Young people leading projects

Erasmus+ and **European Solidarity Corps** encourages projects that are led by young people throughout all stages of preparation, implementation and follow-up. Young people participating in decisions about how a project is run and being able to shape and create projects for themselves is a key part of youth participation.

Groups of young people can develop projects on their own, but youth workers and young people can also collaborate to develop projects together. Providing support for young people to lead and take decisions about projects can help ensure that young people are able to implement their project ideas successfully.

People supporting young people to create projects, whether they are young leaders or youth workers, should consider how they can share leadership and decision-making with other project participants. Different project participants may choose to be involved in different levels of decision-making at different times, depending on their personal needs and interests. The project leaders should be transparent about the amount of influence other participants can have on the project, and they should communicate openly about how and why decisions about the project are made.

A helpful way of thinking about a project participant's level of involvement in project decision-making is to use Treseder's Degrees of participation model [1]. It describes the different relationships that project leaders can have with participants and how decision-making can be shared.

Project participants initiate the project and share decisions with youth workers / young leaders. Project participants have the initial ideas, shape the project design and come to youth workers / young leaders for advice discussion and support before decisions are made. The youth workers / youth leaders offer their expertise for project participants and decisions are taken jointly.

Youth workers/ young leaders consult with participants. The project is initiated planned and designed by youth workers / young leaders, but project participants are consulted on the need for the project, the design and how it is run. Project participants have full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously. Youth workers / young leaders are responsible for decision-making.

Youth workers/ young leaders initiate the project and share decision with project participants.
Youth workers/ young leaders have the initial idea, but project participants are also involved in planning and design. Not only are project participants views considered but they are also involved in taking decisions about how the project is run.

Project participants are assigned roles and informed about the project design by youth workers/ young leaders.
Youth workers/ leaders initiated, plan and design the project. Young people volunteer to be participants. Project participants understand the project, they know who decided to involve them and why.

Degrees of participation

Project participants initiate and lead the project.
Project participants have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Youth workers or others who are supported, such as trainers, are available for support, but do not take charge or become involved in decision-making, or leading the project. All of the project participant are involved in leading the project.

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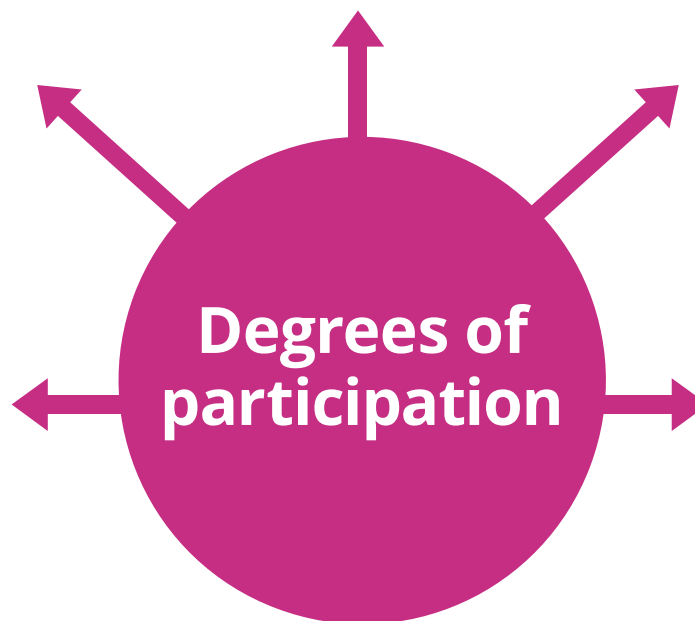
[1] This was first published in Treseder (1997), *Empowering children and young people: promoting involvement in decision-making*, Save the Children, London.
The diagram shows an adapted version of the original model created by the toolkit authors specifically for the context of Erasmus +: Youth and ESC projects.

Different degrees of participation might be useful in different contexts. For example;

Project participants initiate and lead the project. This is useful if the participants already have the confidence and skills to lead a project. It allows all participants to take full control of the project.

Project participants are assigned roles and informed about the project design by youth workers/young leaders. This can be useful when project leaders have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, such as mobilising other young people to join a political campaign. However, it does not allow participants to shape the project, so it is only youth led if the youth workers/young leaders are young people themselves.

The other degrees of participation describe the **different ways decision-making is shared between project leaders and project participants.** In some projects, particularly very large ones, it may not be practical for every young participant to be involved in decision-making. The degree of participation can vary throughout the project. For example, a project might have a steering group of young people that shares in making decisions about the project, whilst other participants chose to take part in activities without being heavily involved in decision-making. This is perfectly valid, as long as this is fully transparent and everyone understands that this is what is happening.

Focusing on: Values and principles for decision-making in projects

Decision-making in projects should be:

Transparent - Make sure all project participants understand how decisions in the project are made and who is involved in decision-making. When involving project participants in decision-making, be clear about the level of influence they can have.

Informed - Make sure project participants are informed about when decisions are going to be taken, and how they can contribute to them. Ensure those involved in decision-making have enough information to make decisions effectively.

Accountable - Make sure the outcome of the decisions about the project, as well as how and why they were taken, is shared with all project participants. The people involved in decision-making should be available for further discussion with the project participants.

Supported - Make sure any young people involved in decision-making have the support they need to be fully involved. Designing projects can be complex, and participants may need access to clear information, guidance or training in order to be thoroughly involved and able to participate fully.
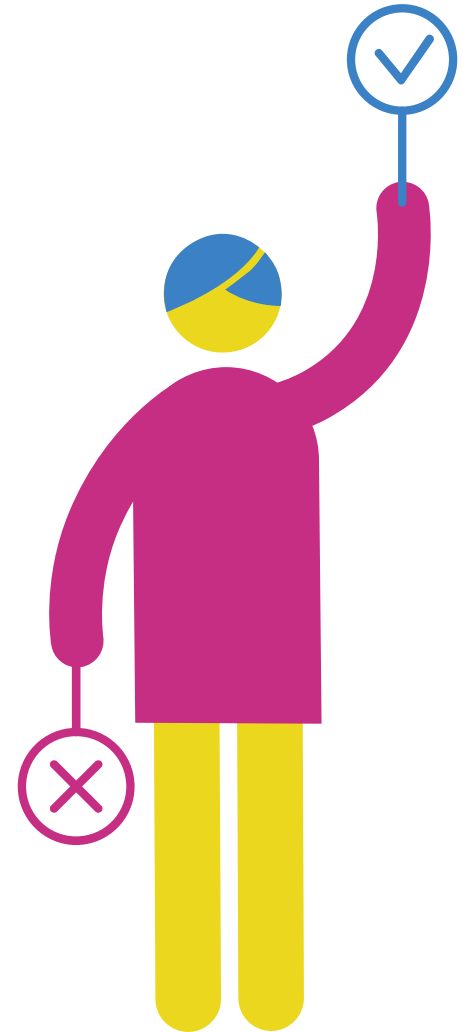
Focusing on: Inclusion and Diversity

Module 🌐 Promoting participation for all focuses on ensuring projects are accessible to participants from a diverse range of backgrounds. When thinking about which groups of young people are able to access your project, make sure that you also consider which groups are involved in leading and running the project. Inclusive participation means ensuring that young people with fewer opportunities are able to take up positions of leadership in your project, as well as taking part in the activities it offers.

Focusing on: Digital Transformations

Digital tools are very useful in finding project partners and potential participants for your project. Digital tools also provide a way to connect all the project participants and hold discussions as a basis for decision-making. Creating an internal blog, chat groups or something similar solely for your participants is a great way to enable ongoing communication between the project leaders and participants. Such tools are also useful for facilitating consensus building and decision-making when face-to-face meetings are not an option.

These channels can be used to check a participant's views and ask for opinions before making decisions as well as to give feedback on the outcome of decisions.

If these channels are being used for decision-making, it is important to be clear how decisions are taken within them. Group chats can sometimes give the impression that the last message posted is the decision that has been made. Using polling and voting tools within group chats, as well as having a moderator, is a way of overcoming this.

Focusing on: Sustainability, environmental and climate goals

Young people's interest in environmental issues, climate change and the sustainability of the contemporary way of living may spark their interest in leading a project addressing these issues. Encourage them to explore the issue further and its impact on young people. Help them to determine what exactly the issue is and how it affects them, so that they can start designing the ways in which they would want to address it.

You could also help them to take inspiration from different environmental projects and green initiatives and also those that were initiated and implemented by young people across the world. Check 👁 Flagship Projects, or 👁 Climate Change Association for inspiration and ideas.

If you want to go deeper...

visit

🌐 participationpool.eu

📖 Or check out:

Read more about levels of involvement in decision-making and Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation in UNICEF's Publication 🌐 Child Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship.

Use 🌐 Have your Say Manual based on 🌐 Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life for ideas for activities.

Who leads?

You can use this activity to think about the decisions you have to make for your project and who will be involved in them.

1. Make a list of all the major decisions you have to take about your project.
You can use a tool such as a mind map or bubble diagram to help you do this.
Examples of decisions could include the theme of the project, the location of the project and which activities will take place.

2. For each decision, or group of decisions, identify which people in your project will be responsible for making this decision.
Then identify which other participants they should involve when making that decision.

3. Ask yourself to which degree each group will be involved in the decision-making.
Will you consult with them? Or will they share in the decision-making? Are they aware of their level of influence?
If not, what needs to happen to make that fully transparent?

4. Identify some simple practical steps the people taking decisions about the project can take to:
Contact other participants and find out their views on major decisions, or involve them directly in decision-making.
Give feedback about decisions to other project participants.