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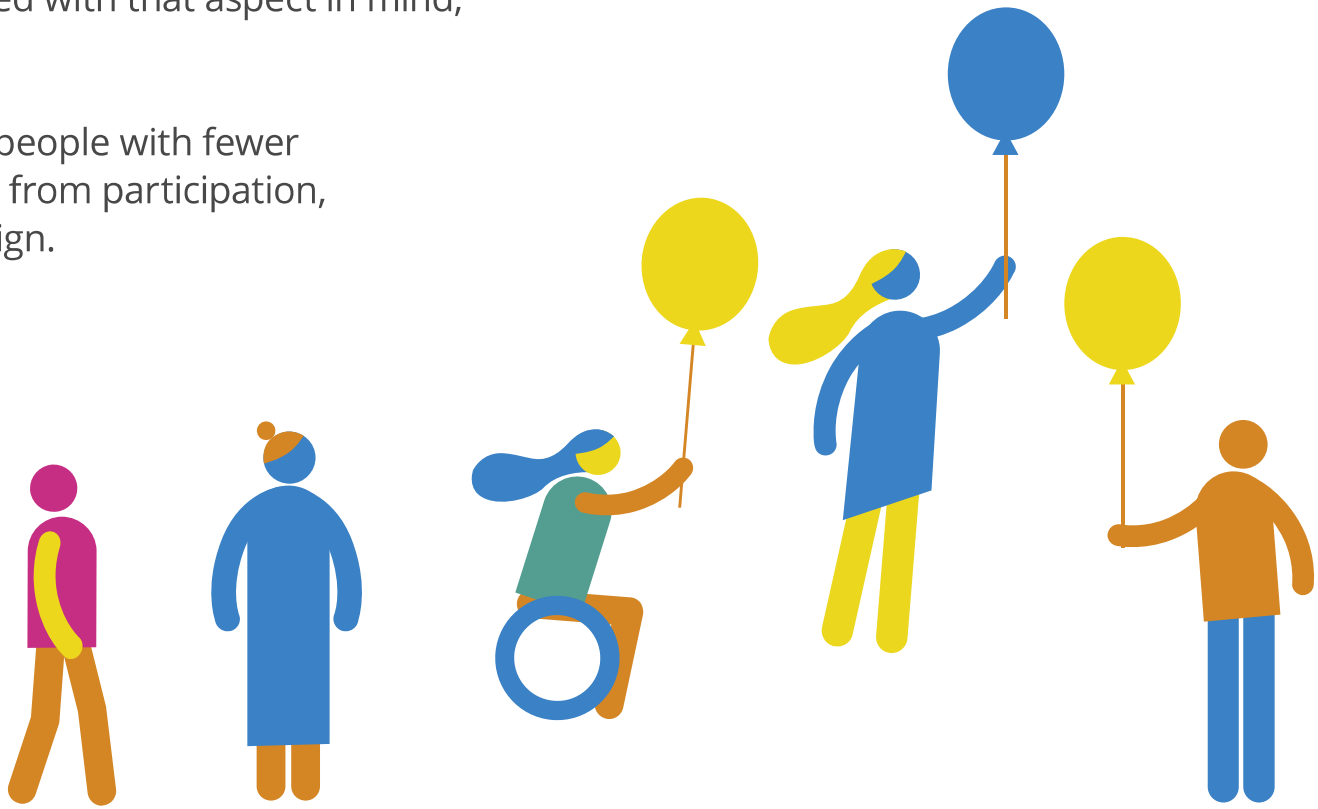
Planning for participation

Youth participation requires both good intentions and continuous efforts on the part of those holding power. It strives for young people to be informed and competent in order to raise their VOICE and take ACTION.

The EU Youth Strategy and the European youth programmes:

Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps provide a clear framework for enhancing youth participation. Supporting youth participation requires that projects are planned and designed with that aspect in mind, along with an explicit approach.

It is also about thinking about young people with fewer opportunities that might be excluded from participation, including through gaps in project design.



Participatory project design

The project is more likely to be relevant and enjoyable for young people when young people are involved in planning and decision-making. When planning projects with and for young people you could think about different aspects that would address barriers to participation and that could enhance their participation experience.

The following checklist could help you to make your project design and implementation more supportive of youth participation

Is your project looking to encourage more youth participation in democratic life?
By encouraging young people to take part in traditional forms of participation?
By finding ways to make better use of alternative forms of participation?
(for more details check the What is youth participation? module)

Participatory project design

Is your project looking to:
Engage youth groups that might not have been involved in your previous projects?
Provide additional support for those young people with fewer opportunities?
Promote a diversity of voices in your project outcomes?
Create opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities to take up leadership positions in the project? (for more details check the Promoting participation for all module)

Is your project looking to support young people in:
Directing their own learning about participation?
Working together to identify collective action and strategies they wish to implement?
(for more details check the Learning by doing module)

Is your project looking to involve project participants in decision-making within your project?
Is the process transparent?
Are the participating young people informed and supported in participating in decision-making processes within the project and more generally?
Are all project participants informed about the outcome of the decisions, as well as how and why they were taken? (for more details check the Young people leading projects module)

Participatory project design

Is your project looking to support young people in creating change?
Is it a VOICE project where young people advocate towards decision makers for change?
Is it an ACTION project where young people implement the change themselves?
Is it a project that somehow combines both? If yes, how does it create change?
(for more details check the Creating change with projects module)

Is your project looking to utilise digital tools and communication channels in order to facilitate the greater interaction and participation of participants?
Are you taking care of data protection issues?
Are you raising awareness about data protection issues among young people?

Is your project looking to avoid a negative environmental footprint?
Have you involved project participants in decision-making about the potential practical aspects of it?

Supporting all young people to participate

Not all young people would feel equally confident, would have the same opportunity and/or would be interested and willing to participate in your (or any) project. It is important to understand what the reason is and support young people accordingly. Possible options are:

Individual and tailored approach to each young person – ask the young person why this is the case and what they need, which obstacles and fears they face, and what would be helpful;

Providing relevant and timely information in an understandable manner and making sure it is understood;

Engaging young people in smaller and less demanding tasks and building their ownership and responsibility over results gradually; etc.

Making sure that the project's information and consultation channel is accessible to all, and, if not, searching (together) for alternative ways to make communication more inclusive.

Supporting all young people to participate

Checklist for ***any material*** that you are preparing for young people during your project:

Are you proposing relevant and user-friendly language(s)?
(Depending on your context you should see, for example, whether young people who have another mother tongue are able to understand?)

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Is the visibility of different elements appropriate?
(Depending on your context you should determine, for example, whether young people who have visual impairments or hearing issues would be able to understand?)

☐

Is information available in different formats?
(Depending on your context you should determine, for example, whether young people using reading software would be able to fully capture the information presented?)

☐

Supporting all young people to participate

Checklist for ***activities*** that you are preparing for young people during your project:

Do the **activities take the different learning styles of the participating young people into account?**
It is good practice to check with participating young people beforehand about their learning needs and learning styles. Not every activity needs to be all encompassing of all different learning styles, but throughout the project there should be a balance of activities that allow for people with different learning styles to engage.

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Are the activities appropriate for the different abilities of the participating young people?
It is good practice to check with participating young people beforehand about their abilities and confidence in certain types of activities (e.g. physically demanding ones). Make sure to adapt and revise activities to correspond best with the abilities of the project participants and to remain challenging and fun!

☐

Are the activities appropriate to the possible personal and inter-cultural sensitivities of the participating young people?
It is good practice to check with the participating young people beforehand about their attitudes towards certain types of activities (e.g. the ways they define boundaries and personal space in physical space – e.g. what is appropriate touch – and emotional space (e.g. which personal questions are not appreciated)). Make sure to adapt and revise activities to take into account the differences and, as appropriate throughout the project, also offer opportunities to the project participants to explore those further in order to understand them better.

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Are activities developed in co-creation with the participating young people?
It is good practice to check with the participating young people as to whether they would be interested and willing to co-create activities. If they are feeling confident and motivated, they might also want to lead and implement some of the activities. It is also good to offer such opportunities and support them in taking them.

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When you identify different groups of young people that might be or feel excluded, it may seem challenging to support their participation. Make sure to remember to take a step-by-step approach. Attempting to cover everything at once will make it difficult for participants to engage and for you to sustain support. Remain open to hearing and learning about different realities and backgrounds, and think about small steps and activities that can change specific things in real time. You can also consult the Promoting participation for all **module for more ideas!**

Evaluating participation

Youth participation is not just something you can add to your project by inserting an activity here or there. A youth participation approach needs to be developed into the design. Participation is a process that needs to be integral to the project. This can be achieved by involving participants and project staff in continued reflection and revision/adaptation of activities, so that participation is possible for everyone. During project implementation, and at the end of the project, the following questions can be used to help project participants and project staff reflect on their participation experience and that of others.

Understanding and learning about participation

To what extent do the project participants feel more knowledgeable about their rights in democratic systems?
How come? What would help to improve this?

To what extent do the project participants feel they were supported in directing their own learning during the project?
How come? What would help to improve this?

Evaluating participation

Experience of participation in the project

To what extent do the project participants feel they were supported in participating in the project?
How come? What would help to improve this?

To what extent do the project participants feel their voice and the diverse voices of other participants were important and taken into account within the project?
How come? What would help to improve this?

To what extent do the project participants feel they were supported in identifying collective action and strategies they wished to implement during the project?
How come? What would help to improve this?

Evaluating participation

To what extent do the project participants feel they were supported in identifying collective action and strategies they wished to implement during the project?
How come? What would help to improve this?

To what extent do the participants feel the project used digital tools and communication channels to facilitate greater interaction and participation among the participants?
How come? What would help to improve this?

To what extent do the project participants feel data protection issues were appropriately addressed during the project and that they themselves are now more aware of them?
How come? What would help to improve this?

To what extent do the project participants feel the project was environmentally appropriate?
Did they feel that they were able to influence this?

Evaluating participation

Readiness for participation beyond project

To what extent do the project participants feel more empowered to take part in traditional and/or alternative forms of participation now?
How come? What would help to improve this?

To what extent do the project participants feel they were empowered to raise their voice and to lobby decision makers for change and/or to take an action and implement the change themselves?
How come? What would help to improve this?

Assessing quality youth participation dimension of your project

This youth participation self-assessment questionnaire[1] was conceived as an online tool for project applicants primarily. The tool is practice oriented and can be used for different projects, in different contexts, at different stages (in their planning, during their implementation and in their final evaluation) and for different target groups.

You should plan, adapt and eventually complement its use by taking into consideration all of these circumstances.

	Ranking	Does not apply to my project
The project aims to support young people to be or become civically active in their communities and realities. The project considers the living conditions and realities young people face. The project has clear aims, one of them being to support young people's active engagement. Young people can address issues of common concern through the project.	★★★★★	⊘
The project supports young people in expressing their views, contributing to and/or influencing developments in their communities and social contexts on matters affecting them. The project provides a safe space and encourages young people to express their views to promote changes and improve the life of their communities. Although the project, organisers and participants capture the results, exploited them and document inspiring practices/practices to learn from. Already at the setup of the project, it is planned how to maximise the impact of the project (e.g. visibility tools, working towards useable results or products, etc.).	★★★★★	⊘

[1] Developed by Miguel Angel Garcia Lopez for SALTO Participation & Information

Assessing quality youth participation dimension of your project

	Ranking	Does not apply to my project
Young participants throughout the different phases and activities of the project have the right, the means, the space, and the opportunity to participate in decisions about it. The participatory approach is considered from the beginning and consequently carried on during the whole project. Young people are supported in expressing their views on the development of the project through their input in a regular and participatory evaluation. The methodological approach facilitates that young people are involved not just in the decisions regarding project implementation but also in the decisions about its outcomes and community impact.	★★★★★	⊘
The project includes outreach work to involve a wider and more diverse range of young people. Youth people from different backgrounds are included as participants and beneficiaries of the project. Media and information literacy and communication of the participation possibilities of young people are addressed The visibility tools and the tangible results take into consideration the diversity of the possible ultimate target groups of the project.	★★★★★	⊘
The project contributes to the development of young people's competencies for youth participation. The learning activities are adequate; they respond to the young participants' learning needs for participation. Learning to participate (within and beyond the project) is part of its intangible outcomes of the project. Some competencies for youth participation (analytical skills, critical thinking, communication skills, digital skills, leadership and teamwork skills, organisational and project management competencies...) are developed.	★★★★★	⊘

Assessing quality youth participation dimension of your project

	Ranking	Does not apply to my project
The project contributes to the capacity building of the youth sector to support youth participation. The results and outcomes of the project are a contribution to the youth sector in its efforts to promote youth participation. The organisations involved learn from the project how to strengthen youth participation in the future. The setting of (new) strategies, the creation of innovative tools or new approaches, the setting of platforms... strength the youth sector in promoting youth participation.	★★★★★	⊘
The project enables young people to be civically active and/or to be involved in public decision-making. The participation of young people in public decision-making processes is part of the expected outcomes of the project. The long term civic engagement of young people, beyond the project itself, is promoted. Specific tools and strategies for civic engagement are explored; for example, advocacy campaigns, social movements or the new Erasmus+ Youth Participation action.	★★★★★	⊘
The project is based on a genuine analysis that includes the needs and aspirations of young people, in their contexts, on issues affecting them. The daily concerns and aspirations of young people are at the genesis of a project. There is a genuine needs analysis conducted by young people in their own contexts in relation to the project topics. The global analysis and/or the European priorities are not parachuted over young people's realities.	★★★★★	⊘
Europe is critically explored as a space of and for youth participation. The mutual influences between the European policies and the local realities are explored during the project. Young participants can become (more) "active European citizens"; they are informed and are able to take a position on European issues affecting them. European policies, particularly youth policy and others that have an impact in their lives (i.e., education, employment...) are thematised in the project.	★★★★★	⊘

Assessing quality youth participation dimension of your project

	Ranking	Does not apply to my project
The methods and procedures of the project enable and encourage the real and meaningful participation of young people. Beyond the interactivity of non-formal methods, the methods and procedures stimulate the contribution of young people. The methods and procedures allow the input of young people in relation to the contents, agenda, strategies, methods and outcomes of the project. The input of young people, gathered through the different methods and procedures, is carefully considered in the planning and in the next steps of the project.	★★★★★	⊘
Young people, according to their level of involvement in the project, become involved in the key decisions of the project. Young people have a say in the management of the project; on the timing, format of activities, human and financial resources... Young people are informed about the key decisions in the project and those are discussed with them... The input of young people is considered in these key decisions; for example, after a mid-term evaluation, or at the end of a certain phase or when unforeseen circumstances demand an adaptation or change...	★★★★★	⊘
The multiplication and follow-up activities open up new opportunities and spaces for youth participation. The multiplication and follow-up activities through the different phases of the project promote youth participation beyond the scope of the project. New platforms, stakeholders, initiatives and organisations are considered in the follow-up activities for encouraging youth participation. Multiplication and follow-up activities are done not just “for others” but “with others” based on common concerns and aspirations.	★★★★★	⊘