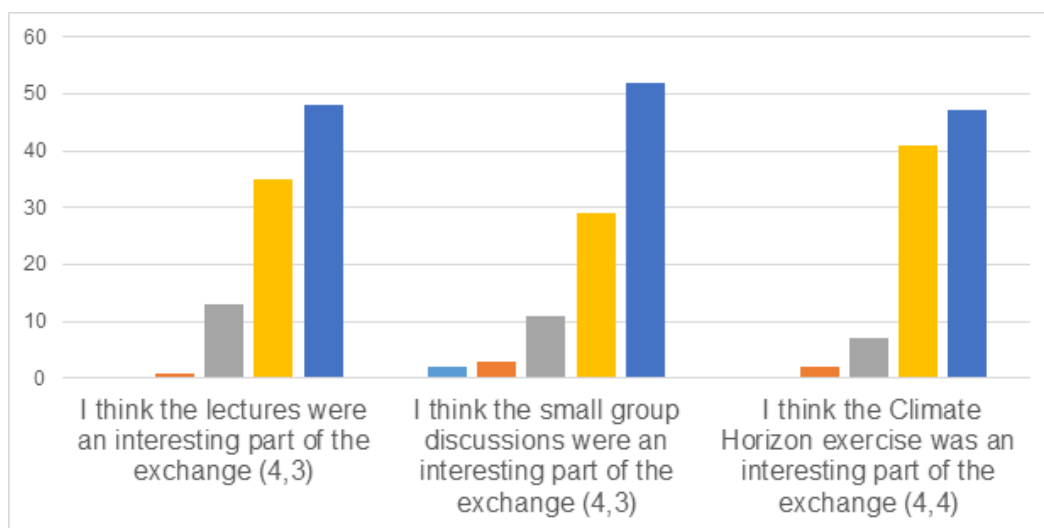


Figure 2.7. Interest in studies, 5 to 1 (average).

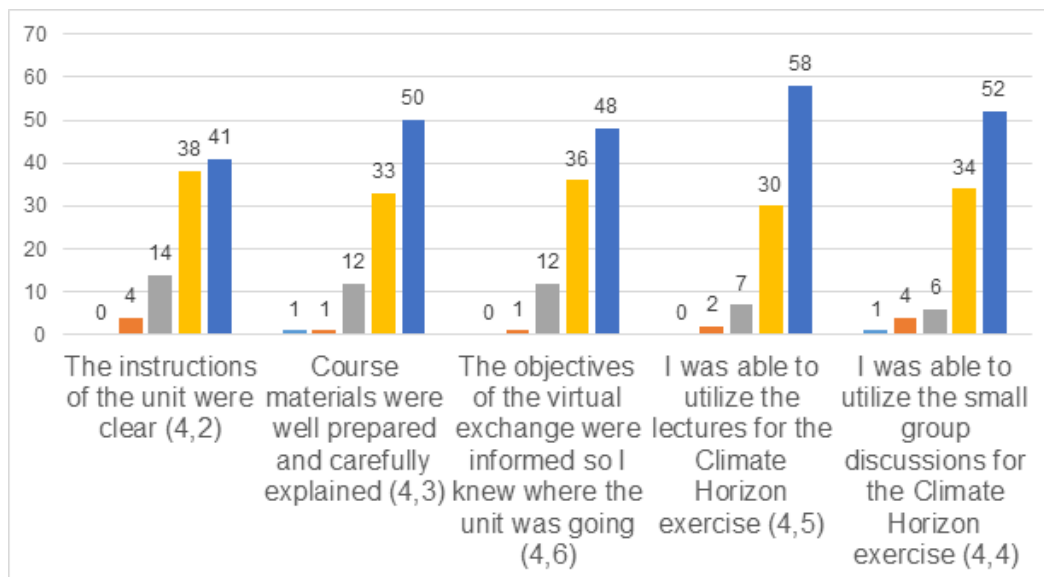


Figure 2.8. Organization of unit, 5 to 1 (average).

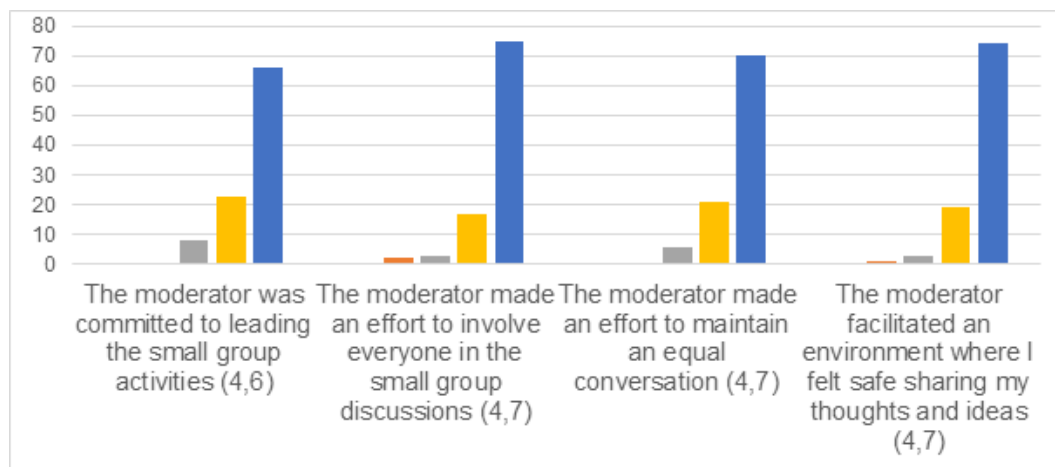


Figure 2.9. Moderation of unit, 5 to 1 (average).

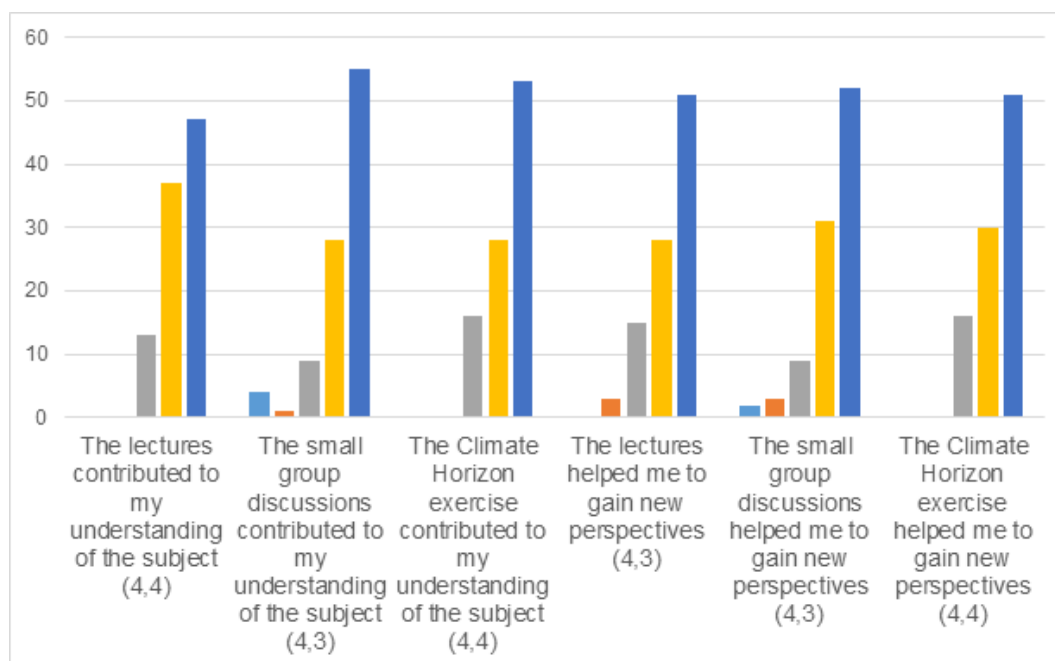


Figure 2.10. Assignments, 5 to 1 (average).

2.4. Advertising and promoting the VE Weeks for students

The analysis of feedback on promoting the course suggests a variety of strategies to increase awareness and engagement among universities and students.

Social Media Advertising: Many respondents emphasized the importance of utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to reach a broader audience. Suggestions included posting engaging content such as fun testimonials, and quizzes related to student life, to attract attention. Social media campaigns could also include collaborations with student influencers to amplify the course's reach.

E-mail Communication: Email marketing was highlighted as an effective method for reaching potential participants. Targeted emails, especially those sent to incoming students, were recommended to personalize outreach. The use of reminder emails was particularly appreciated for keeping participants informed about deadlines and next steps, such as filling out questionnaires.

On-Campus Advertising: Traditional promotional methods, such as distributing eye-catching flyers around university campuses, were proposed to complement digital strategies. Flyers could be placed in high-traffic areas to inform students about upcoming CLUVEX events and encourage participation.

Collaborations and Partnerships: Partnering with student organizations was identified as a valuable strategy to increase visibility and credibility. Workshops or sponsorships co-hosted with these organizations could help foster interest and provide platforms for direct interaction with potential participants.

Interactive and Informative Sessions: Hosting info sessions or webinars about CLUVEX was suggested as a way to provide detailed information and address questions directly. This approach could help build trust and engagement with the target audience.

Feedback Integration: Actively seeking and showcasing feedback on past events to demonstrate improvements was recommended. This practice could enhance transparency and build confidence among prospective participants.

Implementing a combination of these strategies, including leveraging both digital and traditional outreach methods, collaborating with campus communities, and maintaining effective communication, could significantly enhance the visibility and participation rates for the course.

2.5. Feedback on breakout room activities and session structure during VE Weeks

The analysis of the feedback on breakout room activities and session structure highlights key areas for improvement to enhance participant engagement and understanding.

Clarity of Instructions: Participants noted that the structure of breakout room activities was unclear. It was suggested that moderators share discussion questions on-screen to provide visual clarity during group work. Additionally, providing concise instructions at the end of each session, including preparation requirements for the next day, could help participants feel more organized and focused.

Session Scheduling: The reduction in breaks during group work was identified as a concern. While sessions often ended 15 minutes early, having only one break was viewed as insufficient to support group dynamics and sustained engagement. Retaining two breaks, even if sessions are shorter, may better facilitate participant focus and collaboration.

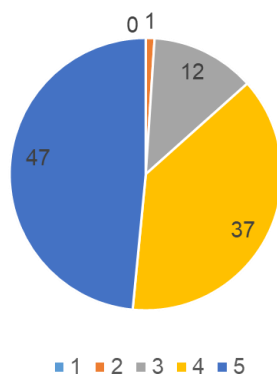
Group Structure: The composition and size of groups were also flagged as areas for improvement. Feedback suggested merging smaller groups into larger ones, particularly when group sizes fell below 10 participants. This adjustment could create more dynamic and engaging discussions. Furthermore, increasing the national diversity within groups by mixing participants from different countries was recommended to promote cross-cultural exchange and varied perspectives.

Language Accessibility: Language barriers were identified as a significant challenge, especially during lectures. Ensuring that lecturers and moderators possess strong English proficiency could help address this issue. Providing supplementary resources, such as translated materials or subtitles, may further support participants with varying language abilities.

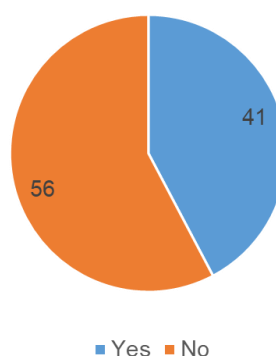
Implementing these changes—clarifying instructions, optimizing schedules, restructuring groups, and addressing language barriers—could significantly improve the effectiveness and inclusivity of breakout room activities and overall session structure.

2.6. Feedback and interest in moderating future VEs

Our overall rating of the virtual exchange on a scale of 1-5
(5 being the best)



am interested in moderator training for virtual exchange in
the spring of 2025



Overall rating of the VE: The majority of respondents rated the virtual exchange highly, with 47% giving it the top score of 5 and 37% rating it 4. Only 12% rated it 3, while ratings of 1 and 2 were negligible or nonexistent. ***This indicates strong overall satisfaction with the program.***

Interest in Moderator's training for spring 2025: Interest in moderator training was more divided, with 56% of respondents indicating they are not interested, while 41% expressed interest. This suggests that while there is a notable group willing to participate, additional efforts may be needed to engage or motivate others.

2.7. Climate Horizon exercises – Individual and Collective

During the VE Week, having daily assignments (from Monday till Friday) the students built the Climate Horizon exercises by exploring the present world from different perspectives, considering pasts that have led to the current situation, and possible future scenarios. Students did it by **listening to lectures, practicing different tools, and discussing in small groups. Throughout the VE week, in the groups and individually, students took notes and draft Climate Horizons.** At the end, students presented own individual Climate Horizons to own group members. **The purpose of the exercise was to look at climate change from different perspectives,** sharing thoughts and ideas with other students having different backgrounds, and to collectively build positive future scenarios. The Individual/ Personal and Collective/ Group Climate Horizons are created in a week-long process during the VE Week.

Students examined own living environments, and imaginatively mapped own present, past and possible future. **Throughout the VE week, students drafted own Climate Horizon using the VE lectures on climate related topics, tools for visualization and analysis of climate relate data, and group discussions as reference and inspiration.** At the end of the VE Week students prepared own short report (max 2 pages), which was submitted (as MS Word, or pdf-format file) through the DigiCampus within 1 week.

Implementation: The short report contained a description of student's own living environment where, for example, employing data visualization tools for the air temperature, humidity, wind, precipitation, etc. profiles have been drawn and evaluated for selected city/ location. The reports were written in a free-style text as a letter or a diary entry reflecting the thoughts that have arisen during the VE Week about environment and climate change. Some reports were prepared as artistic presentations, e.g. a poster, picture collage or a visual essay, about the themes that came up during the VE Week, including discussions. Prepare a short (max 5 min) presentation of own Climate Horizon to own group on Friday, the last day of the VE Week.

Daily assignments: After discussions in groups the students should keep notes on own results and thoughts in own word document or on Miro collaborative platform for own personal/individual and collaborative/ group Climate Horizon assignments.

Day 1 (Monday): learning about climate change related topics, to know each other and introduce the "Climate Horizon" Exercise.

Day 2 (Tuesday): sharing and collectively reflecting on each other the "present" situation and the ways own/students' cities/locations are affected by climate change and other factors e.g. pollution, weather as well as political, social, ecological, or cultural contexts. Start work on Individual Climate Horizon.

Day 3 (Wednesday): studying and discussing the socio-economic trajectories that determine the exposure and vulnerability to climate change both in the past and future.

Day 4 (Thursday): studying and discussing the future of the climate and start building the Collective Climate Horizon.

Day 5 (Friday): finalizing and presenting the Collective Climate Horizon.