



Schaan, 5 July 2018

Press release "GaYA's Toolbox for youth participation"

Involving youth: But how?

Once politicians agree on the importance of young people for the future of the Alps and the need for their inclusion in decision-making processes, the question arises: How? How do we engage them in a productive and effective way? To answer these questions, GaYA's Youth Participation Toolbox was created by eight partners from five Alpine countries.

Existing approaches to youth participation usually try to force young people into the existing bureaucratic procedures. However, many young people are not involved in party politics, but are politically active in the social media and in various cultural, sporting and social organisations.

In the Interreg Alpine Space project GaYA - Governacne and Youth in the Alps - the project partners have developed a toolbox for youth participation. "GaYA's Toolbox for Youth Participation" shows new ways and approaches of participation to meet the needs of both young people and politicians. For GaYA project partner Matevž Straus, project consultant at the city of Idrija/SI, there is no single solution: "Young people are not a homogenous group and this should be taken into account when designing youth participation." Rather, the aim is to initiate tailor-made participative processes at local level.

In the toolbox, selected case studies from the Alpine region show the diversity of participation processes: from simple steps such as listening to young people to more complex and comprehensive activities aimed at sharing power and responsibility. Templates facilitate the creation of own participation processes and cards offer proposals for solutions for frequent obstacles such as a supposed lack of interest or unrealistic claims. GaYA's Youth Participation Toolbox try to provide insights, clarify terms and concepts, showcase participatory methods, inspire and motivate.

The toolbox and its contents can be downloaded at

www.alpine-space.eu/projects/gaya/en/project-results/participation-toolbox

Content of GaYA's Youth Participation Toolbox:

- **Thoughts, Models and Methods** explores what is so special about (youth) participation processes, how youth participation differs from youth work, what are the steps of youth participation, provides an overview of methods and presents magic rules of youth participation.
- **Case Studies** explore the diversity of participatory processes – from simple processes (for listening to young people) to more complex and comprehensive activities aimed at involving youth in making decisions or even sharing power and responsibilities. Far from not exhaustive, the collection provides insight into the most common practices in the Alpine space.
- **Try Different Cards** responds to the main obstacles and propose alternative approaches to common issues, because policy- and decision-makers from throughout the Alpine space often reach similar obstacles when initiating youth participation.
- Posters decorate your office with an African proverb or put Socrates' quote in town hall reception.

The main insights from the toolbox are:

- There is actually no such thing as 'the youth'. Young people are not a homogenous group.
- While young people do not necessarily engage in party politics, they are (often politically) active on social media and in diverse cultural, sport and social organisations. Young people are very much interested in societal challenges and international matters. Contrary to the conventional forms of politics, the preferences of young people for political engagement are more individualised and need to offer more opportunities and channels to express opinions.
- Most of the existing approaches to participation do not accept the 'modus operandi' of the youth and try to force young people into the existing bureaucratised procedures. The aim of designing the participatory processes is thus to establish new ways of cooperation that suit both sides.
- Youth participation processes should not be a one-day event, but a spiral-shaped, never-ending process. Participatory processes might take longer, but their spill-over effects last longer as well.
- Be clear about what can and cannot be influenced. Be transparent, honest, and clear about the purpose, the limits of what can and cannot be influenced, and what can happen as a result.
- Feedback, feedback, feedback. Always provide feedback. Let the youth know what is going on, how their inputs have contributed to the activities, why something was not implemented, and how can they engage further.

This press release and pictures can be downloaded under:
www.alpine-space.eu/project-news-details/en/4027

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GaYA- Governance and youth in the Alps

Young people tend to leave the Alpine space because they lack personal and professional fulfilment. Furthermore a majority of decision-makers remain unaware of the benefits a young active population brings to society. In cooperation with eight partners from all over the Alps GaYA aims to increase the quality of democratic processes in the Alpine space by enhancing the involvement of young people in regional governance and by developing new approaches for decision makers. New democratic methods are collected in order to overcome the challenges of territorial cohesion and participatory involvement of young people in everyday political actions. The implementation of innovative governance forms has great potential for increasing sustainable and fair decision making.

GaYa lasts from October 2016 to February 2019 and is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg Alpine Space programme. www.alpine-space.eu/gaya