GREEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Green Leap

GREEN LEAP
Green Leadership Program

Program Evaluation Report

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This report consolidates the lessons learned from the Green Leadership Program implementation and participant feedback, highlighting the most valuable takeaways and practical knowledge to enhance program reproducibility. The insights, opinions, and suggestions provided on each aspect of the program are used to evaluate how effectively the program achieved its objectives and its perceived value to participants, with these reflections hopefully helping to improve future training delivery and providing valuable insights for organisers.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The Green Leadership Program (GREEN LEAP) seeks to meet the demand for sustainability driven by the European Green Deal and overcome the shortage of professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills in the complex field through training aspiring leaders in SMEs, startups, and European training institutions. The project takes a multidisciplinary, holistic approach, encompassing both technical green and essential soft skills like teamwork and leadership. This ensures effective collaboration and decision-making in the sustainability sphere.

The project was motivated by the pressing need to address environmental challenges, such as climate change and resource depletion, and the transition of industry to sustainable practices. Thus, the aim was to bridge the growing workforce gap and provide training on greenwashing, sustainability communication, responsible communication, collaborative action, and resilience and complexity.

GREEN LEAP was targeted at two distinct groups: professionals in sustainability-related roles in SMEs/start-ups, who can be more agile in adopting sustainable practices and have the potential for substantial positive impacts, but may lack the resources for costly traditional sustainability training; and sustainability consultants who have the potential to shape sustainability strategies and practices for a wide range of organisations and can be empowered with comprehensive skills for a multiplication of green knowledge.

GREEN LEAP used a blended approach (online and offline), including an innovative 'flipped classroom' form of teaching. The training consisted of three main aspects: an online learning toolkit of modules to build up basic knowledge; three online sessions to engage the participants in discussion and delve deeper into the course content; and a one-day in-person workshop in Vienna, where the participants had the opportunity to exchange and work together on common challenges areas relating to sustainability communication, as well as consider how the program's learnings could be adopted within their own professional lives.

ONLINE LEARNING TOOLKIT

The online learning toolkit was hosted on the Terra Academy and consisted of a series of three modules, lasting between 45-60 minutes, each of which could be followed at the participant's own pace, thereby prioritising flexibility. The modules were intended to build one upon the other, supporting the participants in developing a broad knowledge base. For this reason, the modules were released at 10-day intervals to allow the participants to complete them in order. Each module of the toolkit was voiced over by a WU team member, with a video introduction to create a greater sense of interaction. The modules also included questions on the participant's prior knowledge of the topics, knowledge checks at regular intervals, post-module evaluation surveys, reflection questions, a literature/reading list, and a downloadable version of the module presentation.

Some topics covered by the three online learning toolkit modules were:

Module I: Introduction to Sustainability

- Basic topics in sustainability, like the planetary boundaries, doughnut economics and the SDGs, discussed new ideas such as regenerative development, and outlined the corporate status quo of CSR and ESG.
- Concepts such as the sender-receiver model and communication filters, as well as communication of, about and for sustainability.
- An overview of common EU directives and regulatory frameworks in the field, like the Green Claims Directive, CSRD, ESRS, VSMEs and EU taxonomy.

Module II: Greenwashing

- Where the term 'greenwashing' stems from, the different forms it takes, means, other types of 'colourwashing', and why company might engage in greenwashing.
- The 'Seven sins of greenwashing' as a framework to understand how to spot it, including real-world examples, as well as the supportive role the Green Claims Directive will play in this sense.
- An anti-greenwashing strategy with important tips on communicating environmental sustainability responsibly, including transparency, objective/measurable criteria, and verifying information with experts.

Module III: Responsible Communication

- What responsible communication is, including 13 core principles and models to understand how it differs from other forms of communication.
- Case studies of companies from different industries who have made sustainability a key aspect of their business practices.
- The responsible communication compass and what it means for sustainability at the core of a company, in its processes and implementation, and communication externally.

Regarding the prior knowledge questions, more than half of the participants stated to have already good knowledge on sustainability communication. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1: no knowledge and 5: expert), 44% voted with a 3 and 22% with a 4. That being said, all our participants were already professionally and/or personally interested and informed on sustainability topics and on sustainability communication, which could be the reason for this previous knowledge.

Similar data were collected when the participants were asked about their prior knowledge on greenwashing. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1: no knowledge and 5: expert), 58% voted with a 3 and 16% with a 4, indicating an overall good level of knowledge on the topic

All participants seemed to be aware of the importance of responsible communication, as a matter of fact all of them evaluated it with 4 (19%) and 5 (81%) on a scale from 1 to 5 (1: not important and 5: very important).

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At the end of every module, there was a brief survey asking about the topics the participant would like to see covered more in detail during the online sessions and in-person training. The responses were rather coherent throughout the three modules. Most requests were appropriate for the focus of this training program. Yet some were off topic especially regarding the process of sustainability reporting, indicating however increasing curiosity and interest in the sustainability word.

Sustainability Communication-related requests included:
- More case studies on practical implementation in companies of regulations on sustainability
- Communication trends
- Best practices of sustainability communication
- Guidelines to build up an effective sustainability communication strategy
- SDGs and IDGs in companies' communication
- Greenwashing (prevention), also from the consumer's perspective
- Stakeholder engagement
- Integrating sustainability into business operations
- Legal consequences of false claims
- Engaging internal and external stakeholder to change behaviours (considering differences such as culture, age, and so on.)

Other requests included:
- National implementation of sustainability EU Directives
- EU directives on sustainability reporting (CSRD, ESRS, VSME)
- Public fundings to support companies' efforts
- Carbon credit market, carbon neutrality and net zero
- Sustainability indicators to report
- The process of sustainability reporting including the EU Taxonomy
- Resource conservation, waste management, upcycling
- Sustainable Technologies to face the Green Deal Challenges
- Third-party verifications
- Standards and certifications for companies
- Innovation in sustainable product development

At the end of the third module, the participants were asked about the topics they found most useful, and their replies mostly included: greenwashing, the case studies, responsible communication and its benefits for companies, transparency, ethical decision-making.

METHODS

Generally speaking, we did not receive a lot of feedback on the methods used in the online learning toolkit. One participant expressed the need to receive tools or templates for applying communication principles in different situations, and another one asked for methods of addressing different target groups and their specific needs in order to effectively communicate complex issues.

FORMATS

Regarding the formats, the participants seemed to have benefitted from the online modules of the toolkit. When asked to evaluate them, 27% of participants judged it as "very engaging", 55% as "engaging" and 18% were "neutral" about it, meaning that overall, 82% of the participants had a positive opinion on them.
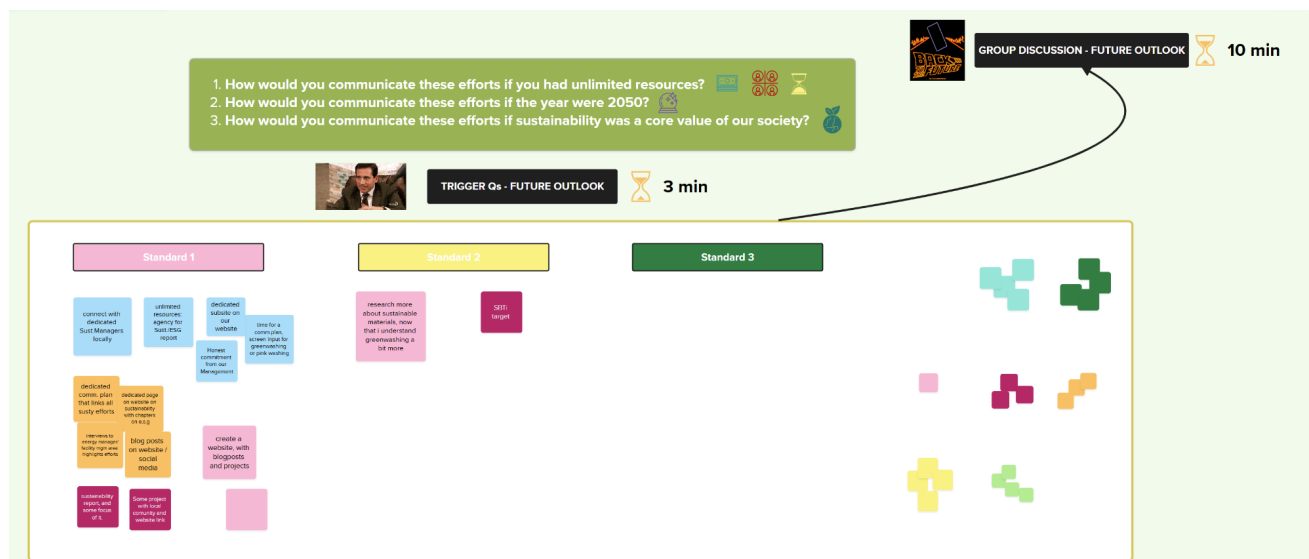
ONLINE SESSIONS

The online sessions were the follow up to the online learning toolkit, using the knowledge imparted there as a starting point for more in-depth discovery and discussion on challenges and approaches to sustainability communication. The aim was for the participants to recognise good and bad practice examples, to consider how the themes raised impact their own personal and professional lives, and to encourage greater reflection on how they and their companies could alter their approach to sustainability communication. The online setting was chosen to make the sessions accessible to a wider audience, while elements such as Mural boards, breakout rooms and practice examples were used in order to make the sessions more interactive. Design Thinking principles were integrated in the Mural boards in order to encourage common understanding, collaborative work and concise discussions. The three online sessions were hosted on consecutive Thursday afternoons to provide consistency and ensure they were easy to attend for as many participants as possible. The basic set-up of each 2-hour session was:

- expert input to provide more detailed observations on topics covered in the online toolkit;
- Q&A session, where each participant could ask questions or make comments related to their own experience;
- breakout room exercise with 3-4 groups of participants engaged in discussion, guided by a specifically design Mural space;
- presentation of the discussion outcomes to the wider group.

Topics covered by the three online sessions were:

Online Session I: Sustainability Communication
- Expert input from Univ.Prof. Dr. Franzisca Weder (WU) on communication of and about sustainability versus communication for transformation.
- Using the ESRS as a starting point, the groups in the breakout rooms chose the three most relevant to their work considered the status quo, their own experience of each standard, and brainstormed creative solutions to working on each.

Online Session II: Greenwashing
- Expert input from Helene Thierig (Terra) providing case studies, good and bad practice examples concerning greenwashing, and what to learn from these.
- Each group was assigned a case study and had to assess the company's behaviour/communication, before considering which sins of greenwashing they may have committed and how they may have communicated more responsibly.

How are they communicating effectively? Are sins of greenwashing being committed? If yes, which ones?

⏳ 10 min

Effective communication

- 3. The sin of vagueness
- rebranding to show commitment to future without oil
- 7. The sin of fibbing
- are they lying or not? Or are they communicating commitment?
- 5. The sin of irrelevance
- No legal consequences
- Carbon footprint calculator - shifting responsibilities
- Successful marketing to reach objectives - effective communication
- Carbon offsetting
- 1. The sin of the hidden trade-off
- Environmentally friendly - based on which data?
- 2. The sin of no proof
- Top 10 green brands - plays the same role as labelling
- 4. The sin of worshiping false labels
- BP Logo - misleading

Sins of Greenwashing

1. The sin of the hidden trade-off, where companies focus on one green attribute while ignoring larger environmental issues.
2. The sin of no proof, where claims are made without verification or evidence.
3. The sin of vagueness, where companies use broad terms that lack clear definitions.
4. The sin of worshiping false labels, where companies create or use deceptive labels to imply third-party certification, as well as relying on less rigorous certification schemes
5. The sin of irrelevance, where companies make truthful but insignificant claims.
6. The sin of the lesser of two evils, where harmful products are marketed as greener than alternatives in their category.
7. The sin of fibbing, where companies lie about their environmental practices.

- 6. The sin of the lesser of two evils

Online Session III: Responsible Communication

- Expert input from Sigrid Koloo (Koloo Projects/FuturAbility) introduced the concept of impact thinking, how to orient your actions towards greater impact, and how responsible communication intersects with this.
- Each group was assigned a real-life greenwashing case study and had to assess the adequateness of the company's response, which of the 13 principles they should have abided by, and how they might have communicated more responsibly.
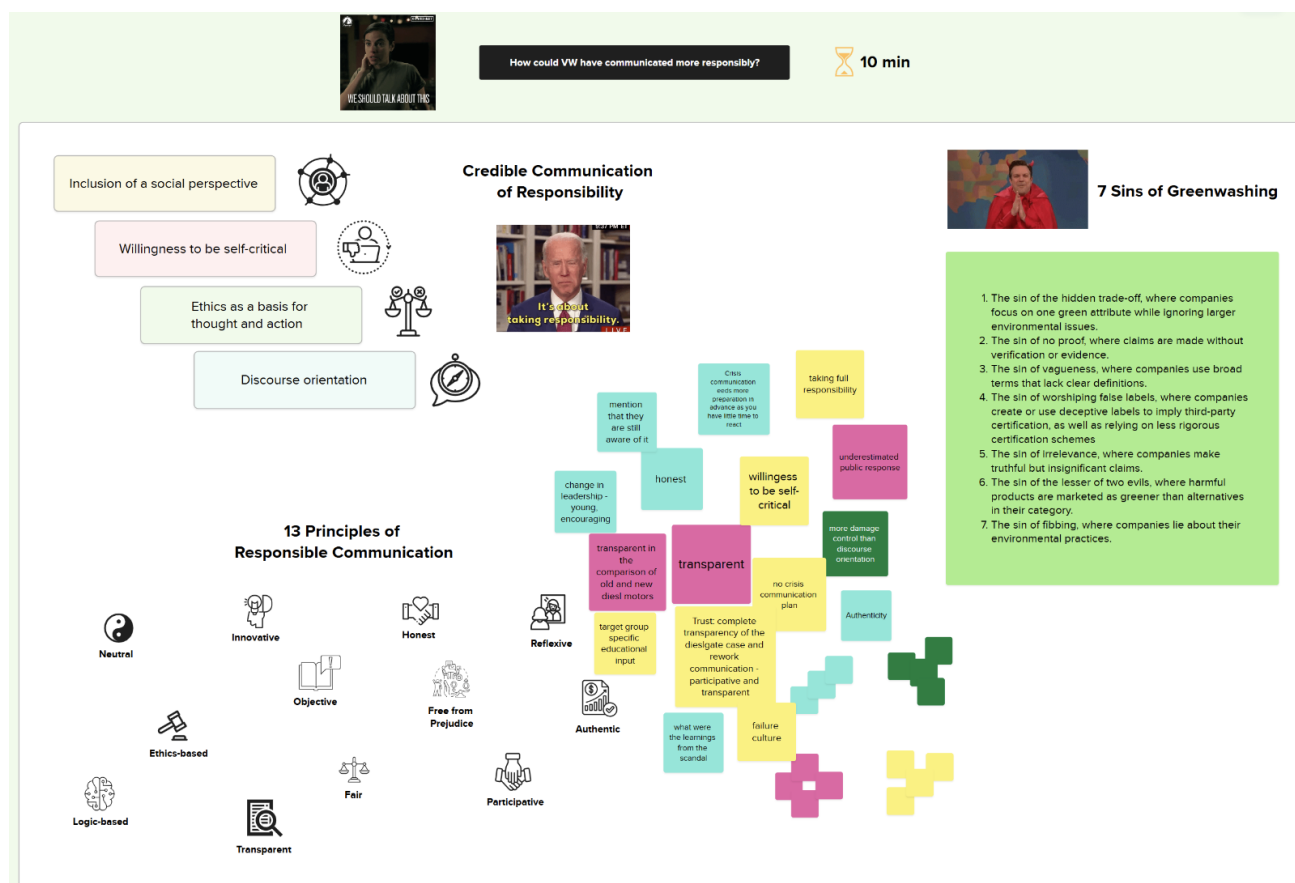
Online Session I: Sustainability Communication

14 participants answered the survey and when asked to rate the input of the expert, all of them gave positive feedback: "Good" (21%), "Very Good" (36%) or "Excellent" (43%) (Fig.1 below).
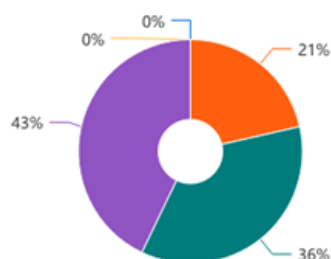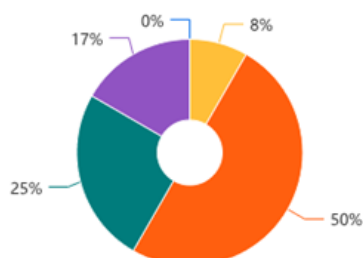

A second point that was assessed is whether the session helped the participant better understand sustainable communication practices. The great majority of respondents answered positively (36% strongly agreed and 43% agreed), yet 14% had a "neutral" position and 7% disagreed. In the end, 71% of respondents stated that the expert input was the most valuable part of the session, followed by the brainstorming on Mural (50%) and by the breakout room discussions and the Q&A session (both 36%), and finally by an exchange of key findings in the large group (7%).

Online Session II: Greenwashing

12 participants answered the survey and when asked to rate the input of the expert, all of them gave positive feedback: "Fair" (8%), "Good" (50%), "Very Good" (25%) or "Excellent" (17%) (Fig.2 below).
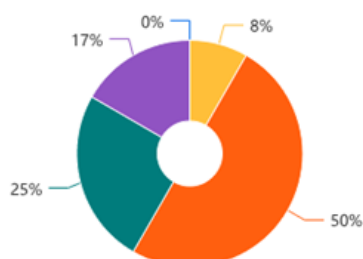

A second point that was assessed is whether the session helped the participant better understand greenwashing practices. The great majority of respondents answered positively (25% strongly agreed and 67% agreed), yet 8% strongly disagreed. In the end, 67% of respondents stated that the breakout room discussions were the most valuable part of the session, followed by the brainstorming on Mural (42%), and finally by the expert input, by the Q&A session, and by an exchange of key findings in the large group (all of these 25%).

Online Session III: Responsible Communication

8 participants answered the survey and when asked to rate the input of the expert, all of them gave positive feedback: "Good" (38%), "Very Good" (13%) or "Excellent" (50%) (Fig.3 below).

A second point that was assessed is whether the session helped the participant better responsible communication practices. The majority of respondents answered positively (25% strongly agreed and 38% agreed), yet 38% had a neutral opinion. In the end, 88% of respondents stated that the breakout room discussions were the most valuable part of the session, followed by the expert input (63%), and finally by the Q&A session, the brainstorming on Mural and an exchange of key findings in the large group (all of these 50%).

CONTENTS

At the end of every module, the participants were also asked about the topics they would like to see covered more in detail during the future sessions (online or offline) and in the Community of Practice. The responses were rather coherent throughout the three modules. Most requests were appropriate for the focus of this training program. Yet some were off topic especially, indicating however increasing curiosity and interest in the sustainability word.

Sustainability Communication-related requests included:
- Case studies
- Community engagement strategies
- Engaging internal and external stakeholder to change behaviors
- Sharing and discussing our own sustainability challenges including communication
- Best practices
- Communicating transparently the right amount of information
- Greenwashing (prevention) also from the consumer's side
- Community engagement

Other requests included:
- Sustainable procurement
- Innovative sustainability practices
- Leadership for climate action
- EU directives on sustainability reporting (CSRD, ESRS, VSME)
- Examples for Sustainability reports
- Capacity building

METHODS

Generally speaking, we did not receive a lot of feedback on the methods used in the online sessions. In the first online session one participants expressed the wish to use or learn to use digital tools for effective sustainability communication. In the third online session another participant requested to use a co-creation approach in the in-person workshop, which was adopted.

FORMATS

All in all, we received very positive feedback on the format of the online sessions. Specifically, in all the sessions the group discussions in breakout rooms and the interactive discussions were appreciated by the participants.

Online Session I: Sustainability Communication

In the first session, the breakout rooms format received good feedback by all participants, 14% evaluated it with "Excellent", 36% with "Very good", 43% "Good" and 7% with "Fair".

Secondly, also the interactive discussion and knowledge sharing moments of the online session were very much appreciated. These were evaluated with "Excellent" by 7% of participants, "Very good" by 43%, "Good" by 36% and "Fair" by 7%.

Then, when asked about the formats they would like to use again in future sessions, the participants mentioned:
- Expert inputs
- Breakout rooms
- Interactive workshops activities
- Reflections on case studies
- Networking opportunities

Online Session II: Greenwashing

In the second session, the breakout rooms format received good feedback by all participants, 25% evaluated it with "Excellent", 58% with "Very good", 8% "Good" and 8% with "Fair".

Secondly, also the interactive discussion and knowledge sharing moments of the online session were extremely appreciated. These were evaluated with "Excellent" by 25% of participants, "Very good" by 50%, "Good" by 17% and "Fair" by 8%.

Then, when asked about the formats they would like to use again in future sessions, the participants mentioned the breakout rooms exercises using Mural boards.

Online Session III: Responsible Communication

Also in the third session, the breakout rooms format received very positive feedback by all participants, 25% evaluated it with "Excellent", 63% with "Very good" and 13% "Good".

Secondly, also in the last online session the interactive discussion and knowledge sharing moments were extremely appreciated. These were evaluated with "Excellent" by 25% of participants, "Very good" by 13% and "Good" by 63%.

Then, when asked about the formats they would like to use in the offline session, the participants mentioned group discussions similar to those organised in breakout rooms and practical exercises.

IN-PERSON WORKSHOP

The intensive in-person workshop in Vienna was the culmination of the training offered during GREEN LEAP. Taking place on the WU campus, the one-day onsite session was considered an opportunity to enhance the hands-on learning and practical experience of the participants, while also offering a chance for the participants network and form a community face-to-face. Beyond this, the workshop aimed to motivate the participants into being more proactive in their approach to sustainability communication, to impart green, leadership and resilience skills, and to make a positive change in their personal and professional lives as a result of what they learned during the program.

The simplified agenda for the workshop was as follows:

Ice-breaker and team building:
• Exercises to help the participants feel at ease and encourage constructive collaboration

Project team inputs:
• Clara Mehringer (WU) introduced the concept of inner sustainability and the value of the Inner Development Goals for self-efficacy.
• Kim Mühl (Terra) presented on key elements to consider when developing a sustainability communication strategy.
• Alice Piccolo (Terra) discussed stakeholder engagement and how to create a strategy, including identification, objective setting, methods, formats, and evaluation.

Group Challenge session:
• Three teams engaged in a Design thinking process to work on a case study of an imaginary company facing challenges with sustainability communication from different perspectives:
• Internal communication
• Sustainability communication strategy
• External stakeholder engagement and management

Own Challenge session:
• Using the knowledge and skills developed, the participants received templates to conceptualise an approach for a challenge they face in their own professional lives and processes, methods and a timeline needed to implement a solution.

A reflection session closed out the session, during which the participants expressed gratitude for the workshop and the intention to take concrete steps based on the program, including starting a new study program, trying out nudging internally in their company, and even starting a business with a responsible approach to communication and marketing.

According to the feedback we received in the online surveys, the participants highly appreciated the event. As an overall statement, out of 9 participants, 6 of them rated the event as "Excellent" and 3 as "Very Good" (Fig. 4 below).

|	
● Poor	0
● Fair	0
● Good	0
● Very good	3
● Excellent	6
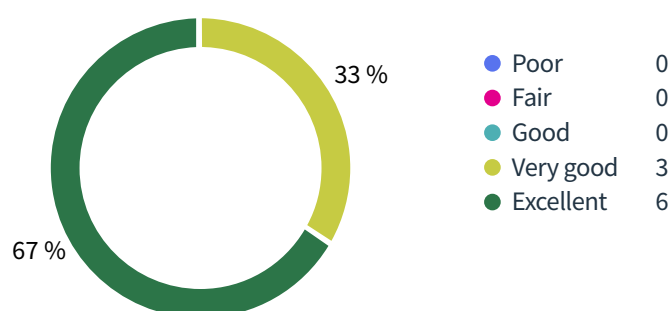
When asked specifically about the project team inputs given, all of them (IDGs, sustainable communication and stakeholder engagement) were received very well, being rated as "Good", "Very Good" and "Excellent" by all participants.

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All participants considered the inputs provided in the first half of the day as valuable for dealing with the Group Challenge session taking place in the second half of the day. Then, also the selection of challenges and the case studies prepared were judged as helpful for the participants' professional lives, as well as for defining better their own professional challenges.

METHODS

The methods used in the workshop was also highly appreciated by the participants. 3 of them defined it as "Excellent", 4 as "Very good" and 2 as "Good" (Fig. 5 below).

🔵 Poor	0
🔴 Fair	0
🟢 Good	2
🟡 Very good	4
🟢 Excellent	3

33 %   22 %   44 %
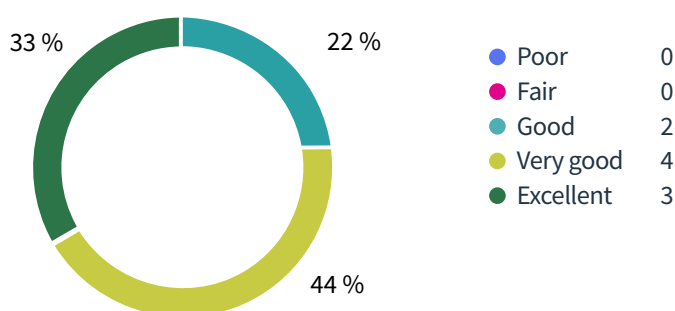
FORMATS

No feedback was received about the workshop format

WORKSHOP PHOTOS

Disclaimer to include at the end of the document: