

# NPiN

NEW POWER in YOUTH

## *Youth Participation and Citizenship Education: A Cross-sectoral Perspective*

### Analytical Paper



**Author: Dr. Dan Moxon, People Dialogue and Change**

**Erasmus+**  
Enriching lives, opening minds.



# Table Of Contents

<b>Key Points.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What is Youth Participation?.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>European Policy Context for Youth Participation.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>What is Citizenship Education?.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>European Policy Context for Citizenship Education... </b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Summary Conclusion.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Guidelines for Collaboration between the Formal and Nonformal Education Sectors.....</b>	<b>16</b>

# Key Points

‘Youth participation in democratic life is about individual young people and groups of young people having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, contribute to and influence societal decision making on matters affecting them, and be active within the democratic and civic life of our communities’ ([SALTO PI Youth Participation Strategy](#)).

Youth participation in democratic life is about young people's ability to exercise their rights to influence and shape our communities and societies through either expressing their voices to decision-makers or taking action to create positive social change. This relies on young people having the necessary competences to engage in democracy as well as an environment which provides them with opportunities to do so.

It is common within the youth sector / non-formal education field to run ‘youth participation projects’ and activities to support young people’s participation in democratic life. These projects typically focus on creating opportunities for young people to directly influence democratic decision-making or to take some form of democratic action during the project. The primary goal of these projects is often to enable young people to exert some form of influence during the project.

‘Citizenship education’ is a term used in the formal education field to refer to educational activities which enable young people to develop the competences required for them to engage in democratic life. The primary goal of these projects is often to enable learners to have the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to then go on to engage in democracy throughout their lives.

There is considerable overlap between ‘citizenship education’ and ‘youth participation projects.’ Youth participation projects may still pay attention to the competences young people develop, and citizenship education may still directly provide opportunities for young people to engage in democratic decision-making. Terminology is not always used consistently, and the forms and types of practice vary considerably in each field.

Both forms of practice have the long-term goal of promoting youth participation in democratic life. This means there are considerable opportunities for collaboration between fields. When collaborating, it is necessary for stakeholders to be aware of their different approaches and agree on what goals and outcomes they hope to achieve by the end of their collaboration.

# Introduction

This paper is intended as a reference for developing cross-sectoral collaboration between the formal and non-formal education sectors around youth participation in democratic life. The first section explores what is meant by the term youth participation and how it is understood within the non-formal / youth sector. The second part explores the concept of citizenship education and how this is understood within the formal education sector. The paper finishes by identifying the differences and commonalities between the two concepts and sectors, as well as proposing guidelines for collaboration. The paper was written for the New Power in Youth Strategic Partnership between several National Agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps and SALTO Resource Centres. It has been presented during the 2023 Forum on Cross-sectoral Cooperation aiming to enhance youth participation in democratic life in both formal and non-formal sectors.

## What is Youth Participation?

There is no universally accepted definition of ‘youth participation’ or ‘youth participation in democratic life,’ but there is a common way that it is discussed across Europe. Within the English language, ‘participation’ refers to ‘taking part in something.’ Young people can participate in a running race, a school class, a youth event, a birthday party, an election, or any number of things. However, ‘youth participation’ is commonly used within the youth sector, non-formal education, political science, and youth policy to mean much more than simply taking part, and it instead relates to young people influencing democracy and public decision-making. Within these fields, youth participation in democratic life refers to young people’s active involvement in our democracies, communities, society, or the public realm in some way. There is much debate about which specific activities count as youth participation. However, it is agreed that youth participation refers to a behaviour or action in which one or more young people interact with other democratic actors and democracy itself, and crucially, have some sort of influence on our democratic societies. Youth participation is about young people being active citizens, engaged in developing the well-being of our communities and influencing the direction of our society, underpinned by their human rights and the duty of states to support these rights.

EU policy, including [the SALTO Participation and Information's Youth Participation Strategy](#) has increasingly taken to emphasising youth participation 'in democratic life', rather than just 'youth participation,' though the two terms are essentially the same. Emphasising the 'in democratic life' element helps make a distinction between young people taking part in democracy and the other things that young people may 'take part' in, such as labour or education programs. But what counts as taking part in democracy? And what is democratic life? There are some activities, such as voting, signing a petition, or protesting, that are clearly political and easily identifiable as an attempt to engage with democratic decision-making. But there are other activities, such as volunteering to clean up a park, expressing political views online, or turning disused buildings into community space, where the political dimensions are not immediately obvious. In these cases, it is more debatable if they can be considered youth participation in democratic life, as these activities do not connect young people directly to political decision-making.

A distinction between political participation and civic participation is sometimes made to address this issue. With this, youth (political) participation is understood as youth voice and involvement in decision-making. Here, young people interact with those in power, such as politicians, policymakers, civil servants, and community leaders, to influence the way public decisions are made and what these power holders do. Youth (civic) participation is where young people take action to improve our communities, though not necessarily by attempting to influence decision-makers. The emphasis is on young people doing things rather than expressing their voices to persuade others to do things.

The concrete ways in which young people can engage in democratic life have been extensively researched. They are divided into the so-called 'traditional forms' of participation: voting, standing for office, membership of political parties or trade unions and the 'alternative forms [1].' Young people across Europe are understood to be less engaged in traditional forms of participation than older generations currently or older generations at their age as a result of their lack of trust in current political structures [2]. However, young people are apathetic towards democracy. Instead, they are heavily engaged in the so-called 'alternative' forms of participation [3], which include:

- *Involvement with protests and social movements* - particularly single issues causes such as the environmental movement and lifestyle choices such as boycotting and buycotting.

---

1 also called innovative, unconventional, or new forms

2 Cammaerts, B., Bruter, M., Banaji, S., Harrison, S., Anstead, N., 2013. *Youth participation in democratic life, final report*, LSE. London.

3 Crowley and Moxon 2016 *New and alternative forms of youth participation in decision making*. Council of Europe. Strasbourg.

- *Volunteering, civic activism and mutual aid* - where young people create projects, initiatives or take individual actions to support their communities.
- *Deliberative participation initiatives* - dialogue based events and programmes often state supported, such as citizens juries and participatory budgeting. These are held around a single theme, and to enable young people to influence a specific policy or area, based on the outcomes of events.
- *Co-production and co-management of public services* - where young participants share decision-making responsibilities for a public policy or programme with the people running it.
- *Membership of youth organisations, youth advisory groups, and civil society organisations* - including both independent civil society organisations, and advisory style groups which exist as part of other organisations or public bodies. This form of structured participation is considered by some as a traditional form of participation.
- *Alternative use of public space* - such as turning disused buildings into community centres.
- *Digital participation or e-participation* - the use of digital tools (ICTs), online spaces and online communities for youth participation. Digital participation can exist alongside or as part of other forms of participation; it can replicate other forms in digital spaces or create new approaches to participation.

Digital participation is closely linked to young people's media consumption and media and information literacy. Access to information is a precursor to youth participation, and young people are increasingly using the online world as a source of information.

It is common within the youth sector and youth policy to use the term 'youth participation' to refer to projects or initiatives that enable or encourage young people's participation in democratic life. The styles of 'youth participation projects' or initiatives are many and varied. They can include civil society organisations undertaking advocacy campaigns with young people, municipalities creating youth steering groups, voter education and awareness campaigns, youth councils, youth volunteering programmes and many more. 'Youth participation projects' can be led by young people, as well as by state or civil society actors. The defining feature is not who runs the project but rather an intention to enable young people to have an actual influence on democracy and democratic life based on their own beliefs and

views. Youth participation projects are sometimes educational in nature, aiming to use education to empower young people to be more active citizens. However, ‘youth participation projects’ more often refer to projects whose main goal is to create mechanisms, systems, or conditions and mechanisms that better enable young people to participate in democratic life. For instance, a public body might host dialogue events with young people or set up a steering group to ensure young people have the opportunity to participate in how the body is run. Or a local youth council might be established to represent and advocate for young people’s views within a local area.

## European Policy Context for Youth Participation

Because youth participation is about the interaction between young people and democracy, youth policy (and other policy fields) also has a role in shaping what counts as youth participation and how the term is defined. Through youth participation policies, states and state actors seek to shape the sorts of citizens they want. Any programme or policy supporting youth participation will contain implicit ideas about what the person creating the programme or policy wants young people to do within democracy and who young people should be as citizens. States will create and support various tools and mechanisms to engage with young people that the states view as positive. The term ‘youth participation’ is used exclusively as a positive phrase - within policy, there are no moral good and bad forms of participation [4]. Instead, ways of engaging in democracy considered ‘bad’ or ‘immoral’ or unwanted are not defined as not part of youth participation. Thus, any ways of engaging in political activity that are seen as negative by the state, such as violent protest or hate speech, become defined as outside of what is considered youth participation. In healthy democracies, this is not necessarily a concern; this process (called ‘Governmentality [5]’) is used to transmit fundamental European values such as respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. But governmentality can become problematic when considering morally or lawfully grey areas such as direct action within climate protests or expression of extreme, but lawful, views. It is also more concerning in states with poor track records of respect for democracy, which may actively seek to suppress political behaviour or viewpoints which may challenge state authority by shrinking the space for youth participation and youth organisations.

---

<sup>4</sup> Though it should be noted that youth participation projects, programmes or initiatives can still be badly implemented or tokenistic.

<sup>5</sup> Bessant, Judith. “Youth Participation: A New Mode of Government.” *Policy Studies* 24, no. 2–3 (June 1, 2003): 87–100.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0144287032000170984>.

International human rights legislation provides a key foundation for democratic (and, therefore, youth) participation. [The European Convention on Human Rights](#), as well as other international legislation such as [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), contains a group of rights sometimes referred to as ‘participation rights,’ the rights to freedom of assembly and association, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of expression, and the right to free elections. In the case of under 18s, [the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) contains similar rights but replaces the right to participate in elections with the rights of children to have their views taken into consideration when decisions are made affecting their lives.

Collectively, international human rights legislation guarantees the possibility for young people to participate in democratic life. It is accepted that the realisation of young people’s participation rights requires not just the legal possibility to participate but also the conditions, environment and even education to encourage it. The Council of Europe identifies that youth participation involves ‘young people having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities, so as to contribute to building a better society [6].’

On the EU level, [The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027](#) objectives include ‘fostering youth participation in democratic life’ and ‘supporting social and civic engagement’. The strategy’s guiding principles include that ‘all policies and activities concerning young people should uphold young people’s right to participate in the development, implementation and follow-up of policies affecting them by means of meaningful participation of young people and youth organisations.’ An annexe to the EU Youth strategy is also the EU youth goals. These goals reflect the views of European youth and represent the vision of those active in the EU Youth Dialogue. Youth Goal #9 ‘Space and Participation for All’ intends to ‘strengthen young people’s democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society.’

One of the EU’s principal tools for implementing this is The Erasmus+ programme, which intends to ‘encourage youth participation in Europe’s democratic life, including by supporting participation projects for young people to engage and learn to participate in civic society, raising awareness about European common values including fundamental rights, bringing together young people and decision-makers at local, national and Union level, as well as contributing to the European integration process [7].’ EU programmes are supported by [the SALTO Participation and Information’s Youth Participation Strategy](#), which defines youth participation in democratic life as:

---

6 Council of Europe, 2015. Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168071b4d6>

7 Regulation [\(EU\) 2021/817](#) establishing Erasmus+: the EU programme for education and training, youth and sport.

*Youth participation in democratic life is about individual young people and groups of young people having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, contribute to and influence societal decision-making on matters affecting them, and be active within the democratic and civic life of our communities.*

## What is Citizenship Education?

'Citizenship education' refers to a wide diversity of educational practices and programmes, and there is an extensive range of alternative terms also used for the field. The language and terminology are used highly inconsistent; the term citizenship education can refer to education for democratic citizenship, national citizenship education, European citizenship education, human rights education, education for global citizenship, critical/active citizenship programmes, civic education, civil education, political education, and many other things. These varying terms do not describe fundamentally different concepts and are often simply a result of sector and organisational branding [8].

The Council of Europe's [9] concept of 'education for democratic citizenship' defines the aim of this field as equipping learners with the competences to 'exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society' and to 'play an active part in democratic life.' Whilst all implementations of citizenship education do not share precisely this definition, most are similar though, thus:

- The EU's Eurydice Education network has defined 'citizenship education' as 'the subject area that is promoted in schools with the aim of fostering the harmonious co-existence and mutually beneficial development of individuals and of the communities they are part of. In democratic societies, citizenship education supports students in becoming active, informed, and responsible citizens who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and for their communities at the local, regional, national, and international level' [10].
- UNESCO has defined 'Global Citizenship Education' as aiming to 'empower learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and secure societies' [11].

8 Hoskins, B., 2020. [Different Understandings and Definitions of European Education for Democratic Citizenship](#). EU-CoE Youth Partnership, Strasbourg

9 Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16803034e5>

10 Eurydice 2018, *Citizenship Education in Europe*, Brussels, European Commission, Available at: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/citizenship-education-europe>

11 UNESCO (2020) *What is global citizenship education?* Available at <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/definition>

- ‘Civic education’ has been defined academically as meaning learning processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities [12].
- ‘Human Rights Education’ is defined by The United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education [13] as ‘education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights’ to ‘impart the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights in daily life’ fosters the attitudes and behaviours needed to uphold human rights for all members of society.’

The **specific competences** said to be required for young people’s active citizenship do vary within the different conceptions of citizenship education and have evolved over time. In any of its forms, citizenship education intends to enable learners to develop competences they need for democracies and as citizens, but there may be varying ideas on what those competences are. A common element is developing the learner’s ability to engage with democratic processes and institutions, as well as respect for the principles of democracy. As the world undergoes a digital transformation, there is an increasing emphasis placed on the development of digital citizenship competences as well as media and information literacy. As a result, citizenship education has increasingly focused on developing the learner’s ability to critically evaluate media, use online technology, tools and information and engage with technology and media in responsible ways. Alongside this, the development of competences for engagement with other citizens through intercultural dialogue, non-discrimination, and the ability to engage in multicultural communities are often given varying degrees of emphasis within citizenship education. This can depend on social, historic, and cultural contexts such as migration and conflict [14].

Whatever its specific variant, at its root, citizenship education refers to initiatives that are fundamentally educational in nature. Citizenship education is concerned with the learning of participants and is an activity consciously conducted by or through education institutions and actors. A key part of definitions of citizenship education is an explicit goal to promote young people’s active engagement in democracy - effectively encouraging young people to become involved in some form of youth participation. Citizenship education, therefore, aims to influence the behaviour of participants as well as competences. This is a key distinction between citizenship education and the study of politics or democracy within political science, political studies, or similar fields, where there is no such goal to influence behaviour.

12 Crittenden and Levine, 2023, *Civic Education in* (eds) Edward, N and Nodelman, U., *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/civic-education>

13 The United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education., 2006. *World Programme for Human Rights Education: Plan of Action, First Phase*. United Nations. <https://doi.org/10.18356/9789210027328>

14 Hoskins, B., 2020. *Different Understandings and Definitions of European Education for Democratic Citizenship*. EU-CoE Youth Partnership, Strasbourg

Because citizenship education intends to affect how learners engage in democracy, it implicitly contains ideas about how people should act as citizens and what it means to be a good citizen. Citizenship education has been used as a vehicle for nation-building and the site for the development of the desired national norms of citizens by national governments that can include patriotic and/or nationalistic values [15].

Citizenship education is a term most commonly associated with the formal education sector, i.e., structured education and training systems that run from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to university. The majority of EU countries provide teachers with guidelines for student assessment in citizenship education. Most EU countries have policy objectives or curriculum goals related to Citizenship education. Citizenship education might exist as a standalone activity, but more commonly, it is embedded as part of other educational activities and curriculums. Although citizenship education can be delivered at any life stage, it mainly occurs with children and young people, as this is the age most formal education is delivered [16].

However, citizenship education is not exclusive to the formal education sector. Many civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, youth organisations and youth workers also deliver programmes of citizenship education. However, these actors may be more likely to use other terms to describe their educational initiatives, such as human rights education, empowerment programmes, voter awareness initiatives. These actors often use non-formal education approaches and are sometimes referred to as the non-formal education sector. [17]

Non-formal based pedagogic methods, such as experiential learning and open debate, are one of the more effective approaches to citizenship education [18]. Non-formal methods can be used within the formal education sector as well as the non-formal sector. But it is also argued that citizenship education needs to be embedded within compulsory education (i.e., formal education system) so that all citizens receive it, and it has an effective impact on democracy. Therefore, it cannot be said that the non-formal sector is more effective at citizenship education than the formal education sector, at citizenship education [19]. Nevertheless, non-formal methods are more effective than traditional pedagogic methods such as banking [20].

15 Hoskins 2020 *ibid*

16 Eurydice 2018, *Citizenship Education in Europe*, Brussels, European Commission, Available at: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/citizenship-education-europe>

17 Moxon, and Escamilla, 2020, *Can citizenship education inspire youth participation in democratic life?*, Strasbourg, EU-CoE Youth Partnership

18 Donbavand, S., Hoskins, B., 2021. *Citizenship education for political engagement: A systematic review of controlled trials*. *Social Sciences* 10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10050151>

19 Moxon, and Escamilla, 2020, *ibid*

20 This refers to teacher centric models of education where knowledge is transmitted from the teacher to the learning. Learners are passive absorbers of information who learn by memorization of facts and banking of knowledge - see Infed.org. 2002 [Paulo Freire: dialogue, praxis and education](#)

A final complication when defining citizenship education is that not all democracy related initiatives within formal education settings and schools fit the definition of citizenship education above. Despite this, it is still common to refer to any democracy related school initiatives as citizenship education. The school (or any educational institution) is an important site of democracy and is many children's first contact with public institutions and democracy. Any school has a system of Governance or decision-making. Enabling learners to engage with and influence this system of governance is fundamental to fostering the school as a site of democracy. Common initiatives to do this include such as school councils, schools' participatory budgeting or consultation with students. As these initiatives have a primary goal of influencing school governance rather than the education of learners, they theoretically fall outside of the definition of citizenship education we have given above. However, in practice, teachers and schools still refer to these as part of citizenship education and are still valuable to students.

## European Policy Context for Citizenship Education

EU educational policy has long recognised the importance of citizenship education as a key part of broader cooperation on education and training between EU member states. The 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of [the EU Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training \(ET 2020\)](#) outlines actions at the EU and EU Member States in four areas level, including:

(i) ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic, and intercultural competences by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion, and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship;

(ii) enhancing critical thinking and media literacy;...

...(iv) promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.'

One of the main goals of the current EU strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ([ET 2021-2030](#)) is to support the development of education and training systems in the member states that ensure the promotion of 'the personal, social and professional development of all citizens, whilst promoting democratic values, equality, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue'. The 2018 EU Council Recommendation on Key

Competences for Lifelong Learning also highlights the need for education systems to foster citizenship competence. This is defined as ‘the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability’ [21].

The Council of Europe has also developed extensive recommendations and frameworks to support citizenship education. Its [Charter on Education for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights](#) is central to this, setting the objective for Council of Europe Member states to provide ‘every person within their territory with the opportunity of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.’ Supporting this, the Council of Europe has produced [the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#), which is an extensive collection of 447 indicators defining the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to be developed through citizenship education. [The recent Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe](#) also reaffirmed the commitment to ‘education about human rights and core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability’ as a tool for democratic renewal.

## Summary Conclusion

Youth participation in democratic life refers to the way in which young people engage with democracy. This includes traditional forms of youth participation, such as voting, as well as a wide range of other alternative forms, such as protest, volunteering, and digital methods. Youth participation in democratic life includes young people expressing their voices to people in power, such as politicians, as well as young people taking action themselves to create positive social change in our communities. Youth participation is a behaviour or type of interaction that young people take part in when they engage in democracy as active citizens, underpinned by their human rights to do this and the duty of state actors to support these rights.

Youth participation projects are common in the youth sector and across non-formal education and are initiatives to promote youth participation in democratic life. These types of projects can be educational in nature, but they more often also aim at creating the conditions and mechanisms needed to better connect young people to decision-makers or better enable young people to influence the world around

---

21 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)#:~:text=Individuals%20should%20be%20able%20to,program%20and%20share%20digital%20content](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)#:~:text=Individuals%20should%20be%20able%20to,program%20and%20share%20digital%20content)

[uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)#:~:text=Individuals%20should%20be%20able%20to,program%20and%20share%20digital%20content](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)#:~:text=Individuals%20should%20be%20able%20to,program%20and%20share%20digital%20content)

them. Youth participation projects can be led by young people but can also be led by other actors, such as the state or civil society organisations. The defining feature of youth participation projects is that they intend to enable young people to have genuine influence and to effect change within our democracies during the project.

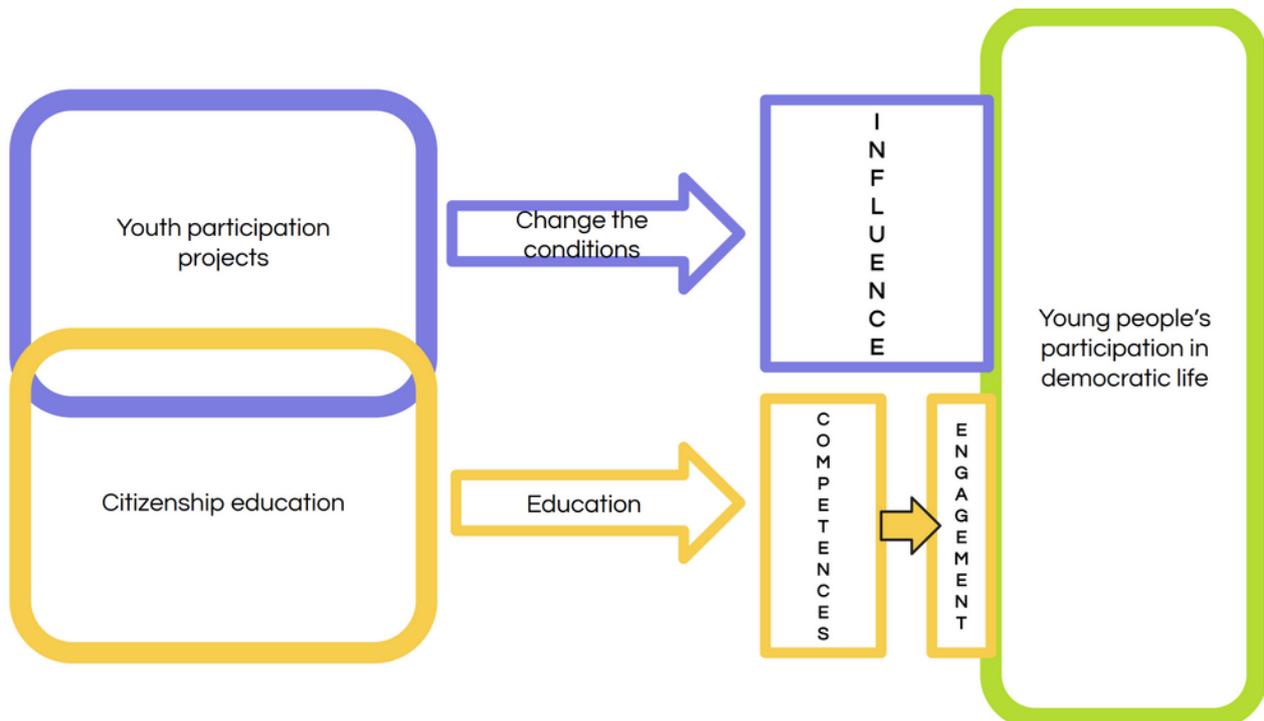
Citizenship education is one of a range of terms used to refer to education that enables learners to develop the competences needed for democracy and to encourage them to actively take part in democratic life (active citizenship) at a future point. Citizenship education is a term most commonly used in the formal education sector. However, citizenship education can take place in any sector and at any age. In practice, any initiatives to promote democracy through schools and formal education are commonly referred to as part of citizenship education.

Both citizenship education and youth participation projects have a contribution to make to strengthening our democracies for young people. They do this by improving the way in which young people can interact with other democratic actors. Citizenship education focuses primarily on the changes it can make to young people, and what young people can learn that will motivate, inspire, and equip them to take part in democratic life. By contrast, youth participation projects more often focus on attempting to change the system and other actors around young people in order to increase the possibility for the young participants to have their voices heard and to exert influence in a democracy during the project.

There is a significant degree of overlap between what could be called citizenship education and what is called a youth participation project. Both terms have a range of different definitions and there is a strong connection between the two concepts. This is not least because any attempt to engage a young person actively in democratic life is also a learning opportunity. Furthermore, some of the most effective methods of young people's learning about democracy are through active engagement in it (i.e. informal or non-formal learning). So, whilst the two concepts are not identical, whether an initiative is called citizenship education or a youth participation project may also be very dependent on which sector the initiative takes place in.

Both citizenship education and youth participation projects have the impact of increasing young people's participation in democratic life. The key distinction between the two areas is the extent to which the learning of participants is regarded as the key purpose and immediate goal. Citizenship education promotes engagement in democratic life with a two-step mechanism, developing young people's competences during the project, which then better enables the young

person to engage in democratic life at a later point. Citizenship education, therefore, tends to define its success by what and how much young people have learned. Youth participation projects, however, focus on creating immediate possibilities for young people to engage in democratic life during the project. As a result, these projects more often tend to define their success by the extent to which young people have been able to actively engage in democracy and the influence they have had during the project.



[Fig 1. The relationship between citizenship education and youth participation projects](#)

Arguably, the two fields may make different assumptions about why young people do or do not engage in democracy. Citizenship education sometimes assumes a tabula rasa (blank slate) approach; young people lack the competences to engage in democracy, and once they develop these competences, they will engage [22]. Youth participation projects tend to assume a critical stance. They argue that young people do not have access to the conditions, support and mechanisms needed for them to engage in democracy and will engage when the circumstances around young people are improved. Both styles of work implicitly contain and promote ideas about who young people are as citizens and how we want them to act within a democracy.

Citizenship education encompasses a slightly broader range of themes than youth participation projects. Citizenship education often includes an emphasis on intercultural dialogue and media and information literacy. These are recognized as connected to youth participation, but not always considered as part of it. The culture of practice in the field of youth participation has tended to prioritise young

22 Moxon, and Escamilla, 2020, *ibid*

people's interaction with democratic bodies, public institutions and policy-making over other themes.

As a final point, the reader should be aware that as both citizenship education and youth participation are subject to a wide degree of definition and interpretations, the analysis and distinctions above may not be universally shared or applicable in all contexts. Both fields, terms and concepts are continually evolving and have varying understandings in different parts of Europe.

## Guidelines for Collaboration between the Formal and Non-formal Education Sectors

The youth sector / non-formal education actors and formal education actors are working with the same target group (young people) and are both engaged in activities to promote youth participation in democratic life. This means there may be opportunities for practice sharing, collaboration and enhancing each other's work. Democracy does not stop or start at the doors of the school or the doors of the youth projects. Both sectors are part of a wider democratic culture and exist within a democratic environment that encompasses our society.

Youth sector / non-formal education actors and formal education actors seeking to collaborate around youth participation and citizenship education should:

- Recognise that youth participation in democratic life is a term referring to the way young people behave and interact with democracy.
- Make a distinction between youth participation in democratic life (the behaviour) and 'youth participation projects' (initiatives that support the behaviour and young people's interaction with democracy).
- Recognise that citizenship education and youth participation projects are distinct but closely connected and overlapping concepts that both seek to promote young people's participation in democratic life.
- Recognise that citizenship education primarily encourages young people's participation in democratic life by developing the competences of young people.

- Recognise that youth participation projects encourage young people's participation in democratic life, changing the conditions and possibilities around young people and/or supporting their young people's learning.
- Recognise that experiential learning methods are identified as one of the more effective methods for influencing young people's democratic behaviour and that non-formal methods can be delivered in both the formal and the non-formal sectors.
- Recognise that when non-formal learning methods are applied to democracy, they require learners to actively engage with democracy. This means there is a significant degree of overlap between learning and active involvement.
- When developing cross-sectoral education projects, consider and agree carefully if the priority and short-term outcome is to:
  - a. Develop young people's competences
  - OR
  - b. Enable young people to influence/effect some sort of change during the project.

These two priorities may not be mutually exclusive. However, at a project level, it is important to be clear about what sort of change or outcome is realistically expected at the end of the project. In the longer term, both priorities will contribute to promoting participants' participation in democratic life.

# *Youth Participation and Citizenship Education: A Cross-sectoral Perspective*

## **Analytical Paper**



*The paper has been prepared for the Strategic Partnership “New Power in Youth” between several National Agencies for Erasmus+ & European Solidarity Corps and SALTO RCs.*