

Youth participation is also

- an essential principle of good governance
(European Governance White Paper 2001, Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty 2009)
- a central right of all children
(Article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Sources

Council of Europe, 2012. Resolution 346(2012) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Youth and Democracy: The Changing Face of Youth Political Engagement.

EACEA, 2010/03. Youth Participation in Democratic Life, Final Report. LSE Enterprise, London, UK.

GaYA – Governance and Youth in the Alps

In the project GaYA, eight partners from five different Alpine countries have worked together for two years to increase the quality of democratic processes in the Alpine space. They collected new democratic methods, tested them in 15 pilot sites and made them available in order to overcome the challenges of territorial cohesion and participatory involvement of young people in political decision-making. The implementation of youth participation in today's governance forms has great potential and is an urgent need for increasing sustainable and fair decision making.

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GaYA policy recommendations

ALPARC – Alpine Network of protected areas

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GaYA Policy Recommendations

"...young people's interest in conventional political participation, such as voting in elections, has declined over recent years due to increasing disenchantment and cynicism. However this does not mean young people are no longer interested, they still engage in democratic and civic behaviour and they still believe in democratic values. They engage in different forms of democratic activities appropriate to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship."

Council of Europe, 2012

WHY YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE ALPS?

There is no major disenchantment of youth with political issues and concerns in Europe. Young people are, however, increasingly harder to reach. And there is "a clear and growing dissatisfaction among youth with the way politics is conducted and with 'politicians' in general". (EACEA, 2010)

Young people in the Alpine region are no exception. They are often very attached to their town, valley or mountain area, and care about it. They lack, however, spaces of encounter and expression in order to propose ideas to decision-makers. Rurality and the remoteness of many Alpine areas do not make the provision of youth services and youth participation easier. The local population is often ageing and so are the decision-makers. The brain drain of the young exacerbates this phenomenon. Because they lack personal and professional future perspectives in their home areas, young citizens leave, sometimes very early, for major towns and cities. **The Alpine regions, towns and rural communities cannot afford to waste the talent, energy and engagement of its youth.**

In order to facilitate change, the GaYA project partners address you, the political leaders of the Alpine region, with the following policy recommendations. Their ambition is **to assist you in re-establishing trust among young people and reconnecting young citizens to their home areas.**

- **You can help young people** to appreciate democracy, responsibility and community-belonging, which motivates them to remain, return and engage in their home areas,
- **You can convey democratic and social values**, which will help young people to contribute to building up stable democratic and peaceful structures,
- **You can make a contribution to youth's active citizenship**, providing administrations with young people's perspectives on policy issues which seem harder to grasp than others,
- **You can benefit from their experiences**, which helps the whole community achieve political, economic and social progress.

We believe that the following recommendations can support you in making your young people more enthusiastic and confident so that they actively and effectively engage in democratic processes, for our common future.

Political culture and trust



Large numbers of young people do not or are not allowed to vote in elections. They feel disconnected from regional and local politics. Very often, young people's opinions and needs are neglected in decision- and policy-making because they are not considered mature or competent enough and have no financial or electoral power. There is no mutual trust.

Reach out to young people and show them that their ideas matter. Promote a political culture open to youth participation.

- Show trust in youth and their ideas: Use appropriate tools and provide appropriate spaces of expression and listen to them. Welcome the output, even when it seems unconventional.
- Add credibility and authenticity to your action by sticking to your promises and being transparent about the reasons for your decisions.
- Work together with young people and include them in decision-making at all levels - municipal, regional, national and European.

Education



Youth participation in politics is not implicit; beyond the right culture or mindset, it requires specific knowledge and skills from politicians, administrations, youth organisations and young people. Young citizens need to know how to participate and engage in order to experience community-belonging and act for the common good. Politicians, administrations and youth organisations need to know how they connect to youth and implement youth participation.

Foster citizenship education and education on participatory democracy for politicians, administrations, youth organisations and young people.

- Provide young people with the skills and competences they need to be enthusiastic, confident and effective in democratic processes. Provide them with possibilities to experience participation in practice.
- Train administrations, both formal and non-formal education providers and youth organisations in youth participation. Include them in a dialogue in order to develop an integrated approach to youth participation education (at home, in school, in free time).
- Provide specific training modules on participatory democracy in school programs and include training programs for teachers and politicians.

Resources and means



Both youth work and youth participation lack means and resources for achieving their objective of an enthusiastic and confident youth that actively and effectively engages in democratic decision-making processes.

Make youth participation a “must”, not just a “nice extra”, by providing adequate means and resources for participatory policy-making and co-decision with young people.

- Assign public officers in your administration to devote time to youth participation: create an interface with young people and youth work, gather information on young ones and start youth participation processes. They should offer valuable back-up and support for young citizens in participation processes.
- Make cooperation possible and facilitate networking in order to learn from other examples in your region and beyond. Give the opportunity to seek support from external facilitators and experts.
- Provide appropriate funding mechanisms at local, regional, national and European level. These mechanisms should consider the mindset of youth participation: the process is important, the outcome is not fixed and should remain flexible.
- Support further experimentation projects such as GaYA using action-research or communities of practice on youth participation.

Youth work



Youth work often faces a lack of recognition and resources. It is, however, a crucial prerequisite to establish trust and show young people that they and their ideas matter. It is, besides school and family, an important tool for personal development, social integration and the active citizenship of young people. Youth work can play the role of an intermediary between youth, administrations and decision makers and thus can become a catalyst for youth participation processes..

Recognise and develop youth work as an important service of public interest.

- Make youth work a priority in public services and recognise it as the basis for more and better citizen participation.
- Support the creation and development of youth work. Create funding mechanisms, capacity-building activities and networking opportunities for the development and professionalization of youth work.

Institutionalisation



Many non-institutionalized forms of youth participation already exist. Consultations, workshops or youth events can help move youth participation forward. They imply, however, the risks of remaining isolated, not establishing political long-term commitment, lacking necessary follow-up and control of further political action, and not providing equal opportunities for all young people over time. Institutionalising youth participation is a valuable solution and a necessary further step.

Institutionalise youth participation and young people's say in decision-making processes through participatory democracy.

- Empower youth by recognising modern, flexible and dynamic forms of organisation as official institutions which are listened to. Create platforms through which young ones can exchange and develop ideas, and through which they can meet on an equal footing with administrations and decision-makers.
- Involve young people in non-traditional policy sectors such as social, economic and housing policies.
- Ensure the presence of youth and young people's representatives in key political bodies, but consider how young people engage today.

Cooperation and exchange



The life of young people is not limited to the municipality where they live, especially in rural areas (many young people go to school, study or spend free time elsewhere). These perimeters often do not coincide with those of policies and political decisions. In addition, exchange of knowledge and skills between areas regarding youth participation is still insufficient; some areas have taken the lead over others. Finally, there is a lack of exchange between young people from different areas on how they engage in local policy-making.

Facilitate exchange and cooperation in youth participation at different political levels and continuously provide opportunities for young people to exchange.

- Develop cross-border and regional youth participation processes.
- Support the exchange of good (and bad) practices between politicians, administrations and youth at all levels – local, regional, national and European.
- Support and improve European and international youth exchanges.
- Consider young people and their associations as interest groups to be involved in the development of mainstream funding schemes (EAFRD – ERDF – ESF).

RECOMMENDATIONS