

**Interreg**  
Alpine Space



**GaYA**   
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND



GaYA's Youth  
Participation Toolbox:

# THOUGHTS, MODELS AND METHODS

What is special about  
(youth) participation  
processes?

An overview of  
participation methods

The Magic Rules  
of youth participation

Scan the QR code  
and **find out more.**



[www.alpine-space.eu/gaya](http://www.alpine-space.eu/gaya)

To be used by public administrators and policy-makers.

# WHY YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

**Democracy is in crisis. We all feel it. Lower percentages of eligible voters casting ballots in elections, decreasing activism in political organisations, and negligible percentages of youth activists in political parties. Distrust in the cornerstones of representative democracy – political elites, political parties, parliaments and governments – is on the rise. Populism, unargumentative public discourse, political showmanship are too often synonymous with ‘politics’. But does it have to be like this? We believe that involving young people in decision-making could revive democracy.**

The active and continuous participation of citizens in political processes, called ‘participatory democracy’, is one of the ways of rethinking democracy. It stems from the thesis that the dissatisfaction, apathy and cynicism of voters should not make us believe that they actually do not care and are not interested in public matters.

Take a look at our young people. While they do not engage in party politics, they are (often politically) active on social media and in diverse cultural, sport and social organisations. Young people are often over-represented in more direct methods of political actions, such as protests, boycotts and e-petitions. Young people are very much interested in societal challenges and international matters. And they have access to the resources and often the skills to understand and analyse the challenges of our societies. Contrary to the conventional forms of politics, the preferences of young people for political engagement are more individualised and offer more opportunities and channels to express opinions.

Close contacts of local authorities with voters, public meetings and consultations are historically part of the local decision-makers repertoire. But with young people, a new approach should be developed - one that would engage the globalised, internet-native, creative younger generation that is too often overwhelmed by information and high expectations on it.

Developing youth participatory decision-making processes cannot be prescribed from above. To avoid bureaucratisation, new models need to be developed in local communities. You, the user of this toolbox, can contribute as well. This toolbox provides a few guiding cues, but the creative part should be done by you and your local young people.

*Read more about the status of citizen participation in the Alps in the comparative report Democratic Innovation and Participatory Democracy in the Alpine area on [www.alpine-space.eu/gaya](http://www.alpine-space.eu/gaya).*

# ISN'T YOUTH WORK ACTUALLY YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

Youth work (youth centres, youth organisations) and youth participation are intrinsically connected and often intertwined. Youth participation often happens within the field of youth work or with the support of youth workers. However, youth work itself does not suffice for the inclusion of young people in broader regional/national decision-making processes, and youth workers themselves cannot run youth participation processes. In this regard, youth participation processes are much broader, demand different skill-sets, and require administrators and policy-makers to actively be engaged.

## YOUTH WORK

Youth work primarily consists of youth organisations and organisations for young people (e.g. youth centres, faith-based organisations, street-based work, etc.). Its main aim is to achieve inclusion of young people and social cohesion by facilitating the formation of autonomous and active citizens - often through non-formal education. The environment it creates is usually conflict-free.

This provides a space for the participation of young people within organisations and thus raises motivation, capacity, and context for making a (broader) change.

## EXTERNAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

External youth participation happens outside of youth organisations and consists of young people and public actors (municipalities, regions, countries, etc.). The main aim of youth participation is the formation of new policies and public projects based on the needs and views of young people. By including young people, it is believed that local communities can be more inclusive, sustainable, and attractive to them. As with any political activity, it also includes conflicts and aims to resolve them through argumentative confrontation.

# PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION

Youth participation is not an event, but a process. To develop youth participation requires long-term commitment that usually starts with the willingness of politicians and administrators to engage with such a commitment, leads to recurrent procedures that offer opportunities to young people and finally establishes a legislative basis and a standard for future procedures – on several levels. Shier's Pathway to Participation offers a set of questions to evaluate the current position of institutions in terms of youth participation.

## SHIER'S PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION (2001)

LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION	OPENINGS	OPPORTUNITIES	OBLIGATIONS
<b>Level 1</b> Young people are listened to.	Are you ready to listen to young people?	Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to young people?	Is it a policy requirement that young people must be listened to?
<b>Level 2</b> Young people are supported in expressing their views.	Are you ready to support young people in expressing their views?	Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help young people express their views?	Is it a policy requirement that young people must be supported in expressing their views?
<b>Level 3</b> Young people's views are taken into account.	Are you ready to take young people's views into account?	Does your decision-making process enable you to take young people's views into account?	Is it a policy requirement that young people's views must be given weight in decision-making?
Shier states that Level 3 of his model is the minimum practice needed to meet the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.			
<b>Level 4</b> Young people are involved in decision-making processes.	Are you ready to let young people join in your decision-making processes?	Is there a procedure that enables young people to join in decision-making processes?	Is it a policy requirement that young people must be involved in decision-making processes?
<b>Level 5</b> Young people share power and responsibility in decision-making.	Are you ready to share some of your adult power with young people?	Is there a procedure that enables young people and adults to share power and responsibility for decision?	Is it a policy requirement that young people and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?

Adapted from Shier, H. (2001) *Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations. Young People and Society, Vol 15. John Wiley and Sons Ltd: United States of America, pp. 107-117.*

# BUREAUCRACY VS. YOUTH

Most of the existing approaches to participation (interest groups, public consultations, etc.) do not accept the 'modus operandi' of the youth and try to force young people into the existing bureaucratised procedures. The aim of designing the participatory processes is thus to establish new ways of cooperation that suit both sides – by splitting the strategic and broad policy procedures needed by the administration and decision-makers into smaller consequential participative steps preferred by young people.

## Existing participative procedures:

- Defining broad policy goals
- Requiring long-term commitment
- Favouring formal institutions
- In-person meetings and exhaustive written documents
- Rigid hierarchies
- Discourages personal involvement
- Aim at a few large actions

## Young peoples preferences:

- Issues-based goals and cause-oriented activities
- Enable irregular engagement
- Focus on non-institutionalised young people
- Online and offline 'to the point' methods
- Horizontal structures
- Allow personal involvement
- Aim at many micro actions

## Youth participation processes:

- Several issues-based activities, contributing to the broader strategic goals
- Long-term process with recurring chances for engagement and early wins
- Diverse participative methods – for formal and informal actors
- An integrated (online and offline) communication with digital access to additional resources
- Horizontal structures within existing hierarchies
- Allow personal involvement for the collective good
- Aim at several micro acts, supporting the few large ones

# PARTICIPATION CANVAS

The Youth Participation Canvas, developed within Governance and Youth in the Alps (GaYA) project, provides a new and different approach to planning youth participation processes. It is a rather short yet structured way of planning and documenting a process. It stems from the understanding of the planning of youth participation processes as a design process in which different aspects need to be respected, yet leaves space for creativity in process planning.

The Youth Participation Canvas is a process management template for developing and documenting existing participation processes. Its aim is to provide a clear, focused and easy-to-read chart. By describing the participation process on a single page, it should lead to easier understanding and endorsing of the process. Moreover, the structure makes it easier to tweak and build on the model – the elements can be changed quickly and adapted to the changing needs and circumstances.

The Youth Participation Canvas can be printed out on a large surface so groups can jointly sketch and discuss youth participation elements with post-it notes or board markers, or it can be used individually, as a documentation method, or be completed with text editing software. It is a hands-on tool that fosters analysis, discussion, understanding and creativity – its aim is to make the design of participatory processes easier, better structured and focused on the needs of both the youth and administrators and decision-makers.

**Explore Youth Participation Canvas and instructions attached in the Youth Participation Toolbox.**

# SPIRAL OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

**We believe youth participation processes should be spiral-shaped, never-ending and collaborative by design. Participatory processes might take longer, but their spill-over effects last longer as well.**

While conventional approaches are quick to complement youth participation, more complex processes should be developed to truly address the modus operandi of young people.

## YOUTH PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

### 1 Engagement of stakeholders

- Interaction with implementers and affected interests early on and throughout the planning process

### 2 Broad identification of needs and wishes

- Includes information/feedback, consultation and negotiation
- Provides stakeholders additional information on the topic
- Assumes that open participation leads to better decisions
- Focuses on mobilisation of support

### 3 Ideation in smaller groups

- Administrator as proactive advocate
- Plan = what we should do

### 4 Political confirmation

- Politicians respond, upgrade and confirm
- Could include a new round of ideation
- If rejected, iterated collaboratively and involving the initial set of stakeholders

### 5 Implementation

- Importance of early wins to show administration's commitment and reassure young people's motivation
- Prototyping mindset – improvement of solutions through constant participation

### 6 Monitoring

- Success measured by sufficient information, goals reached, transparency, efficiency, stakeholder support, and the use of appropriate methods

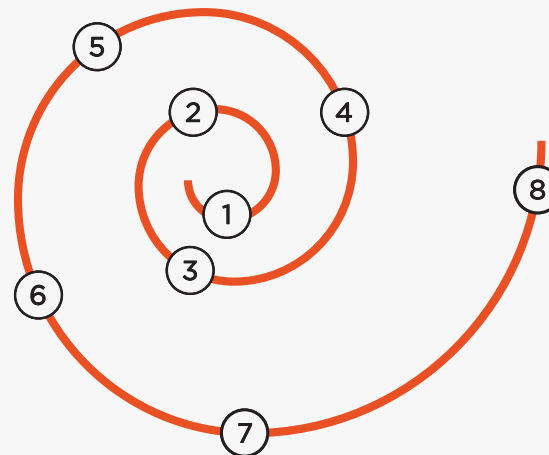
### 7 Scaling

- Identification of 'what works' and how can it be spread to other locations and youth groups

*See Scaling Strategies at [www.socialimpactexchange.org](http://www.socialimpactexchange.org)*

### 8 Systemic Change

- Helping the seed of change to alter the system – by establishing a new 'modus operandi'





*Inspired by: Lang, R. (1986) Contingent Theory and Planning Practice. Paper presented to the ACSP Conference: NYC.*





*Inspired also by: The Open Book of Social Innovation - The Young Foundation.*

# OVERVIEW OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION METHODS

## Length

-  1 day
-  Up to 5 days
-  A few weeks
-  Months and years

## Size group

-  Small groups (<25)
-  Medium groups (25-100)
-  Large groups
-  Any group size

## Selection of participants

-  Self-selection
-  Random selection
-  Target selection

See case studies of methods on attached factsheets within the Youth Participation Toolbox.

## LEVEL 1: LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

**Information Day**  
Informing and gathering feedback



## LEVEL 2: SUPPORTING EXPRESSIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS

**Mediation**  
Resolving conflicts



**Community Platform**  
Exchanging information and ideas



## LEVEL 3: TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

**Scenario Workshop**  
Anticipating challenges



**Open Space Conference / Unconference**  
Discussing relevant topics



**Deliberative Polling**  
Predicting public opinion



**Appreciative Inquiry**  
Engaging stakeholders in self-determined change



## LEVEL 4: INVOLVEMENT IN MAKING DECISIONS

**Planning for Real**  
Prioritizing urban planning topics



**Design thinking method**  
Designing novel products and services with users



**Hackathon**  
Hacking the system by creating new solutions



## LEVEL 5: SHARING POWER AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Participative Budgeting**  
Proposing and selecting investments and budget



**Living Lab**  
Creating collaborative innovation environment



**Future Search**  
Catalysing change



# MAGIC RULES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

After numerous hours of talking with the youth, discussions with administrators and practitioners from the Alps, browsing through literatures, we have come up with (for now) 14 magic rules of youth participation.



## **There is actually no such thing as 'the youth'.**

Young people are not a homogenous group. As in any other age group, there are many differences, even conflicts among them. Take this into account when planning your activities.



## **Participation is contextual.**

Participation is embedded in social developments and structures. The national, regional, or local social economic and environmental context as a backdrop affects the way participation can/could be done, as well as being the subject of change. Take into account that every initiative has its own circumstances, depends on them, and has to be judged in that given situation.



## **Assign a responsible person**

The responsible person is 'the face of participation', should be easily reachable and in touch with the youth, and is accountable for the implementation of reached decisions. Assigning a responsible person is crucial for the success of participation.



## **Be clear about what can and cannot be influenced.**

Be transparent, honest, and clear about the purpose, the limits of what can and cannot be influenced, and what can happen as a result. This will prevent 'long faces' if the outcomes are not as expected by the youth.



## **Participation is voluntary.**

Effective participation requires participants to choose to be involved. Do not try to force youth to participate (e.g. as part of school activities). However, consider encouraging them to be involved.



## **Be ready to give away some power or link to power.**

Participation should never be only about discussing and proposing ideas. Without access to the power and the possibility of changing anything, participation will be seen as a scam and hinder any future participative activities. Try to establish a co-creative process from ideation to implementation in which power and responsibility for implementation are shared among youth, politicians and public administration.



## **Trained participation professionals can facilitate the process.**

Dialogue between young people and adults is indeed difficult. Accompany it with professional participation workers that understand both sides and can employ methods that allow cooperation and bridging the gaps.



## **Build upon existing structures and partnerships.**

Do not reinvent the wheel. Engage existing youth workers, youth organisations, partnerships, and youth projects. This will give you better understanding of and access to the youth. But be careful – do not break youth's trust in your partners by being uncommitted and unprofessional.



## **Establish lasting legitimate activities.**

Youth participation should not be a one-day event, but a long-term process that establishes lasting (ideally informal, horizontal and cause-oriented) activities (annual forums, continuous feedback, working groups, regular interval surveys, etc.).





Youth participation is not an educational role-play. Learning how one could be included if given the opportunity is counter-productive. Youth participation must be serious with the possibility of real consequences.



Young people might think and react differently to your vision of participation than you expect. The misunderstanding is best captured in the quote: 'We expected the young people to be thankful for the chance we gave to them. And we created such a wonderful statute. And now everything is not as we expected it to be ...' Integrate youth's way of functioning and avoid forcing them into the established bureaucratic system.



Always provide feedback. Let the youth know what is going on, how their inputs have contributed to the activities, why something was not implemented, and how can they engage further. No feedback will demotivate youth for any further activities.



Do not give up, if it does not work immediately. Do not let the first problems scare or demotivate you.



'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better', said Samuel Beckett once. Start. The rest will follow.

### Based on local Alpine-wide experiences

Contents of this toolbox have been developed based on numerous discussions, observations and experiences of 15 pilot areas of Governance and Youth in the Alps project and inspired by popular models and concepts from around the globe. In 15 pilot areas, project partners have organised and conducted trainings and workshops for local young people, decision- and policy-makers. To improve the cooperation between young people, administrators and politicians, new participatory processes have been initiated.



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Editor: Matevž Straus

Texts: Matevž Straus, Maša Eržen, Tina Mervic

Illustration: Petra Preželj

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