



Youth Work Europe



Erasmus+

Key Policy Recommendations of the 360 Degree Participation Project

Recommendations for further strategic improvements of youth participation in the policy shaping process are explored in this section. We have attempted to respond to a key question *“under what conditions can greater participation and successful cross-sectorial cooperation result in advanced and sustainable participation leading to greater inclusion”*. However, we need to highlight that institutional and structural factors are important elements to be taken into account when reading through our modest small-scale project. The recommendations are based on evidence supplied, feedback offered, and observation of, participants at the Training Course (Lithuania 2016) and the Conference (Norway 2017). We identify thirteen recommendations for future policy and practice:

- i. That methodologies that seek to engage young people, and community groups, should be commenced at a very local level in the first instance; for example, a neighbourhood, commune, or parish, initiative provides an opportunity to build grassroots support that can lead to increased community cohesion;
- ii. That a range of constituencies be considered: inter-generational and intra-generational; intra-organizational and inter-organizational; between NGOs, state organizations, municipal bodies, and unstructured groupings;
- iii. That acknowledgement be made that there are many “hard to reach” groups and that creative methods should be developed to offer opportunities for inclusion; by way of example, nomadic, movable, or transient communities are often forgotten;
- iv. Newly-arrived communities offer particular challenges for policy makers, youth work projects, NGOs, and municipalities; agencies should commit to collaborative working, to sharing skills, and sharing resources;
- v. Cross-sectorial approaches, in terms of relating to separate policy fields and research perspectives which intersect young people’s participation, should be funded in order to establish a strong and evidence-based rationale for future work;
- vi. Practically, participative projects have to be allowed, and encouraged, to combine soft and hard approaches and outcomes;
- vii. The recognition of youth work approaches, otherwise known as informal and non-formal methods, which focus on skills and knowledge development, and examine behaviours and attitudes, be acknowledged and valued;

- viii. Lack of participation amongst young people has to be understood. Especially, if it stems from their past and previous experiences of blocks or limited choices in civic life; misunderstood or neglected needs, resulting in corroded confidence in agency rather than as personal deficit;
- ix. That policy and practice should overtly provide spaces for creativity, failure, exploration and experimentation, known in youth work terminology as “learning by doing” – also known as experiential learning;
- x. Young people should be consulted in the policy-making processes not only in the areas of education, training and employment but also in civic life, culture and environment;
- xi. In terms of adaptation of the Handbooks for use by other target groups, we suggest that all methodologies have been written in such a way that they are applicable to a wide range of audiences. Therefore, we recommend that users of the Handbooks and the web site should adapt or amend the resources to suit their participants;
- xii. Short-term metrics that seek to measure “impact” are contested by many in the youth and community profession. Similar to conventional scientific research, we recommend that longitudinal evaluations of cross-sectorial and participatory processes which aim to assess the sustainability and the impact of participatory policies on young people’s transitions would prove to be of greater value and influence;
- xiii. That further investment in training for youth workers and policy makers is critical to achieving a lasting legacy for this project.

Through this Erasmus+ -funded project we have discovered many credible and valuable examples of both participation and cross-sectorial working that critically engage young people and their communities. For the future, it is evident that young people’s involvement must be Critical, Objective, Purposeful, and Educative (COPE); such a complex regime will require skilled youth workers working in partnership with young people, policy makers, bureaucrats, and politicians. Young people, irrespective of whether or not they vote, are citizens; and engaged citizens are actively responsible for their communities. We are aware that “active citizens” is a contested concept but critical engagement should enable an authentic and credible level of participation and collaborative working. Critically engaged active young citizens are a significant component of a healthy and democratic society’s social capital; with prudent investment and skilled professional support they will flourish – respectful and responsible social actors just need to invite their involvement.