



**URBACT**

Young Citizens' Project

Toolkit for Youth Participation in Urban Policies

**URB  
ACT**



## URBACT Young Citizens' Project

URBACT Young Citizens' Project, a **best value toolkit** for Youth Participation in Urban Policies.

The baby-boomer generation, who have been running the show for such a long time, now find it difficult to hand over the reins to young people whose lucidity, scepticism and idealism they find disconcerting. Local authorities find it difficult to offer young people the role of participants rather than that of spectators in local life. The city of Bristol is a pioneer in this regard, and offered other European cities an opportunity to address the issue boldly by creating a thematic network on youth and participation, in the framework of URBACT.

The results are presented here and provide an excellent illustration of URBACT methods: motivated cities; concrete projects analysed together by peers; a process of exchange that associates young people in a collective debate on key issues and pragmatic answers. Finally, recommendations for those who wish in turn to develop activities that enable young people to play their proper role in the cities.

The partners in the Young Citizens Project deserve to be thanked and congratulated for their work and for making the effort to produce a document that is clear, focused on seven key issues, educational and useful to all policy makers in cities.

The document is not very long - all the more reason to read it all the way to the conclusions it draws and the final warning it gives: young people will not forgive you if you "pretend".

**Jean-Loup Drubigny**

Director of the URBACT Programme

Paris, May 2006



# URBACT

## Young Citizens' Project

Most of the examples used to illustrate the key themes in this toolkit are condensed versions of case studies detailing practices and projects run or evaluated by young people involved in the Young Citizens' Project.

Where stated a full version of the case study can be downloaded from the Young Citizens' Project area of the URBACT website.

To access the case studies, go to [www.urbact.org](http://www.urbact.org) and select the Young Citizens' Project from the drop-down menu on the right of the page. As well as holding complete case studies and focus group reports from all of the partner cities in the network, this part of the URBACT website provides more information on the project, its organisation and working methods and the cities involved.

Additional resources on the subject of young people and the city developed by other URBACT networks and working groups can be accessed by selecting the 'Young People' theme from the left-hand side of the URBACT homepage.

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# Introduction

## Why participation?

At the outset of this project potential partners were invited to join a network in which young people would be empowered to make a contribution to civic life in their cities; to make recommendations to statutory bodies; and help to develop forms of governance that encourage the active participation of young people. The idea behind this was simple: young people are the future and, as such, they should be the source of solutions to local issues. Our responsibility, as democratic cities, is to create opportunities, open up decision-making processes, and provide young people with the tools and support to engage meaningfully with issues that are of importance to them.

Citizens across Europe are increasingly disillusioned with existing democratic processes and young people tend to be both less interested in voting and more distrustful of formal political processes than adults. One result of these trends is that participation has been placed high on the agendas of many policy-makers and institutions. While engaging with young people and promoting their participation is one of the best ways to counter disengagement; offering the rhetoric of participation without ensuring that we are both willing and able to deliver will only lead to further disillusionment. For this reason, it is vitally important that local authorities consider why they want to encourage young people's participation and what they want to achieve through doing so.

Through their participation young people can contribute significantly to their cities by:

- **Developing their own understandings of citizenship, their knowledge, skills, ambitions and confidence.**
- **Reinvigorating the democratic credentials of city government and bridging the democratic deficit that threatens to undermine local political structures.**
- **Improving the efficiency of services directed at or affecting them.**

## What's it all about?

In this toolkit we understand participation as being the active involvement of young people in civic life and see decision-making as central, but not the only feature of active participation. Because definitions of adulthood and youth vary both between member states and social, economic and political contexts, we define a young person as anyone aged between ten and thirty.

This toolkit is intended to provide professionals with tools and examples of good practice to help them structure and evaluate their efforts in the planning, implementation and political enforcement of processes that young people participate in. It is intended to be usable across a wide-range of local authority departments, and aims to demonstrate that young people can and should be involved in decision-making in all areas that impact on them and their communities.

# Introduction

## How was it made?

This toolkit is the product of two years of work by a network of nine European cities in six Member States:

- **Belfast City Council, UK**
- **Birkirkara Local Council, Malta**
- **Bristol City Council, UK**
- **Municipal Enterprise for Culture and Education, Evosmos, Greece**
- **The Hetton & Murton Partnership (Sunderland City Council, District of Easington Council and Durham County Council), UK**
- **Liverpool City Council, UK**
- **Mazeikiai District Municipal Government, Lithuania**
- **Commune di Misterbianco, Italy**
- **Ajuntament de Sabadell, Spain**

At the heart of our work have been 108 young people who have evaluated existing youth-led projects and developed new initiatives, on the basis of local research which they have carried out. This work was organised as a series of 'focus groups' or 'laboratories' with young people run at local (city partner) level, allowing cities and young people to adapt the way they worked, and the problems and projects they looked at, to local circumstances.

Focus group results and outcomes were fed into two network-wide meetings at which experiences were shared, and lessons to be learned and transferred from them were assessed. From these we have identified seven key themes relating to youth participation and agreed on seven sets of recommendations and principles for youth participation, considered by our network to be vital to enabling the proper participation of young people.



## What's in it?

This toolkit is structured around the seven themes mentioned above and questions that have emerged from our evaluation of participation processes within the partner cities. These are:

- 1 Different understandings of participation:** Why participation? To what end? What kind of participation processes can city governments initiate? What are the key decision points in starting participation processes?
- 2 Recognising young people's diversity:** Who are 'Young People'? Young people's life situations, needs and opportunities differ widely; they cannot be seen as a homogenous group. How should we respond to their diversity?
- 3 Making participation credible to young people:** If young people have largely lost faith in formal democratic practices how do we ensure that they take new opportunities seriously?
- 4 Motivation, why should young people want to participate?:** While many young people have disengaged they are far from apathetic. What do we need to do to encourage their participation?
- 5 Sustaining Youth Participation:** How can we integrate youth participation into different policy-making areas? What structural changes within local authorities are necessary to make it an integral part of local authorities' working procedures?
- 6 Voices:** Young people's voices must be heard for them to participate in civic life. How do we ensure that they have the space to explain themselves in their own words? How do local authorities ensure they are talking to and not at young people?
- 7 Resources for participation:** What resources are necessary to sustain credible opportunities for youth participation and to ensure that their diverse needs and interests are accommodated? How can existing resources be pooled and better used?

Each theme is discussed in a separate section of this toolkit and all sections are built on the same set of elements:

- 1 The recommendations on key principles agreed by the partners of the Young Citizens' Project.**
- 2 A discussion of the findings of the project and suggested points for reflection during the planning, organising and evaluation of participation processes.**
- 3 Examples drawn from the work of the focus groups and from case studies informed by this work. These examples highlight key elements of the recommendations and suggest conceptual frameworks, procedures or working methods that can be used in other local contexts.**

Transferring practices between the diverse local and national contexts of the European Union is a difficult task. By providing readers with recommendations, arguments and questions to reflect upon, along with a number of examples that demonstrate how these can and have been implemented in practice, this toolkit aims to go beyond the limitations of taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

# Different understandings of participation

## Recommendation

There are many different models of participation and many different ways in which young people can get involved. No single solution is suitable for every city's circumstances.

Validation, consultation, steering and management are all possible roles for young people.

Young people can play a part in any number of decision-making processes within a city, from programming the timetable for their local youth centre to evaluating city-wide youth services and making-decisions on what ought to be funded in the future.

Differences in understandings of participation are defined by three main sets of issues. These are the **context** in which participation will occur, the **purpose** of that participation and the **model** you choose to base your practical decisions on. Below we briefly discuss these issues and present some examples from the work of network partners to help illustrate their impact on what you can do.

### 1 Differences in context

Political and cultural differences between countries and regions of Europe make it difficult to generalise and to transfer practices. Local authorities vary widely from country to country in the way that they are structured. National governments have different policies and place varying degrees of responsibility for delivering them on local authorities. In many countries there are obligations to involve children and young people in all decisions that affect them; however, the resources to implement these obligations are not necessarily forthcoming.

A wide range of ways of delivering youth work have grown out of this variety of contexts. Some national governments have centralised and professionalised the delivery of most services at local authority level whilst others rely more on better-developed community and voluntary based youth provision while local authorities provide a narrower range of services.

European countries are united in their commitment to the Council of Europe Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The central idea behind these initiatives is that the participation of young people in matters that concern them is a right, rather than a privilege

# Different understandings of participation

## 2 Differences in purpose

Youth participation is developed by local authorities for many reasons; the most common are:

- Promoting education in democratic processes, citizenship and civic responsibility by facilitating commitment to participation in society.
- Improving or validating service provision by giving young people a say in what services are provided and how they are provided.
- Increasing the uptake of services and ownership of resources by young people through the devolution of power and responsibility.
- Providing opportunities for young people to develop life-skills and self-confidence by supporting their engagement in any of the above.





# Different understandings of participation

## 3 Differences in models of participation

There is huge variety in the models used to define the level of participation of young people in decision-making; most models however share the common idea of a spectrum of potential forms of participation. These models place different forms of engagement into a hierarchy, the low end of which offers only token participation, or in the worst cases manipulation of young people. The other end of these scales offers young people a high degree of ownership over processes and decision-making.

- **We propose that the highest possible ownership of young people of the goals, processes and outcomes of participation is the ideal.**
- **We recognise that different levels and forms of participation will suit different young people at different times and for achieving different goals. Young people are entitled to choose whether they participate or not: it is the job of local authorities to ensure that young people's right to participate is acknowledged in practice and that young people are encouraged, supported and equipped to participate.**
- **We view participation as a dynamic process; local authorities have a great deal to learn before they can get it right. Offering a relatively low level of participation does not mean that it is impossible to develop stronger roles for young people as local authorities develop the capacity to support these roles.**

Where you start will depend on many things, but the following is a small list of important points to base your decisions on the:

- Issues you are seeking to address, and the goals that you want to achieve, through youth participation.
- Young people you are trying to empower/address/involve (see the next chapter for a discussion of the diversity of young people).
- Resources you have access to, in terms of staff time and finance.
- Context in which you are working, and existing resources such as organisations already working with the young people or within the area; the partnerships that you can build with non-governmental or voluntary sector organisations as well as other local government departments and national government agencies.
- Political backing of elected representatives of your city.
- Youth infrastructure (e.g. youth organisations, professional youth work etc.) available to support participation processes.

The following examples show some of the forms in which participation can be expressed, in respect to purpose, scope, and rationale.

# Different understandings of participation - Case Study

## **Young people shaping their environment, The Team to Re-Shape Evosmos. Evosmos, Greece**

In the last ten years the population of Evosmos, a former industrial area of the periphery of Thessaloniki, has doubled. As a result, public buildings such as schools and facilities such as green spaces and playgrounds for children fail to meet the needs of the population.

The Team to Re-Shape Evosmos provides an example of young people participating in the improvement of their local community by taking the lead in developing and implementing a public consultation, which asked local people to identify positive and negative aspects of the city. The project brought together young people from different backgrounds and was inspired by the question, 'What would you show a visitor to Evosmos?'

Taking the lead in determining their working methods and organising a work programme, the young people involved developed a plan to consult the wider public with the aim of demonstrating public support for practical and realisable efforts to improve the city. The group interviewed around one hundred people in the central square of Evosmos and, after evaluating their results, drew up a list of improvements to public spaces.

The next phase of the project was to take these findings to decision-makers within the local authority. To give the results more impact and to help to publicise the project, the team produced a photo exhibition illustrating Evosmos' good and bad sides and designed a website to publicise their work. The site, which includes an online diary of their activities, as well as their photographs, can be found at [www.evosmos-youth.gr/urbact/index.html](http://www.evosmos-youth.gr/urbact/index.html).

The group presented its work to local decision-makers including the heads of Municipal Development, the Infrastructure Department, the Education Department, the Cleaning Department and elected councillors. After discussion with decision-makers the group were able to get support for putting some of the improvements that had come out of their work into practice. The municipality approved a number of follow-up projects including:

- **The development of an educational campaign in schools with a booklet for children presented by a short theatre performance.**
- **The creation of a project to involve children in mural painting on walls in Evosmos.**
- **The set-up of a project to involve young people in the painting of ugly dustbins in Evosmos.**

Aside from the benefits of their work for the wider community, the group's experiences of this project have helped them to develop their personal and professional skills, given them an experience of political lobbying and developed their confidence in their ability to make themselves heard.

A full version of this case study is available online

# Different understandings of participation - Case Study

## Empowering young people to have their say, Belfast City Youth Forum. Belfast, UK

Belfast City Council Youth Forum provides an example of a city seeking to develop young people's participation for two reasons:

- To develop a mechanism for consulting young people on on-going processes of policy development within the council.
- To provide young people a platform from which they can address the City Council on issues of importance to them.

The City has involved young people in this process from the outset. Their first action was to commission a study that asked young people about the issues with which they would want to engage, and how they would like this engagement to be organised. Based on the results of this study and to help to entrench young people's perspectives from the outset, a young person was employed as Children and Young People's Coordinator with the task of establishing the Youth Forum.

The Children and Young People's Coordinator then studied examples of young people's forums, parliaments, and shadow councils in the UK, Republic of Ireland and further afield, as part of the process of developing proposals for Belfast Youth Forum. Consultation with young people (represented by youth projects and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum) and with adults from young people's charities, central and local government agencies and the police force was conducted throughout this process, and a Youth Steering Panel was established to work on the detail of the forum's structure. The panel were provided with training in democracy and citizenship and were given in-depth briefings on the different proposals for establishing a youth forum.

To support these young people in their work and to provide a clear channel of communication between any future youth forum and the City Council each of the six political parties represented on the City Council appointed a Councillor to champion young people's issues within their party and the council as a whole.

The Belfast Youth Forum will be established in summer 2006 and will follow a model negotiated between young people and other stakeholders right from the start. This process of involving all stakeholders, young and old, through different forms of consultation like research, steering groups and ad-hoc groups is considered to be an important success factor in the forum's development so far.

A full version of this case study is available online



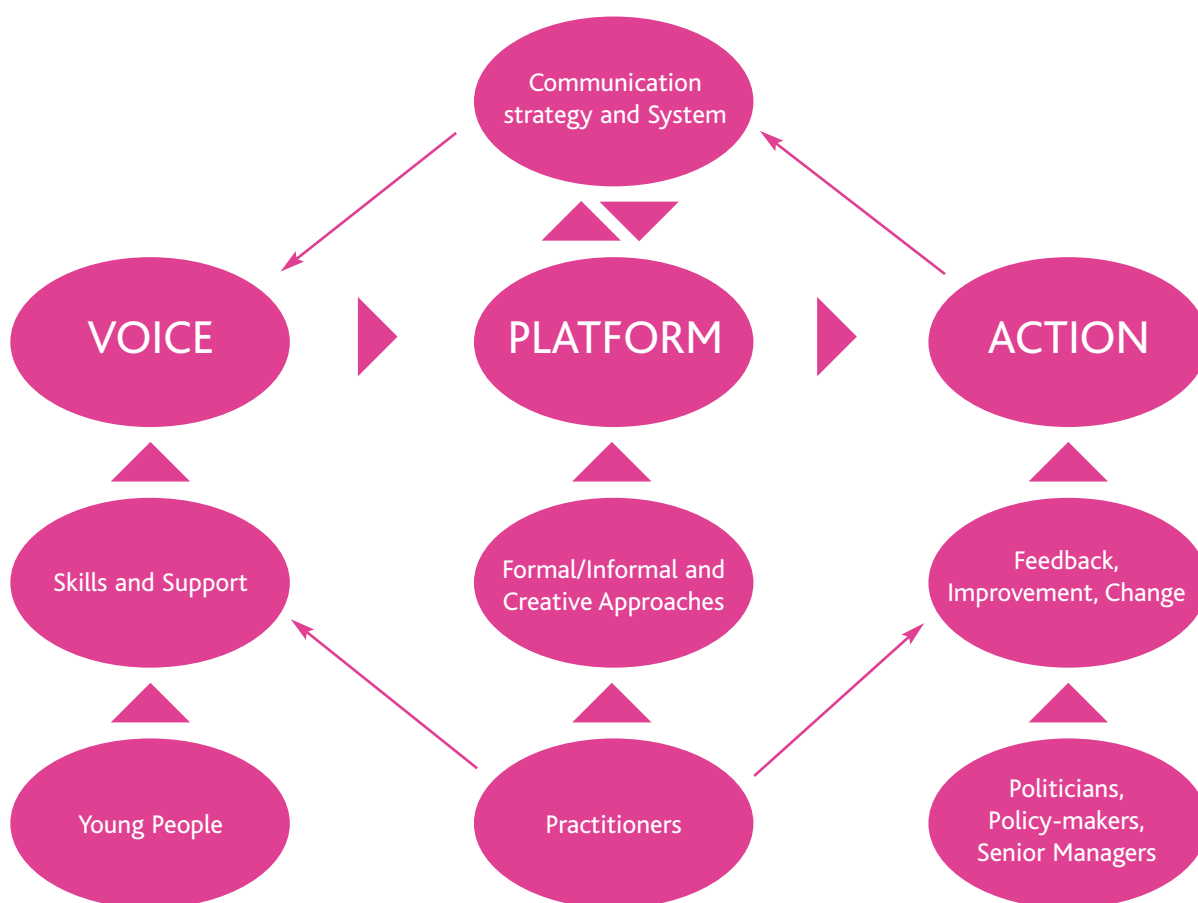
# Different understandings of participation - Case Study

## From consultation to concrete action, Voice-Platform-Action. Sunderland, UK

Voice-Platform-Action is a simple model designed by Sunderland Youth Strategy Team to provide a conceptual framework for involving young people and ensuring that their involvement goes beyond consultation.

The concept takes as its starting point the idea, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that young people have the right to express their VOICES and to be listened to (Article 12). It recognises that to have their voice(s) heard within the structures of local government (and elsewhere) young people require a PLATFORM which enables them to express their views to people with the power and authority to effect change. Lastly the model recognises that young people do not always have the authority to put their voice into ACTION. Adults (elected politicians, policy makers and senior officers or managers) must have responsibility for taking action. Action can take many forms: feedback in the form of progress reports, explanation of how young people's voices have led to change, and justification for any action taken or not taken.

The following diagram shows what roles different actors have in this model.



A full version of this case study is available online

# Different understandings of participation - Case Study

## **Putting decision-making and participation first, Everyday Participation. Liverpool, UK**

Everyday Participation forms part of a comprehensive participation strategy which is explained in more detail later in this toolkit. One part of this strategy involves developing participatory decision-making processes and incorporating participation into the youth services' working standards. However, the Youth Service is also trying to develop and strengthen a culture of participation among the city's young people with the aim of educating a generation of democratically aware young people who will continue to challenge the city council (and national institutions).

A culture of participation can only develop if young people are able to experience participation as a part of their everyday life and not simply as a 'one-off' event. The guiding principle for achieving this is the concept of Everyday Participation.

Developed in a series of workshops held with young people, everyday participation emphasizes the role of youth work as a seedbed in which young people can learn the basic skills and develop the attitudes needed to enable their participation in decision-making at multiple levels. Its working principles are:

- **Participation is a dialogue between adults and young people as equal partners in a process where decision-making takes place and results in change.**
- **A culture of participation is a climate in which young people expect to be heard and involved, where participation is something that happens every day and not a separate event or activity.**
- **Everyday participation integrates the aims of participation into the daily running of a youth group, making it a guiding principle of every session and every aspect of group life, not the focus of a separate initiative.**

This practice emphasises the use of everyday situations in all service settings as democratic moments where young people can make experiences through their negotiation of interests. The implementation of everyday participation will be included as an element of working standards applied across Liverpool Youth Service and disseminated through worker training.

A full version of this case study is available [online](#)

# Recognising Young People's Diversity

## Recommendation

Developing the full participation of young people requires active recognition of their diversity.

It is not enough for opportunities for participation to be 'open for all'; disadvantaged and excluded young people often need to be pro-actively engaged with and encouraged.

Taking a number of different approaches, in terms of the forms of participation you adopt, will help to ensure that more young people are reached.

Young people are as diverse in ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality as the societies which they are part of. Young people also present a wide range of scenes and sub-cultures and relatively small geographical areas can define local identities. Developing participation opportunities that reflect this diversity means working across scene or sub-cultural divisions between young people as well as recognising and responding to the particular needs and interests of disadvantaged and excluded groups.

Traditional methods of consultation through shadow youth forums or parliaments often fail to appeal to young people who are disconnected or disengaged from mainstream youth services. As a consequence, city officials have accused some young people of not being interested or motivated to engage. Positive experiences from cities that take more proactive approaches show that this is wrong and that more subtle barriers to the participation of these young people need to be closely investigated.



# Recognising Young People's Diversity

**As a baseline, we suggest that it is the responsibility of local authorities and administrations to:**

- Evaluate decision-making procedures and youth participation mechanisms to identify potential barriers to young people's active involvement. These barriers include both those created by unequal power relationships between young people and adults, and between young people as individuals who represent the same diversity and the same range of disadvantage and prejudice as adults. It's not enough to simply open a space with the intention of welcoming everyone; you have to address the issue of whether this presents problems for some groups.
- Examine your organisation's structures for features that exclude young people. For example, by holding meetings in the morning or late in the evening, school students will be excluded; by not providing transport to and from meetings young people who cannot afford or arrange their own transport are excluded.
- Develop outreach programmes and 'low threshold' or 'drop-in' participation opportunities to build links with disadvantaged and excluded young people. One-off activities and short term projects also provide young people with the opportunity to find out what's involved without initially having to commit a lot of their time and can lead to more sustained participation in the longer term.
- Provide 'bridging' incentives (e.g. social opportunities, recognition, prestige, etc.) that will encourage young people to find out what their capabilities are.
- Provide additional training and capacity building for young people who need more support to be able to engage fully.

Participation processes must try to balance the representativeness of the participation model by taking positive action to include young people who would not normally get involved in more formal structures like youth councils. Alternative models of voting can be used to ensure that these young people are included as well as to break down geographical barriers.

**Two examples of this approach are Liverpool and Easington District youth councils.**

- The District of Easington Youth Forum is investigating the possibility of broadening its representativeness by using a staggered voting method to select its members. One suggestion is that young people standing for election within a school context would need 100 nominations to be elected to the forum, whereas more socially excluded young people, who are normally accessed in small groups via youth work, would need only 10 nominations.
- In Liverpool each young person has two votes in the youth council elections, one is area-bound and the other can only be used to elect someone standing for the youth council who is from another area of the city. This system aims to be responsive to local identities, but also to provide a balance to the tendency of voting for members of the same community is introduced.

The following two examples show working methods that can be used to deal with diversity among young people in a constructive way.

# Recognising Young People's Diversity - Case Study

## **Bridging the gap between youth scenes, The Three Zone Model, Easington, UK**

Communities in the District of Easington share the legacy of the collapse of the local mining industry, which caused significant damage to the social and economic heart of the area. High unemployment, low educational achievement, limited horizons, a lack of social mobility and residues of a manual labour ethos and macho culture strongly influence the attitudes and outlook of the majority of young people from different communities who are isolated from each other and from nearby urban centres by poor transport links. Relative homogeneity, in terms of this cultural, social and economic context, has not eased historical rivalries borne out of narrowly defined local identities; indeed such rivalries have been sharply emphasised by deprivation. Attempts to bring young people from different communities within the area together had to be based on an understanding of local identities and the rivalries associated with them. A strategy for negating these prejudices was vital.

Easington Youth workers used a Three Zone model to define and attempt to overcome young people's understandings of their territorial boundaries, dividing areas into:

- **The 'comfort zone' within which they feel at ease.**
- **The 'stretch zone', part shared territory, part no-man's land, in which learning and development can take place.**
- **The 'panic zone', which is outside of their normal experience and in which they tend to feel anxious and uncomfortable.**

The model is based on the understanding that to enlarge the stretch zone, youth workers must understand where the boundaries of the different zones lie. In this case boundaries were geographical and to use the model successfully youth workers had to develop a detailed understanding of the ways in which geographic identity was defined and areas demarcated. One way of doing this was through learning to read graffiti tags often used by young people to indicate their area (their 'comfort zone'). While Easington applied the technique to geographically based identities it can also be used as a way of approaching issues of racial, ethnic or religious divisions as well as difference in gender and sexuality.

Once young people have been brought together three simple ground rules need to be followed to deal successfully with young people's identity conflicts:

- **Increase young people's knowledge of one another.**
- **Stress what they share with each other.**
- **Don't blame young people for social divisions (they did not invent them!).**

A full version of this case study is available online



# Recognising Young People's Diversity - Case Study

## Young people's views of diversity, Tribus Urbanes. Sabadell, Spain

Tribus urbanes (Catalan for urban tribes) was an exercise run during Sabadell's URBACT focus group that was designed to get young people to think about the implications of diversity in youth sub-culture and to help youth workers to understand how young people view sub-cultural diversity.

Each participant was asked to write a characteristic of a young person on a card. Participants were then divided into groups and each group then constructed stereotypical profiles of the members of different sub-cultures that they were aware of based on the characteristics written on their cards. The groups then presented their findings and discussions to each other in the form of a mural.

Below are examples of some of the sub-cultures identified, along with the characteristic attributed to them by the focus group.

<b>Posh</b>	<b>Indy</b>	<b>Jackass</b>	<b>Sporty</b>	<b>Hippy</b>
Studious	Selfish	Spontaneous	Tireless	Happy
Opinion-less	Social	Funny	Vital	Raver
Partier	Educated	Unique	Energetic	Partier
Vain	Intelligent	Mad		Pacifistic
	Claimer			
	Free spirited			
<b>Wee</b>	<b>Isotonic</b>	<b>Idealist/Utopian</b>	<b>Bohemian</b>	<b>Cool</b>
Cheerful	Energetic	Revolutionary	Curious/	Partier
Happy	Sporty	Rebellious	discoverer	Nice
Mad		Studious	Original	Insatiable
Scrounger		Frank		

Debate between the young people stressed the prejudices and negative ascriptions contained within the presentation of different tribes as well as the common ground between tribes and the positive aspects of belonging to one of these groups.

Young people in Sabadell highlighted that:

- While 'tribes' differ in their values and ideals, these values and ideals can also create links between different groups.
- In extreme cases tribalism can lead to conflict between groups of young people.
- Every young person is different and should be seen as an individual, "You are not a hippy, a skin etc, you are a person".
- People should not be judged by their dress.

This working method can be applied as a starting point to debate difference, social divisions and conflicts with young people. It can be used to help to build bridges between different groups of young people by showing how subjective the perception of different groups is.

# Making Participation Credible To Young People

## Recommendation

Local authorities' attempts to engage young people must be transparent both in their procedures and their objectives.

Local authorities should negotiate with young people to identify roles for young people.

Local authorities must be open and honest with young people about what they want to achieve through involving them and should be able to deliver on any commitments made.

Any limitations to young peoples' participation should be clearly explained and justified from the beginning.

The credibility of youth involvement efforts in the eyes of young people is a crucial factor for success and vitally important for sustaining motivation. The experience of all partners in the network is that every effort will fail if participation opportunities are tokenistic and young people, and their ideas, are not taken seriously. Making your efforts credible will depend on a number of factors but negotiation, accountability and the real devolution of power are vital.

Negotiating roles and objectives at the beginning of a project is important for ensuring that both young people and adults (and the institutions they represent) understand each other's expectations and goals.

In a participatory project, ensuring that institutions and adults involved are accountable to young people is necessary for maintaining credibility. As a minimum adults and institutions should be accountable for explaining decisions that run against the wishes of the young people. The credibility of an accountability structure will be greatly enhanced by ensuring that an individual or body who takes a decision explains it to the young people directly, rather than leaving it to someone lower down the chain of authority.

Finally, the credibility of a process of participation turns on how much power young people are attributed within the process. There are different limitations to the devolution of power to young people in different contexts and a wide variety of ways to distribute power between adults and young people. While legal, structural and political barriers can limit the possibilities for devolving power to young people, proper negotiation and accountability can ensure that participation remains credible.

The following examples below show different ways of making sure that participation processes are credible for young people.

# Making Participation Credible To Young People - Case Study

## Overcoming structural barriers to youth participation, The Urban 2 Programme Group, Bristol, UK

Bristol's URBAN2 experience illustrates what can be achieved if young people are taken seriously and the influence they have is "for real". Young people are the focus of Bristol's URBAN2 programme, the objectives of which are to:

- Break down barriers to employment and social inclusion.
- Raise skill levels and increase access to job opportunities for young people.
- Improve the local environment and facilities for young people.
- Promote active involvement of young people in their communities.
- Give young people the chance to influence and direct the Programme and its projects.

Young people make up over half of the members of the Urban Partnership Group (UPG), the steering body which determines which projects are funded. Young people make the decisions and (with the support of adult partners, mentors and the Programme Staff) determine the way the Programme evolves. Through their membership of the UPG young people are responsible for the evaluation, revision and decisions on applications for the 11 million allocated to the URBAN2 programme.

Young people interested in working on the UPG apply for membership and are approved by UPG members. All the young people involved have received training in grant giving. Each young member of the UPG receives support from the programme team and from a mentor who works with him or her on a one-to-one basis.

See [www.southbristolurban2.co.uk](http://www.southbristolurban2.co.uk) for more information.



# Making Participation Credible To Young People - Case Study

## Young people taking a lead in shaping service delivery, The Young Person's Inspection Team. Sunderland, UK

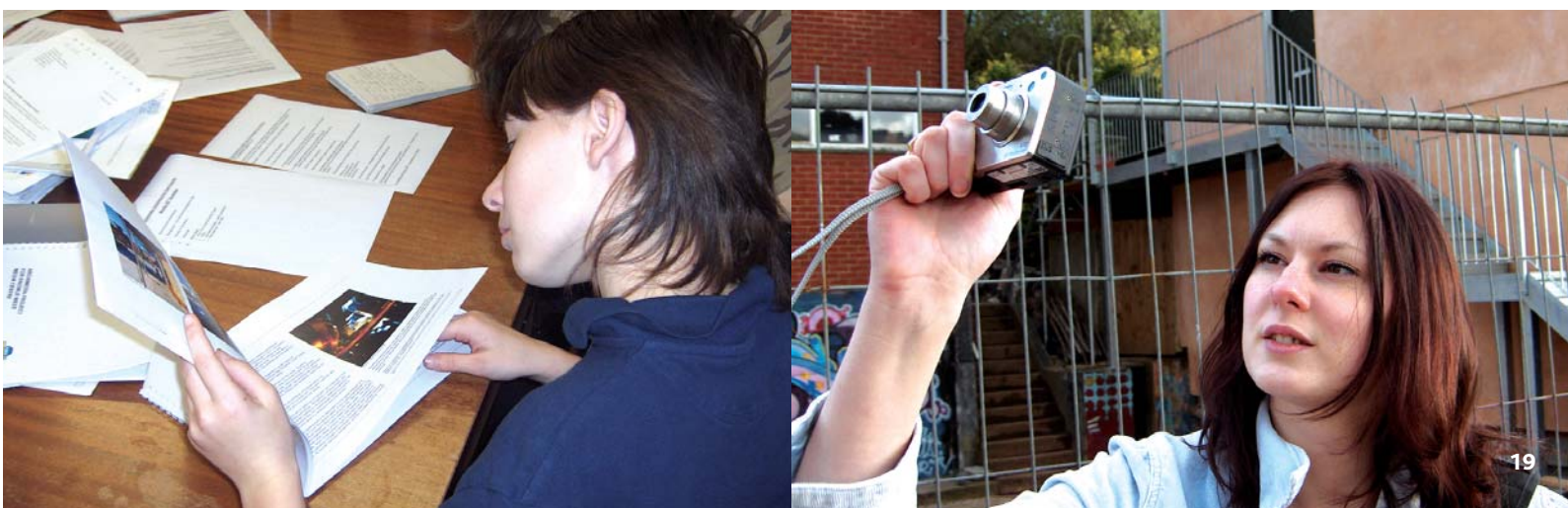
Young people are not often able to get directly involved in deciding how statutory services are delivered. This example from Sunderland shows how young people can make important contributions to the delivery of youth work.

The Young Person's Inspection Team (YPIT) was established as a response to a needs analysis undertaken by the Youth Development Group in 2004. The YPIT are a group of young people trained and supported to carry out a timetable of inspections of youth provision in the city alongside the Council's Quality Assurance Team and Ofsted, the national agency responsible for monitoring education and youth services. The YPIT was established specifically to enhance the work of the Quality Assurance Team and help provide a voice for young people within the inspection process and, consequently, within youth provision.

With any participation project a critical success factor is training. The YPIT members received a two-day training programme comprising a variety of workshops on observation, communication and feedback skills. To enhance this learning experience, methods such as the use of dramatisation or role-playing and a mapping exercise of youth provision in the city were used. The 'drier' topics of the inspection process, such as performance indicators, Ofsted criteria and inspection forms, were also covered in the programme.

The YPIT conducted its timetable of inspections in preparation for the commissioning of youth work to the Voluntary Sector from April 2005 and received Special Recognition in the Young Achievers Awards' for its work. The Young Person's Inspection Team has since conducted over fifty inspections alongside the Quality Assurance Team, covering the full range of youth provision on offer throughout the City, and has made a number recommendations for improvements.

In cooperation with Ofsted, nine individual inspections were carried out on a sample of seven projects, with the young people all receiving positive feedback from the inspectors that accompanied them. The findings of the YPIT were used to help inform the judgements of the Ofsted inspectors who held a debriefing session with their counterparts in the YPIT in order to evaluate the inspection process and take recommendations from the participants. These recommendations, including amendments to the inspection form, the level of support required, feedback methods and how to prepare other young people for the inspection process, have been fed back into the inspection process. The YPIT itself will be taking the lead in implementing improvements to the form and the feedback process.



# Making Participation Credible To Young People - Case Study

Each young person was presented with a certificate from Ofsted in recognition of his or her contribution to the inspection process; there are only a small number of such certificates in the country to date.

Inspections found that youth provision in the city is generally adequate to good, with accessible facilities in the localities varying from purpose built centres to schools to community buildings. The variety of resources available to young people was found to be dependent on the space available for youth clubs and it was noted that the purpose built centres have better facilities than smaller, community venues. The general consensus was that youth provision is friendly and welcoming with the young people having a good rapport with youth work staff, who in turn support young people with issues and encourage involvement in programme planning and activities. In line with the Quality Assurance Standards and Framework, a six-month review of the nine contracted agencies has been carried out and as part of the feedback process details of the implementation of recommendations made as a result of the inspection process have been presented to the YPIT.

In review of their own activities the YPIT have further developed their mission statement, job description and code of conduct as well as gaining accreditation for inspection work through the Duke of Edinburgh Award. A further thirteen young people have been recruited to the team, participated in two days of training and are now developing their skills through a second round of inspections alongside the remaining members of the original team. This will lead to an end of year review for the first group of contracted agencies and a six-month review for the second group.

Future plans for the YPIT include producing a questionnaire for young people on the youth provision they access, incorporating the Every Child Matters agenda of the UK central government into the inspection process and monitoring and evaluation of the practice of the team itself.

A full version of this case study is available online



# Motivation: Why should young people want to participate?

## Recommendation

Young people will be motivated to engage with participation structures that address their real needs and interests.

Recognising the contribution of young people to public life is key to maintaining their motivation and commitment to participation processes.

Maintaining interest in engagement over a long period of time is challenging; it is important to integrate feedback mechanisms that give young people a proper understanding of progress, and recognise the importance of their participation in this progress.

Building opportunities for success into the early stages of a project will highlight the value of seeing it through and the possibility of their having a significant, positive impact.



## Motivation: Why should young people want to participate?

Young people are often accused of being apolitical, uninterested in democracy, civic life and in making a contribution to their communities. As suggested in the introduction to this toolkit we see this as fundamentally incorrect. Instead it needs to be understood that, in common with other marginalized groups, young people face many barriers to engagement. These barriers include:

- **A failure of institutional systems of decision-making to offer enough and suitable opportunities to become involved.**
- **A failure to take sufficient account of the difficulties young people have when trying to participate equally with adults within an adult, institutionalised context, and a failure to adapt and adjust processes of decision-making to young people's needs.**
- **A lack of self-confidence in their knowledge, skills, capacity and right to contribute.**

In the case of the last point, adopting practices like Everyday Participation (see the section on Different Understandings of Participation, above) can help cities work towards developing young people's understanding of their capacity and awareness of their right to be involved.

Local authorities need to be aware of young people's political interests and the new forms of engagement that are emerging. Two cross-national developments in particular have been identified by recent research:

- **A shift from broad based to single-issue and from long-term to short-term engagement; in other words, from formal/institutional engagement to engagement with specific issues.**
- **A change in understandings of political engagement with a trend towards focusing more on everyday and identity issues.**

Young people's participation is too often restricted to soft sectors of policy-making such as youth work and leisure. Excluding young people from participating in the harder sectors, such as education and training, means not giving them the opportunity to engage with those issues that have the greatest impact on their futures.

Increasing institutions' openness to young people's active participation in these hard sectors presents a real challenge. To understand how to increase opportunities for young people to have influence, it is important to consider what their interests are and what it is that motivates their involvement. The experiences of network partners and the findings from focus groups show that young people are not all that different from adults in terms of what motivates and discourages them.

When discussing their personal experiences of becoming involved, focus group members agreed that initial motivations were frequently concentrated around perceptions of the personal benefits. Such benefits include social opportunities such as meeting new people or travel opportunities, but also related to gaining experiences that they see as benefiting their future employability.

# Motivation: Why should young people want to participate?

Young people suggested the following factors influenced their initial involvement:

- **The opportunity to meet new people and make new friends.**
- **The possibility of improving their skills and expanding their horizons.**
- **An informal, enjoyable atmosphere in which roles and responsibilities are negotiated between themselves and adults involved.**
- **A safe environment in which all participants negotiate and agree rules, but where adults involved provide a sense of stability by being able to enact these rules.**
- **An expectation of the impact of their involvement that is high enough to generate interest and excitement, but realistic, so as to avoid disillusionment.**
- **The perception of being involved in something 'cool', which offsets negative peer pressure from young people who are not involved and therefore know little about a project. Establishing this status is largely dependent on the kinds of incentives for involvement offered to young people; for example opportunities for travel.**

Young people's motivations for engaging are subject to change over time. It can be counter-productive to stress a high-level of decision-making and responsibility early on in a project because this can sound too much like work. It is through experience that the appeal of more substantial motivational factors, such as the responsibility and authority to introduce change, is better understood. In short, experience shows that initial motivations are more frequently self-interested and it is through the act of participation that young people (and adults) develop broader and deeper understandings of the value of what they are engaged in.

It is important to recognise, therefore, that our expectations of young people need to be based on a realistic appraisal of what those young people are ready for. This is not to say that we should not have high expectations and challenge the young people we are working with. Rather, we need to be sensitive to their perspectives and we must be prepared to provide the support that they need to meet their potential.



# Motivation: Why should young people want to participate?

## Case Study

### Changing views of the benefits of participation, Young Citizens' Project Focus Group, Bristol, UK

In Bristol the focus group comprised young people who were involved in participatory projects funded by the South Bristol Urban2 Programme. The Urban2 area has a relatively bad reputation for crime, drug abuse and low education achievement.

Many of the members of Bristol's focus group noted that their initial motivations were mostly centred on what they would get out of involvement in terms of personal rewards. However when reflecting on the work that they had been involved in they agreed that the most valuable outcome of their involvement was making a contribution to their communities and demonstrating to other parts of the city that these communities are vibrant places with active and engaged citizens, both young and old. One young person summed up this development, saying:

"When I first got involved with Spacemakers (case study in the Resources for Participation section) my parents said to me "Just look at everything you'll get from this project and how good it will look on your CV. But after you've been doing a project for a while you realise that you're not only getting good rewards yourself, but you get rewarded twice because you're doing something good for the community and everyone else - and that's important."



# Motivation: Why should young people want to participate?

## Case Study

### **Making democratic structures understandable, The Game Conspiracy. Sabadell, Spain**

One off-putting factor in engagement can be the complicated structures of decision-making, which are often a source of frustration for activists, and not only young people. The aim of Conspiracy is to introduce key concepts and processes involved in decision-making at local authority level.

Playing the game necessitates prioritisation of goals against limited resources. Players must form alliances, negotiate with each other, and support one another to achieve their goals. The game also tries to introduce ideas such as the need for commitment to one's goals if they are to be achieved, and, since resources are always limited, that it is often best to 'get on with it' rather than to wait for everything you want or think you need.

The game involves eight policy areas, in each of which there are three projects with different objectives, each requiring differing amounts of social and economic resources (represented by yellow and red counters) to be implemented.

Players choose to represent one of a number of predetermined social actors including members of the community (young and old), business, and local politicians (both in government and in opposition). Actors have differing access to the social and economic resources needed to implement projects and varying ability to deploy those resources. Only business and politicians begin the game with access to economic resources while other community representatives initially have access to social resources only. There are always too few resources available for all projects to be implemented. The game is played out as an opportunity for each player to foster support (both social and economic) for his or her projects through negotiation and co-operation.

Conspiracy was developed by young people at El Refugio de Sàtiro, a youth club in Sabadell, from a concept presented to them by Sabadell's Youth Department. The young people involved put a considerable amount of effort into developing a game that was payable while remaining an effective learning tool. Played with a game master that has a good knowledge of the game, Conspiracy is an effective and fun way of dealing with issues that theoretical training would make very boring.

[A full version of this case study is available online](#)

# Motivation: Why should young people want to participate?

## Case Study

### Recruiting young people to promote youth participation, The Youth Engagement Team, Liverpool, UK

The Youth Engagement Team was created by Liverpool Youth Service with two central aims:

- **To develop a mechanism for improving the involvement of young people in decision-making processes.**
- **To create new paths into professional youth work and address a shortage of youth workers qualifying through traditional routes.**

The YET is staffed by four young people aged 16-19 who are employed on a two-year contract for thirty hours per week and paid an annual salary of between nine and eleven thousand pounds. Their brief is to research and develop better ways of involving young people in the decision-making processes of the Youth Service, its partner organisations and the wider local authority. As a prerequisite for employment, team members must have previous experience in youth-led decision-making structures, for example school councils, project management committees or youth forums or councils.

During its existence the team has had a significant impact on the Youth Service, other council departments and on the city's politicians. They have:

- Taken the lead in delivering research projects and consultation events, such as the Liverpool Youth Service User Satisfaction Survey.
- Organised and facilitated a conference to open dialogue between Liverpool's young people and the Police Force.
- Worked with local councillors and the local transport company to develop a detached youth work project, which was funded by the transport company. The team's research on young people's attitudes to youth crime and anti-social behaviour (and related national legislation) was presented at the National Conference of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Other activities of the YET have included organising the G-litter Festival on environmental issues, a conference and research with young people on drugs education and planning and facilitating Liverpool Youth Services' annual Question Time, where young people have the opportunity to question senior officers and councillors. They have on-going commitments to support and develop the City's Youth Council, attend the Creative Issues Group (of local politicians) and the Youth Engagement Group (a multi-agency group of professionals involved in participation). The success of the team has been such that before the initial externally funded two-year pilot programme had finished the Youth Service, with support from local politicians, had decided to mainstream the team.

[A full version of this case study is available online](#)

## Recommendation

To ensure real change, participation should be integrated into a culture of dialogue between local authorities and young people, not 'bolted on' to existing practices.

Incorporating youth participation into the working standards and accountability systems of a local authority will make initiating and sustaining change easier.

Developing a flexible approach that allows young people to opt-in or out according to their interests and other commitments is important for sustaining the inclusion of some young people.

Ensuring the sustainability of meaningful youth participation is a challenge. Different forms of participation require different approaches, but the key features of making participation sustainable are introducing institutional and cultural change and developing strategies for preserving knowledge.

Institutional and cultural change can be achieved by establishing the correct structural links between young people and adult's institutions, for example:

- **Making participation a key element and a 'way of working' in employees' job descriptions is a powerful tool for making participation the norm (see the example from Liverpool, below).**
- **Enabling youth forums or councils to raise issues to the city council agenda and to address the council on these issues either directly or through an intermediary such as a councillor who assumes the role of young person's champion.**
- **Requiring the council to formally respond to issues raised at youth forum meetings.**
- **Inviting politicians who have responsibility for issues of importance to young people to youth council meetings as observers and to respond to issues raised by the young people.**
- **Developing links between specific council posts and their holders and young people's institutions. For instance, part of the job description of the director or deputy-director of education could include responsibility to attend youth council meetings.**

# Sustaining Youth Participation

Flexibility is important when working in short or fixed term projects and when working with young people who are not attached to a more formal programme such as a youth forum or council. Structural links such as those discussed above can be unsuitable.

For short and fixed term projects there is a danger that knowledge gained is lost when they end. Ensuring that knowledge is preserved requires raising awareness and understanding of existing good practices within (and outside) an organisation. Resources for publicity, aimed at maintaining the profile of youth projects in the community and within the structures of the council should be built into projects. Building awareness of good practice in young people's participation through the local media (radio, TV and newspapers) and local authority newsletters can help to ensure that what is learned through a fixed- or short-term project is passed on to others and not lost with the completion of the project.

Both of these approaches can help to establish consideration of young people's right to participate as an element of mainstream policy-making,



# Sustaining Youth Participation - Case Study

## **Young people as agents of change, The Young Citizens' Project Focus Group. Belfast, UK**

Youth provision in Belfast is fragmented, with a range of statutory and voluntary bodies seeking to meet the needs of young people. In practice this has meant that a range of approaches, varying from agency to agency, have been developed for working alongside young people. Whilst there is a consensus on the importance of youth participation, most organisations have tended to focus on what implications this has for themselves, as opposed to taking a strategic and integrated approach.

Developments in recent years have presented both young people and agencies with the opportunity to review the whole area of engagement. The adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and policy changes in Belfast City Council have provided common ground on which fragmented agencies can work together to improve young people's services. Taking this opportunity as a starting point, the Young Citizens' Project in Belfast was developed as a partnership of agencies and NGOs involved in delivery of services for young people. Partners included Belfast City Council, the Belfast Education and Library Board (the city's youth service), the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, and two NGOs, Opportunity Youth and Youth Action. To develop and strengthen the role of young people and as a mechanism for embedding closer co-operation between agencies and NGOs at practitioner level, young people (under 30) from these organisations formed the members of the partnership.

The scope of the project was to:

- **Create a partnership which recognises the fragmented nature of youth provision in Belfast.**
- **Review current models of participative practice both in Belfast and wider a field with the aim of producing a toolkit, which can assist in a process where young people and statutory bodies can interface in a manner, which is comprehensible and meaningful to young people.**
- **Create agents for change (young professionals) within the relevant bodies.**
- **Review practices in other European countries with a view to sharing best practice.**

One result of this way of working was the official endorsement of the recommendations presented in this toolkit by the agencies and NGOs involved and the inclusion of these recommendations in all those organisations' working standards.

A full version of this case study is available online

# Sustaining Youth Participation - Case Study

## **Embedding youth participation in local authority decision-making, Liverpool Youth Service Participation Strategy. Liverpool, UK**

The purpose of Liverpool Youth Service's Participation Strategy is to provide a framework and plan for the continued development of the participation of young people in the decision-making processes of the Youth Service and the City Council and to enable youth workers to provide a lead on participation within Children's Services.

The strategy defines the opportunities for participation at different levels and how to link these opportunities and suggests ways of integrating the recommendations made in this Toolkit into the working principles and practices of the Youth Service. It stresses the need for an integrated approach to youth participation that starts from the level of the single youth work unit through the development of Every Day Participation. Central elements are the area-based Youth Advisory Groups (see the Resources section), the youth council and the "Youth Engagement Teams" (see section Motivation: why should young people want to participate?). This strategy will be included into the working standards of all youth workers and disseminated through worker training.

A full version of this case study is available [online](#)

## Recommendation

Dialogue between local authorities and young people is a key foundation of citizenship.

Good practice includes:

- **Using accessible language in local authority meetings and official documents particularly those that aim to address young people's issues.**
- **Using a range of media when local authorities seek dialogue with young people.**
- **Providing creative ways to give young people a voice; this could include the use of performing and other arts.**

Adult institutions have not been designed with young people in mind; the ways in which they work are frequently ill-suited to young people's participation. Working hours clash with school times; and working methods like meetings, council sessions and formal methods of communicating have a discouraging effect on the majority of young people. Many forms of civic engagement exclude young people (and indeed other disadvantaged groups) because it is presupposed that young people have an understanding of how the structures work and the confidence to approach and engage with them.

In fact, there are many hidden barriers to young people's engagement with adult institutions. The ways in which adults work and the cultures of adult working environments are not always compatible with the outlook of young people; differences between young people and professionals in levels of formal and informal education mean that young people are at a significant disadvantage when trying to integrate into professional working environments (as are many other disadvantaged groups).

Language is a key issue that often makes communication between adults and young people difficult. Establishing a meaningful dialogue between local authorities and young people means addressing the following questions:

- **Are the ways of communication and dialogue accessible to all - in terms of language used, prerequisites required in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude?**
- **Are the messages from either side reaching their target?**

The use of new media like the internet or SMS text messaging are good ways of keeping in touch with young people, while magazines and newsletters can provide young people with a platform to address the public. Media coverage can also benefit by publicising young people's activities and achievements to the wider community, helping to combat negative images of young people and offering those who are not actively involved the opportunity to find out what's going on.



## Voices - Case Study

### **Bridging the language gap in formal meetings, South Bristol Urban Programme Group, Bristol, UK**

The Urban2 programme in south Bristol is explicitly aimed at investing in young people as the solution to the economic and social problems of the area. At least fifty percent of the members of the Urban Programme Group, the body of local people who determine which projects are funded, are young people under the age of eighteen. The challenge for the programme management team is to ensure that these young people are able to participate in its meetings in a meaningful way.

Language is an important obstacle to the meaningful participation of young people in meetings where they sit with adults and professionals. To lower this barrier the management team introduced the idea of the red card. Each UPG (Urban Partnership Group) member (young and otherwise) was issued with a red card and asked to challenge other members, visiting experts, prospective project managers and local councillors who used technical language or jargon and failed to explain it properly. By issuing adult members of the UPG with red cards young people were not singled out, instead the team aimed to demonstrate that everyone on the committee would benefit from plain speaking and clear explanations.

It took some time for everyone to get used to the system and for a culture to develop whereby UPG members were confident to assert their right not to know the jargon used by professionals in their working lives by presenting a red card. The number of red cards used in meetings peaked some time ago and has declined as professionals have learned how to express themselves in a way that is accessible to the whole UPG as the UPG members' knowledge and vocabulary has expanded.



### **Supporting young people's voice, Urban Beat and Street Magazines. Sunderland, UK**

Urban Beat is a quarterly publication of the Sunderland Youth Parliament's Media Group. The group's mission is to exercise young people's voice through the publication and distribution of magazines and newsletters. Urban Beat is their main publication and its content is wholly written by and for young people, giving a young person's perspective on issues, activities and services for young people. Urban Beat focuses on youth work, projects and services for young people. Young people write their own articles and have editorial control over the magazine's content, with Sunderland's Youth Development Group providing staff to support them with advice and training, as well as with outreach work aimed at ensuring that the magazine constantly encourages new voices.

Around five thousand full colour copies of Urban Beat are produced for distribution through Sunderland's schools and youth projects. Publication of the magazine costs around £1,000 per issue, provided from the Youth Development Group's budget; staff support for the project was built into existing staff time.

Street Magazine is a quarterly magazine produced through a partnership between young people, Sunderland Youth Development Group, and the Sunderland Echo, a local newspaper. The magazine has a wider focus than Urban Beat delivering a variety of articles on young people's issues and lifestyles as well as features. The young people involved have met with the editor, deputy editor and reporters from the Sunderland Echo to develop their understanding of media work and to help them relate it to youth issues. Although young people produce the content of the magazine the Sunderland Echo retains editorial control. Advertising targeted at young people is the magazine's main source of funding.

The Youth Development Group support the magazine by regularly purchasing space to advertise youth events and provision of a half-post to work with young people, helping them to organise and meet their deadlines and, as with Urban Beat, reach out to new writers. 30,000 copies are produced and circulated to schools, youth clubs and other venues where young people meet.

### **Supporting young people's voice, Urban Beat and Street Magazines. Sunderland, UK** (continued)

This double strategy allows the Youth Parliament to have both a youth-owned newsletter where production is almost completely controlled by young people and a professionally produced magazine that reaches far more people and can contribute to the promotion of positive images of young people and to counter negative stereotypes and prejudices about young people in the wider public, currently a significant problem in the UK.

In order to transfer this model, organisations would need to dedicate human and financial resources to its development. It would be best placed within a youth participation agenda that is serious about promoting positive images of young people and actively engaging them in the life of the city or town.

When work expanded to incorporate the development of the Street Magazine a specific 17.5-hour (per week) post was established to support the young people involved in media work as part of the work of Sunderland Youth Parliament. In addition other associated costs including office space, computer, telephone, administration and management support had to be met. The Youth Development Group has also sponsored the Street Magazine guaranteeing advertising and editorial space in addition to the contribution made directly by the young people. This currently costs around £1000 per edition; the local newspaper takes the responsibility to attract other sponsors and advertisers in order to produce the magazine, which is circulated and available free of charge.

A full version of this  
case study is available online

### Recommendation

Young people's participation is not free. Local authorities need to take financial implications seriously.

The planning and implementation of youth participation should be based on a thorough assessment of resources (both human and financial), political will and young people's interests, needs and capabilities.

Such an assessment will help to define achievable goals, and avoid disappointing those young people who participate.

The time and effort of young people is not always free; some young people will not participate unless they are offered some form of compensation, although this does not mean that they require traditional salaries.

Incorporating monitoring and evaluation strategies into the participatory process can ensure that resources are effectively allocated.

A realistic allocation of resources must underpin any effort to involve young people in decision-making and thus engage them as active citizens. If young people are to be expected to take efforts to engage them in decision-making seriously they will rightly demand that sufficient resources are allocated to allow meaningful participation. In terms of resources, finance (especially for paid staff) is obviously the lynchpin; the value of other physical and human (including voluntary) resources as well as committing a sufficient amount of time to participation should not be over looked.

# Resources for Participation - Case Study

## **Partnership working to provide better resources, The School Environment Regeneration Project. Evosmos, Greece**

As discussed previously, due to its rapid population growth the Municipality of Evosmos suffers from inadequate public facilities and amenities. Public facilities such as schools, green spaces and playgrounds for children fail to meet the needs of the population. Rapid population growth has created pressure for the equally rapid building of schools with five new primary schools constructed in the last five years. Evosmos has a total of sixty-four schools and 15,000 students. Schools are often temporary and poorly planned, providing poor facilities for their students.

The School Environment Regeneration Project provides an example of developing a participatory project for young people within a context of limited resources (both financial and human). It also shows how developing partnerships and activating existing resources can help to overcome or mitigate some of these limitations. The project was developed by Evosmos' Youth Information Centre and Social Support Centre; two institutions run by the Municipal Enterprise for Culture, to empower young students to make a contribution to their school environment and life. The partnership gave the project leaders access to students and teachers, who would be key in supporting project delivery.

Project leaders initially presented their ideas to lower secondary school teachers' associations and students' councils in an effort to secure their support and assistance in delivering it. On the basis of its response to this presentation, one school was selected to pilot the project and a group of twelve student volunteers (aged 13-15) and two teachers were formed to deliver it.

As a first stage the group conducted a survey of the schoolyard, looking at its positive and negative aspects as well as investigating potential safety issues. The group met regularly to draw up suggestions for improving the schoolyard and mobilising other students to get involved in making suggestions.

Once they had completed these tasks the students presented concise proposals for improvement to the local municipal authority department responsible for the maintenance of school buildings. These proposals were taken up by the municipality and will guide future planning processes. Additionally, an exhibition with plans and models of schoolyards was conceived and realised by the group. This exhibition has been shown in other secondary schools to inspire the foundation of similar groups throughout the city.

A full version of this case study is available [online](#)

# Resources for Participation - Case Study

## **Voluntary engagement needs professional support, Youth Advisory Groups.**

### **Liverpool UK**

Liverpool's Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) provide an example of building a platform into local government structures where young people can participate on an ad-hoc basis. This example shows that working on an ad hoc or drop-in basis with young people who are not firmly integrated into a regular group necessitates additional support both to enable those young people to participate and to allow the development of skills over an extended period of time. Additionally the example shows that it can be necessary to separate young people's participation forums from direct links with forums for adults as young people cannot always participate on an equal footing, even with the support of youth workers.

Liverpool's Youth Advisory Groups were a political creation in response to national legislation which restructured local government by creating a Cabinet system of Executive Council Members supported by Area Committees. The Area Committees are public meetings at which local stakeholders negotiate the needs of their particular neighbourhoods to be fed into the citywide decision-making processes.

Originally local politicians wanted young people's representation at the Area Committees. However, because anti-social behaviour amongst young people has such a high profile in the UK and because the media (amongst others) have to a large extent failed to challenge (and often reinforce) negative perceptions of young people the Area Committees proved to be unfriendly environments for them. Young people who attended often found themselves being made responsible for the actions of their entire peer group by adults.

As a result of this and after consultation with youth workers and officers the Council established Youth Advisory Groups as sub-groups of the Area Committees. Running in parallel to Area Committees, the YAGs provide young people with the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the rest of the community. Senior local politicians also sit on the YAGs and act as a conduit between them and the Area Committees and the City Council. Smaller working groups of young people from the YAGs meet to allocate £14,000 as small grants to young people and community groups in each of the ten areas.

# Resources for Participation - Case Study

## Developing young peoples' resources, Spacemakers. Bristol, UK

Spacemakers was a public space education and design project for young people on the Hartcliffe and Withywood estates of south Bristol. Part-funded by South Bristol Urban2, the project was delivered in partnership with Bristol's Architecture Centre, Hareclive Youth Club and Withywood School. Spacemakers demonstrates the importance of ensuring that processes of youth participation contain strong training or educational elements, and the value of this in terms both of project success and the personal development of those young people involved.

A group of twelve young people, all aged thirteen, were recruited through schools and youth organisations to work over a two-year period to redevelop a park in South Bristol. The recruitment process was enhanced by the project manager's efforts to make contact with youth workers and school mentors and by inviting youth workers, mentors and parents (along with the young people themselves) to attend an open evening at which the project was explained to them. This helped to foster the support of these groups of adults, who in turn encouraged and supported the young people in their decision to become involved and help to maintain their motivation throughout the project.

The project began with an educational phase, which aimed at ensuring that the group were properly able to make key decisions regarding their work without needing the project team to take the lead for them. This programme dealt with planning, presentation, communication, negotiation and team building. Further training (in the form of study visits) related to the design and use of public space was also provided. A final training element looked at a number of technical issues relating to potential building materials and issues of durability, site maintenance and safety.

The education programme included a residential training course and study visits to public spaces both in the UK and Europe. Fortnightly meetings and workshops were held at the youth centre and school.

Having undergone this training programme the group took the lead in selecting the site. They then interviewed and chose the landscape architect they wished to work with and over the next six-months played an active role in contributing to and critiquing the designs that the architect put forward. Simultaneously they worked at fundraising for the project, delivering presentations to potential funders, as well as to the wider community, as part of the project's awareness raising programme.

The success of Spacemakers has been recognised on numerous occasions, even before the project was completed the group were chosen to front the launch of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment's Best Practice Guide for Engaging Young People in Public Spaces and Bristol's Public Art Strategy. The project has received the Building a Better Bristol Award; recognition from the Civic Society and was highly commended in the nationwide Sustainable Communities Award of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Aside from its important role in making Spacemakers an extremely successful project, the education and training element of the project has empowered the young people involved, having an important impact on their confidence and personal ambition, with members of the group confident to go on to further and higher (university) education.

A full version of this case study is available [online](#)

## Resources for Participation - Case Study

### **Building on a community's social and political resources, Young Citizens' Project Focus Groups. Misterbianco, Italy**

In common with many peripheries of large southern European cities, Misterbianco, a municipality of 45,000 people on the outskirts of Catania, Sicily has a rapidly growing population. As in many other cases rapid urbanisation has outpaced infrastructural development. These developments have aggravated the emergence of divisions between the centre and the city's suburbs which have grown to a large extent due to illegal building. High unemployment contributes to the exclusion of young people living in the periphery of the city from many sectors of society. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a response to the almost total absence of social cohesion and participation in social life.

The Municipality of Misterbianco made the re-connection between centre and periphery the central issue of their URBACT focus groups. Young people were invited to make proposals in four thematic areas: young people and participation, young people and delegation, young people's roles and responsibilities and young people and commitment.

With the aim of giving an empirical support for their action, the young people involved in the Young Citizens' Project prepared and distributed a questionnaire on the issue "Young People and the Municipality", aiming at identifying young people's perceptions of the role of the municipality in addressing the need for participation and social acknowledgment, particularly with regard to the periphery.

Through analysing responses to the questionnaire it emerged that most young people feel neglected by the Municipality and that the creation of a Youth Council was seen as one of the most frequent proposals of the young people interviewed (together with self-organised Youth Centres).





# Resources for Participation - Case Study

## **Building on a community's social and political resources, Young Citizens' Project Focus Groups. Misterbianco, Italy**

(continued)

The results of the questionnaire will feed into three pieces of work to be supported by the Municipality:

- **A youth council will be developed which will institutionalise the cooperation between the City administration and young people and their organisations. Young people involved in the Young Citizens' Project will write the statute of the new Youth Council.**
- **The youth council will cooperate with the URBAN2 funded Portinerie Sociali (Social Reception Points, or community centres) in the peripheral parts of the Municipality, which are increasingly dealing with young people who seek advice and guidance on career and education opportunities.**
- **The youth council will also work with youth associations and social animators engaged in the three laboratori di quartiere ("district laboratories", also funded by URBAN2) in three peripheral districts of Misterbianco, which provide social and recreational opportunities for young people (e.g. music, theatre, ICT, social interventions for children, adult education).**

The Young Citizens' Project in Misterbianco worked with and built on available social 'know-how' of operators and professionals working in the peripheral districts. This networking of the project with existing social resources has helped to strengthen the resources available to young people in the Municipality.

The preparation, distribution and analysis of the questionnaire on the question of "Young People and the Municipality" was a useful instrument of participatory action research, in which young people and the wider community co-operated, sharing knowledge and experiences in identifying needs; planning; and implementing and evaluating solutions. The relevance of participatory action research with young people should be always kept in mind when approaching complex social problems like these. Particularly in the Italian context, where they generally leave home in their late twenties, young people are a means of involving families, acting as real catalysts in the involvement of other age groups.

The commitment of the municipal authority, significantly the direct involvement of the mayor who attended the first part of each focus group, was a valuable investment in the project, helping to support youth activities and to give importance and acknowledgment to the whole process.

# Conclusions

We hope that the toolkit provides practitioners and elected politicians with a set of guiding recommendations as well as questions and practical examples of different aspects of participation projects that are useful in planning, implementing and evaluating youth participation processes. We are convinced that this will help to encourage professionals in all fields of urban policy-making to move forward to introducing new ways to include young people in the lives of their cities.

## **Two concluding remarks need to be made on the relationship between social inclusion and participation:**

Concentrating on citizenship without social rights runs the danger of holding individuals responsible for problems created by society. Participation of young people in decision-making is a good way to give them an opportunity to learn about democracy and lots of other things, but it cannot replace social inclusion policies. Although we have provided some examples of how to make sure that all groups of young people can be included into decision-making structures, we want to stress that participation has to be part of every social inclusion policy, it is not a replacement for it.

Working towards social inclusion without participation rights excludes young people from having a say on the issues that really concern them. Young people's participation needs to be mainstreamed into education and training and into social inclusion policies. Particularly in respect of disadvantages young people, participation requires the building of trust in institutions and professionals; creating spaces for self-experimentation, and developing (informal) learning approaches that build on the individual strengths and interests of young people, rather than demanding that they compensate for their individual 'deficiencies' first. Finally and most importantly, it must include the possibility of choice, whether to participate or not.

Active participation in the context of inclusive social and education policies is in this respect equivalent to empowerment. Empowerment therefore cannot be restricted, but implies that young people have rights and that the resources to exercise these rights properly and to enable them to take responsibility for their transitions to adult life must be made available to them.

The long-term impact on society depends on whether large parts of the young generation can be encouraged to actively shape the societies they are living in at this crucial stage in their lives.

## Further Resources

### Statements of Principle

#### **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

[www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf)

#### **Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life** (21 May 2003)

<http://documents.youth-knowledge.net/documents/214.pdf>

### Other Hands-On Guides To Participation

#### **Involving Children and Young People: Where to Find Out More**

[www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn/downloads/PGSResources.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn/downloads/PGSResources.pdf)

A commented list of resources by the UK government's Department for Educational Services and the National Youth Agency.

#### **A Collection of Tools and Methods on Youth Participation** (in Italian)

[www.politichegiovanili.it](http://www.politichegiovanili.it)

#### **Engaging Young People in Evaluation and Consultation: A Review of Best Practices in Involving Young People in Evaluation of Services**

[www.nof.org.uk/documents/live/2665p\\_\\_Engaging\\_young\\_people\\_report.pdf](http://www.nof.org.uk/documents/live/2665p__Engaging_young_people_report.pdf)

#### **Everyday Participation: A Practical Guide to Youth Involvement, Felicity Shenton**

ISBN: 1-904479-04-9

[www.ukyouth.org](http://www.ukyouth.org)

#### **Participation: Spice it Up. By Dynamix Ltd. and Save the Children**

ISBN: 1-84187-062-5

[www.dynamix.ltd/shop.htm](http://www.dynamix.ltd/shop.htm)

Practical Tools for Engaging Children and Young People in Planning and Consultations.

#### **Act by Right: Skills for the Active Involvement of Children and Young People in making Change Happen, Bill Badham/National Youth Agency.**

ISBN: 0-86155-317-9

This is an excellent training package for young people based on the Local Government Association Here by Right Standards for Participation (See Sunderland's Self assessment tool)

### Studies

#### **YOYO - Youth Policy and Participation: A Comparative Study on Participation in Transitions to Work**

[www.iris-egris.de/yoyo](http://www.iris-egris.de/yoyo)

Website with reports and good practice case studies.

### Websites

#### **South Bristol URBAN2**

[www.southbristolurban2.co.uk](http://www.southbristolurban2.co.uk)

#### **Belfast North Belfast Partnership**

[www.nthbp.org/index.cfm/area/information/page/UrbAct](http://www.nthbp.org/index.cfm/area/information/page/UrbAct)

#### **Ajuntament de Sabadell**

[www.sabadell.net/Eng/Ajuntament\\_Eng/PaginesEng/Joventut\\_eng.asp](http://www.sabadell.net/Eng/Ajuntament_Eng/PaginesEng/Joventut_eng.asp)

#### **Sabadell's Youth Information Centre**

[www.sabadell.cat/jove](http://www.sabadell.cat/jove)

#### **Misterbianco URBAN2**

[http://62.77.45.182/apri\\_pagina.asp?ID=1](http://62.77.45.182/apri_pagina.asp?ID=1)

#### **Liverpool Youth Service**

[www.lys.org.uk/](http://www.lys.org.uk/)

#### **The Hetton & Murton Partnership**

[www.urban-2.org.uk/urbact.asp](http://www.urban-2.org.uk/urbact.asp)

#### **Evosmos Youth Information Center**

[www.evosmos-youth.gr/](http://www.evosmos-youth.gr/)

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## Glossary of terms

### **Apolitical**

Young people today are often accused of not being interested in politics to the same degree as previous generations, they are said to be 'apolitical'. Firstly, this understanding fails to take into account the changing nature of decision-making in a globalising world. The influence of national and local governments is shrinking and their roles as sites of political activity are shrinking too. Secondly, it ignores the political aspects of participation in new social movements and looks only at traditional modes of participation. The ways in which young people engage in civic life have changed, this does not make them apolitical.

### **Capacity Building**

There are many prerequisites to the effective participation. Knowing what your interests are, how best to express them and how to operate within complex institutions are some examples, developing the motivation the self-confidence to make your voice heard are others. Participation processes must include an element of capacity building to ensure that all young people are able to participate as fully as possible from the start.

### **Low-threshold approaches**

By low-threshold or low-step approaches we mean activities and participation opportunities that pose as few hidden barriers to young people as possible. Outreach work and youth clubs can fulfill these criteria because they do not require long-term commitment as prerequisites for taking part.

### **OFSTED**

OFSTED is the inspectorate for children and learners in England. It is this agency's job to ensure quality in education and services for young through the inspection and regulation of services and schools. See [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) for more information.

### **Scenes and sub-cultures**

Young people's lifestyles are often defined by shared fashions and tastes in music, clothes, etc. Young people often meet and socialise with people sharing their preferences. We refer to groups of young people who share the same fashion and taste for musical styles a scene or a sub-culture, like the punk sub-culture or the Goth scene.

### **Structural barriers to youth participation**

Structural barriers are barriers that are built into the ways local authorities act. They are independent of the will of single actors, but depend on the ways participation is organised. They can be open or hidden barriers. One open structural barrier is that minors are not allowed to make budget decisions. One example of a hidden barrier could be that meetings with a very formal atmosphere will discourage many young people from participating.

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