Creating change with projects

Within Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, change starts by developing the competencies of the project participants' and supporting their learning.

However, youth participation goes further than this. It is about supporting young people to apply these competencies, to have an influence on the world around them and enable them to create change.

This can include a wide range of activities from lobbying decision makers to change policies to doing voluntary work to improve conditions for the local community.

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Public policy and politics
Local, National, Regional and European Laws and Policy

Community
Design, access, connectedness, spaces

Organisational
Youth organisations, schools, civil society organisations etc

Interpersonal
Family, friends, social networks

Individual
Knowledge, Skills, attitudes and values

Change can happen at a variety of levels that are interconnected [1]. At the **individual level,** project participants can develop a wide range of knowledge skills, values and attitudes. This can range from learning how to run a project to learning how democracy works.

At the **interpersonal level,** project participants can work together on changing their attitudes and behaviours among their peers or other people immediately around them in their day-to-day networks. For example, participants could persuade their friendship group to take part in a campaign or join a project addressing climate change and environmental issues.

Participation projects can create change at the **organizational level**, level; For example, by creating an elected youth steering group or advisory board, an organisation such as a museum or healthcare service can share decision-making with young people.

Project participants can create changes in their **wider community**, by organising or setting up initiatives and activities. This involves working at a larger scale and effecting change across whole neighbourhoods, cities or even countries. For example, a group of participants in a European Solidarity Corps project could arrange community events to bring young people and older people closer together in their town, or a youth NGO could run a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of environmental issues with the public.

Public policy and politics can be changed when project participants engage directly with democratic institutions, such as through advocacy and campaigning, by voting or by meeting with politicians to raise concerns. Project participants could also ask for more sustainable mechanisms to be put in place for youth participation, such as co-decision-making with young people for creating change or reforming systems they are concerned with.

[1]Based on Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) *The ecology of developmental processes*, in W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development*, 993–1028, New York, John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Focusing on: Creating Change

Be clear on your method of creating change.

Is it a VOICE project where young people advocate towards decision makers for change or an ACTION project where young people implement the change themselves (see the 🌐 What is youth participation? module) or does it somehow combine both?

Be focused.

Identify clearly what sort of change you are trying to create and what a successful change would look like.

Identify supporters and allies.

These are people and organisations that can help you create the change you are hoping to see. Build alliances with these stakeholders and work together.

Identify barriers to change.

Spend time thinking about the things that can stop you from achieving the change and how these can be removed.

Be prepared to re-evaluate.

As your project develops, new goals might emerge and some changes might be harder to achieve than you initially expected. Evaluating your progress regularly will help you adapt to unexpected developments yet stay focused on your ultimate aim.

Be honest with participants.

You might not achieve your goals and there is no guarantee that your project will bring about the change in society that you are seeking. Be open about this at the start of your project, and make sure the project still creates a positive change on participants. Make sure that the project participants have the chance to reflect on what their participation has brought them or their communities beyond the stated goals.

Look at what has been done before.

Learn from projects that have happened in the past. This will help you identify which topics or issues will be most likely to receive support and which methods and strategies are good for making change.

Focusing on: Inclusion and Diversity

Consider which groups of young people are involved in your project and leading efforts at change. Do these also include young people who are directly affected by what you are trying to change, for example Racism or Ableism?

Supporting young people from all backgrounds to take on leadership roles within a project, and especially those directly affected by the issues of the project, can ensure its participation credentials and legitimacy. Everyone in the project should have the opportunity to contribute to making change through the project.
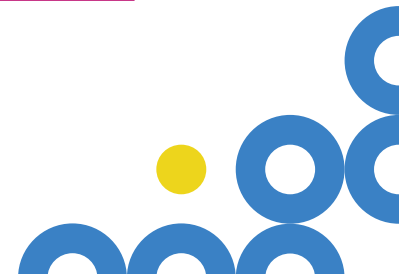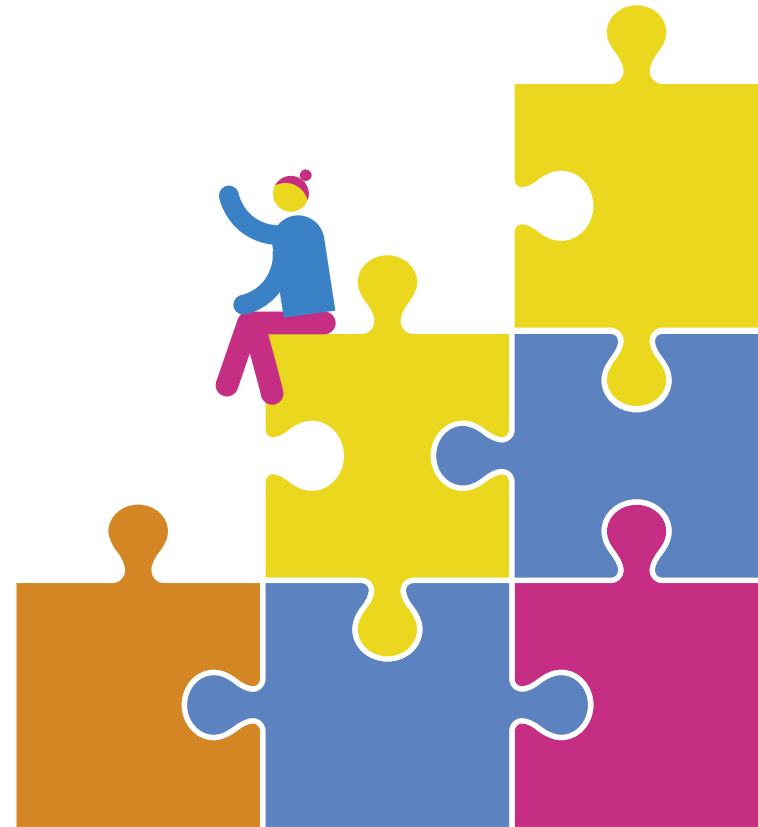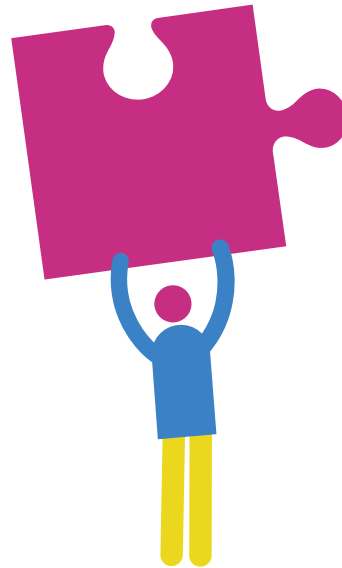
Focusing on: Digital Transformations

Working for change in the digital space does not automatically lead to change offline. A website or social media group that encourages young people to discuss politics might not actually lead them to be more politically active in the 'real' politics where they live or in their community. It will probably not create change in public policies either. For that it would need to be connected to political institutions and processes of decision and policy making. However, the online environment does provide the opportunity to have an impact on the ongoing discussions.

The digital and online environment provides an opportunity for sharing and finding open source data, tools and methods that can help achieve greater change and in different contexts. For instance, hackathons are bringing new problem solving methods in an agile manner, coupled with prototyping and user-focused approaches. Here is only 🖝 one example from Estonia.

On some occasions, creating change in a digital space or community might be the main goal of an activity. For example, the project 🖝 Game Over Hate supports young people in challenging hate speech and prejudice in online settings, to create safer online gaming communities, and it is changing the online gaming culture to reduce discrimination and hate speech in online settings.
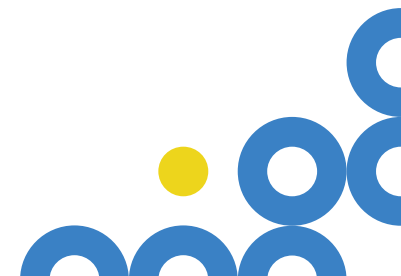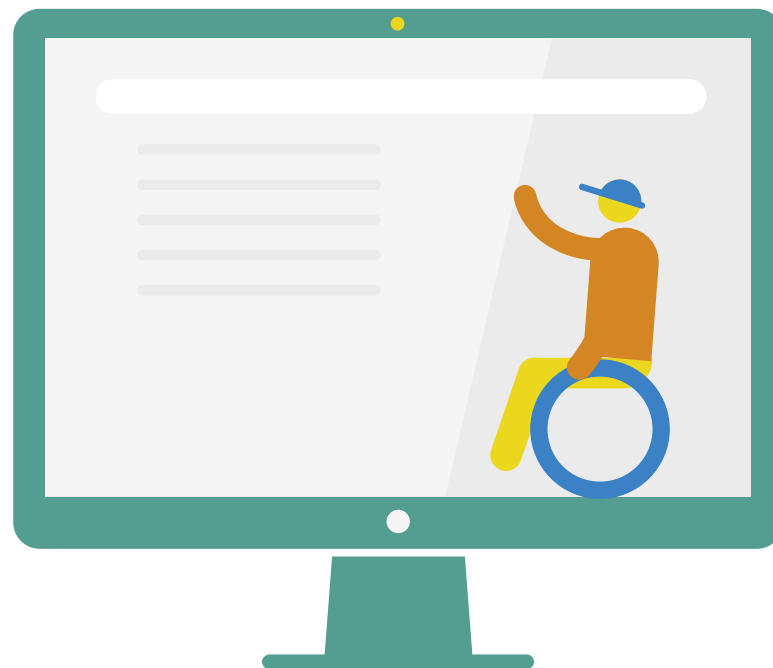
Focusing on: Sustainability, environmental and climate goals

Environmental change can happen as a result of actions at all levels, as the environment transcends them. For example, it can occur:

- As a result of individual actions, such as recycling waste, conserving clean water or reducing meat consumption.

- As a result of organisations and communities changing their energy and fuel usage, improving access to sustainable food sources or improving public transport systems.

- As a result of politics and policies. A good example of such a policy is the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, EU Climate Commitments and EU Green Deal.

It is a good idea to incorporate into the design of your project the process of bringing participants out of their usual surroundings and behaviour patterns with the aim of inspiring behaviour change (e.g. when in the project the conscious decision is taken not to eat meat or something similar for sustainability reasons). Make sure to support the project participants in actively reflecting on the individual change they are undergoing.

If you want to go deeper...

visit
🌐 participationpool.eu
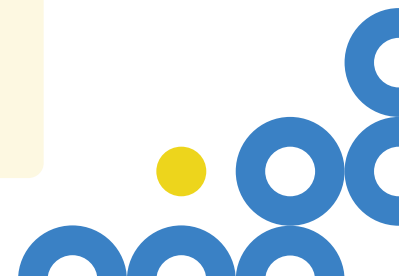
Or check out:

Read Save the Children's Guide to
🌐 Monitoring and Evaluating Child Participation
by Gerison Lansdown and Clare O'Kane.

Read the 🌐 Handbook of advocacy
made by a group of National Youth Councils.

Read 🌐 Finding Spaces for Change
by John Gaventa.

Read the 🌐 Learning by doing to think more
about young people's learning and individual
change that happens as a result of projects.
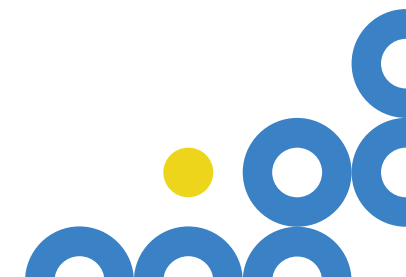
What type of change will your project make?

You can use this tool to help you plan the changes you are trying to create in a participation project.

Imagine you are at the end of your participation project, and everything has gone successfully. What sort of changes will you see? You can record them in the boxes below.

	What or who will have changed?	How will they have changed? What difference will you see?
Individual level		
Interpersonal		
Organisational		
Community		
Public policy and politics		