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Centre Strasbourg



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STUDY
SESSION

W(E)-PARTICIPATE! HARNESSING DIGITAL INNOVATION FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRE STRASBOURG
27TH SEPTEMBER - 3RD OCTOBER 2020

REPORT OF THE
STUDY SESSION HELD BY
DYPALL NETWORK
IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE
YOUTH DEPARTMENT
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DYPALL
DEVELOPING YOUTH PARTICIPATION
AT LOCAL LEVEL



This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Executive summary</i>	5	
1. Introduction	6	
1.1 Presentation of the organisation	6	
1.2 Motivation behind the session	7	
1.3 Objectives of the session	9	
1.4 Profile of participants	10	
1.5 Programme	12	
1.6 The link with the Council of Europe	14	
2. Learning points	15	
2.1 Understanding youth e-participation	15	
2.2 Rights, Means, Space, Opportunities and Support in Digital Youth Participation	18	
2.3 Ladder of digital participation	21	
2.4 Level up the ladder	24	
2.5 Practices of youth e-participation	30	
2.6 SWOT Analysis	32	
2.7 E-participation tools	33	
3. Conclusions	38	
Appendix 1. Participants	39	
Appendix 2. Programme	41	





ABOUT THE REPORT

This report is an outcome of the study session “W(e)-participate! Harnessing digital innovation for youth participation at local level”, organised by DYPALL Network together with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe from 27th September – 3rd October 2020 in the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg.

This report gathers and summarises the main information about the session including its objectives, participants, general programme flow, key outcomes and follow-up strategies, as well as the overall evaluation of the session. It should not only give the reader a general overview of the session developments, but also help to understand the conclusions and experiences shared during the session, as well as, to ask some important questions that remain to be answered in the future.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Study session was the first residential activity in European Youth Centre Strasbourg since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Physical distancing and wearing masks brought a new dimension to the non-formal education environment we are so much used to in study sessions like this one. In the middle of the pandemic its topic "W(e)-participate: Harnessing digital innovation for youth participation" was more pressing than ever. The study session aimed to create a common understanding of e-participation and digital participation among youth workers and to examine and exchange good practices on the field to promote its implementation. The study session served also as a forum to explore the challenges and opportunities of e-participation, as well as, to assess the needs among youth organisations that can help to guarantee a successful and meaningful implementation of e-participation processes.

For the participants, this study session was an opportunity to learn more about digital youth participation in decision-making processes. They exchanged their experience and identified good practices in this field using the Council of Europe standards of youth participation such as the *Have your say* manual with its ladder of youth participation and RMSOS model. They learned about different tools for digital youth participation and discussed their functionalities and the application of these tools to implement youth participation practices at their local level. They reflected on the future of e-participation in youth work, its strengths, weaknesses, advantages and challenges. The study session gave them also a possibility to get closer to the work of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, the European Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation.

The following report gathers the most relevant information about this study session, including main motivations behind the study session, its innovative developments, link between the session's theme and the Council of Europe, an overview of the participants, information about the organisers and programme of the activity.

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRESENTATION OF THE ORGANISATION



The session was organised by DYPALL Network (Developing Youth Participation at Local Level), which is a European platform of over 60 civil society organizations and local authorities from more than 30 countries, that aims to involve young people in decision-making processes at local level, and thus enable municipal and regional authorities to address the needs and interests of youth, engage young people as active actors of problem-solving and increase the level of ownership, commitment and involvement of an important part of our communities.

YP Lab is a resource and mobility centre within DYPALL Network with the focus on research development and capacity building in the field of local youth participation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ORGANISATION



1 - Develop structures and mechanisms for youth participation in decision-making at local level;



2 - Identify best practices and introduce innovative approaches on public governance in cooperation with local authorities and civil society organizations active in the field of youth;



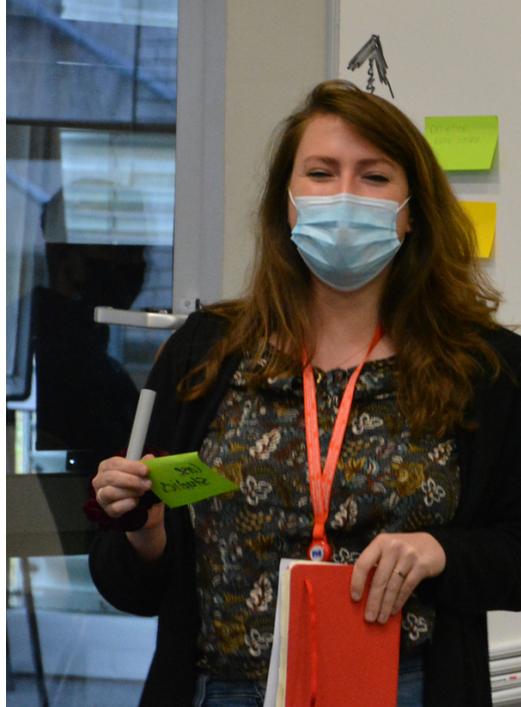
3 - Foster youth engagement and inclusiveness in representative and participatory democracy processes;



4 - Build capacity and provide technical assistance on various areas and processes like policy making, advocacy, structured dialogue, co-management, and more;



5 - Mainstream youth policies at local and regional level



1.2 MOTIVATION BEHIND THE SESSION

DYPALL Network as a European-wide network of over 60 members is on the foreground as a fosterer of local participation by providing training, consultation, research and exchange of good practices and opportunities to its members and partners. One of the strategic priorities of the organisation for 2019-2020 is to develop the capacity of its members to better develop and implement structures that allow an effective and sustainable engagement of youth in local governance.

Digitalisation is an unstoppable process that creates threats and opportunities in every sector. This is not different in case of decision-making at the local, regional, national or European level. All over the world, various forms of e-participation are being spread, tested and implemented. New challenges are discovered, new strategies successfully verified. The problems that affected democratic processes during COVID-19 pandemic have also shown how important this topic is. Restrictions in public gatherings forced the acceleration in digitalisation of democratic processes, but underdevelopment in the field of e-participation made some of the opportunities impossible to use. For some reasons, the discussion on the digital innovation in youth participation in the decision-making process has not yet been mainstreamed, even though we often refer to youth as digital natives.



DYPALL Network reflected on this topic briefly in their study session “Transferring Positive Practices Of Democratic Youth Participation Models From The European To The Local Level” (2016), discussing with Jessica Walker of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) how to use youth-friendly digital and mobile participation tools to make young people more involved in political decision-making and what are the opportunities that stand behind a growing OPIN Platform.

The organisation continued to work in this field as a part of the “DigiZation - Digital Participation in Youth Organisations”, an Erasmus + KA2 project of one and a half years with the aim of developing high-quality skills for youth workers and organisational staff working to raise the level of participation of young people and to ensure more inclusion in participatory processes of youth from diverse backgrounds.

With this study session, DYPALL Network aimed to create a shared understanding of digital participation among youth workers and to promote the deployment of digital participation through examining and exchanging good practices on the field. The study session served as a forum to explore the challenges and opportunities of digital participation, as well as to assess the needs among youth organisations that can help to guarantee a successful and meaningful implementation of digital participation processes.

The organisers identified the importance of creating opportunities to learn from each other's realities by observing the implementation of different projects connected to digital participation tools in the field of youth participation. They realised that currently, there is a considerable diversity in terms of approaches and strategies to support this effort, namely as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. They identified that in the member states of the Council of Europe, there was a need to develop better strategies and mechanisms to support the development of sustainable, meaningful and effective forms of participation supported by digital participation tools. This study session was created as a platform for young people to explore, discuss and ideate in the field of digital innovation in youth participation in decision-making processes, to set in motion processes that mainstream this topic at the European level and lead to significant developments in this field.



1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION

The study session “W(e)-participate: Harnessing Digital Innovation for Youth Participation at the Local Level” builds a shared understanding of digital participation among youth workers and municipal representatives who will examine and exchange good practices to support e-participation.

The study session aims to develop better strategies and mechanisms to support sustainable, meaningful, and effective forms of participation through digital participation tools.

Objectives:

- ❖ Share experiences and create a common understanding of digital youth participation;
- ❖ Map realities, opportunities and challenges of digital participation among youth workers and local representatives (including the experiences from the COVID- 19 pandemic);
- ❖ Exchange and discover good practices around and outside Europe on the usage of digital tools for youth participation;
- ❖ Reflect on possible ways to promote digital youth participation based on the Council of Europe standards such as the Revised European Charter for Youth Participation in Local and Regional Life, and the CM Recommendation on young people’s access to rights;
- ❖ Plan and devise strategies to enhance digital youth participation at the local level.



1.4. PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The study session drew great attention, which resulted in receiving almost 200 applications from 48 countries. However, as the study session was organised during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of participants had to be very limited. This did not negatively impact its quality. The study session brought together 14 youth workers and educators from Bulgaria, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain and Sweden, each of them with a very diversified background and experience:

- Representatives of youth organisations active at the local level in the field of youth education, democracy, migration, digitalisation, ecology;
- Representatives of law institutions, specialised in the field of youth policies and fake news;
- Experts in the field of digitalisation in youth work;
- Facilitators, trainers and speakers in youth work and non-formal education;
- University educators and experts in the field of democratic processes;
- Project managers with experience in the successful implementation of digital participation solutions in cooperation with local municipalities;
- Representatives of organisations coordinating widely recognised digital youth participation events and processes;

- Youth delegates from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
- Members of local and regional youth councils;
- Young leaders active both in their local communities and at the international level.

As a result of the diversity in the group of participants, their needs and expectations connected to the session were also very diverse. They wanted to learn about the digital innovation in youth work and youth participation, they wanted to explore tools that allow e-participation and bring youth participation in decision-making processes to the next level, to discuss the opportunities and threats that the digital youth participation brings, to share their different experiences and learn from the experiences of others and eventually, they wanted to network and exchange the views and perspectives with other young people with a similar background.



1.5. PROGRAMME

The programme of the activity was designed by the preparatory team of the study session together with the educational advisor from the Youth Department of the Council of Europe during the preparatory meeting in Strasbourg. It took into account the different background and experience of participants, as well as their needs and expectations.

The first day of the activity was dedicated to welcoming the participants, introducing them to the COVID-19 health measures implemented in the European Youth Centre during their stay and presenting the programme of the activity. Participants could learn about each other and build a comfortable space among them through group-building activities. The first day was also a time for building common ground on digital youth work through drafting common terms and definitions and learning about the key standards of youth participation in digital contexts - Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and RMSOS model.

The second day started with a continuation of the previous session – the participants could learn about the ladder of participation, and had an opportunity to reflect on how to apply it to the digital case studies. The rest of the day was dedicated to gathering and highlighting the good practices in digital youth participation in decision-making processes across Europe.

During the third day of the activity, the participants reflected on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the digital youth participation in decision-making at the local level. They discussed afterwards if the digital participation should only support in-person participation mechanisms, or if the digital participation can replace the in-person meetings completely. The free afternoon that day was dedicated to a visit to the Palace of Europe, the headquarters of the Council of Europe.

The fourth day of the activity was called a TOOLBOX day, because of the number of workshops that equipped the participants with the practical knowledge and solutions in the field of digital youth participation. The day started with a short introduction to several solutions for e-participation, and the ways of their possible application to the youth work and local realities. Afterwards, the participants could choose between a workshop on advocacy or social media campaigning, according to their needs and interests. The next part of the day brought two workshops by a guest facilitator Frank Skikink on youth work and cybersecurity & digital footprint, as well as digital social media engagement. The day was closed with input on Digital Citizenship Education Programme which is implemented by the Education Department of the Council of Europe.

The last, fifth day of the activity was a space for participants to build detailed action plans to be implemented at their local level after the study session. Each participant had an opportunity to share, receive comments, feedback and support from others. Before the evaluation activities, the participants also heard more from the European Youth Foundation about the funding opportunities that might apply to their follow-up projects.





1.6 THE LINK WITH THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

With this study session, the organisers aimed to support further the promotion and implementation of the principles of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and the “Have your say” manual. The activity supports mainly the 11.3. principle of the Charter “Promoting youth participation through information and communication technologies”, as the aim of the session is to equip youth workers, local authority representatives and representatives of local youth councils and similar participation structures with practical knowledge and skills to implement e-participation solutions in youth work at the local level, as well as to reflect on the necessary adjustments of existing e-participation solutions to make them attractive for youth.

DYPALL Network believes that the potential of digital youth participation is not yet explored in local and regional contexts. With this study session, the organisers wish both to inform, train and give the tools for youth workers and local representatives to further the scope as well as the access of e-participation methods, while also promoting its usage.

2. LEARNING POINTS

The session was composed of various learning opportunities, many of which are hardly transferable to the report. Some of them, however, create valuable and innovative perspective and might be a source for a reflection. Therefore, we decided to make it a part of this report.

2.1 UNDERSTANDING YOUTH E-PARTICIPATION

The readers of this report, just like the participants of the study session, might have different backgrounds and levels of knowledge, that determine their understanding of specific terms used widely during the study session and in the report itself. To build a common ground for further discussion, we had to first find answers to the following questions:

- What is youth participation?
- What is youth participation in decision-making processes?
- What is digital youth participation?

In our exercise, we did not limit our participants to a plain definition of the term. We gave them space to discuss and reflect on these topics, which resulted in several relevant observations.

What is youth participation

We define youth participation as a set of activities, through which young people engage in the life of their communities regarding problems and opportunities that concern them.

Reflection:

Youth should be included with different approaches. If we want young people to participate, we must first find out where do they want to participate. What are the issues that concern them? It is only when we have these answers, we can create a proper space for quality youth participation.



Principles of youth participation highlighted by the participants

What is youth participation in decision-making processes

Youth participation in decision-making processes is comprised of the different ways in which young people might take part in the decisions that shape and create their local realities. Different structures might foster the involvement of young people in decision-making processes, for example: non-governmental organisations, school councils, local youth councils, organised non-formal groups of young people as well as, the local authorities.

Reflection:

How to increase youth participation in decision-making processes?

Citizenship education. The key to popularisation of youth participation in decision-making processes is in civic education. To participate in the existing structures, young people first need to learn that these structures exist, learn about their purpose and their influence of their lives.

Access to information. If we want young people to participate in decision-making processes consciously and effectively, we need to give them quality access to information. This information, however, should be delivered in a form adjusted to the young age of participants.

Quality of consultation processes. To participate, young people need to feel that their voice has meaning. Results of consultation processes should show that the voice of young participants was not ignored.

What is a digital youth participation

Digital youth participation is an adaptive, flexible and innovative manner for youth to interact with institutions by using digital tools, for expressing opinions, searching advice, advocating, highlighting specific topics and problems and participating in decision-making processes.

Reflection:

In 2020 we have many means to make digital youth participation effective, for instance, e-consultation available through various platforms, easy to deliver e-information, number of specifically designed applications and online movements, that allow young people to take a voice. What we are missing, however, is equal access to these means and the literacy in using them.



2.2 Rights, Means, Space, Opportunities and Support in Digital Youth Participation

Youth participation in decision-making processes is the way that young people take part in the processes that shape their local realities. Different structures might foster the involvement of young people in decision-making processes, for example non-governmental organisations, school councils, local youth councils, organised non-formal groups of young people.

The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life was produced by young people in a partnership with local and regional authority representatives and was developed by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities which is part of the Council of Europe. It is both a guide for local and regional authorities to implement youth-friendly sectoral policies and a tool for young people to convince local and regional authorities that they should be the part of the decision-making processes. As it states in its preamble, “Young people must have the **right, means, space, opportunity and support** to participate in decision and policy-making.” Because of that, the charter’s approach to youth participation is called “RMSOS model”. The “Have your say” Manual says, that with these five words, Right,

Means, Space, Opportunity and Support, we can understand the factors which influence youth participation at the local level.

The first day of the study session was the perfect opportunity to remind the participants about this model, and make sure they can reflect on it based on their experiences. How can the model created in 2003 support the discussion on youth participation in the digital dimension? The authors of the Charter recognised the potential the new technologies have in promoting participation among young people, but at that time did not have quality material for research to take it into account.

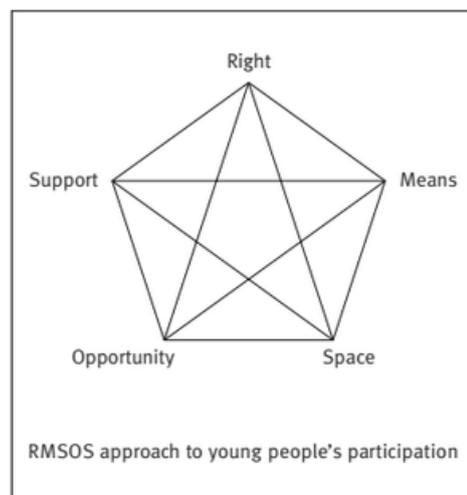


Illustration from the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

Our participants took a challenge to explore the RMSOS model based on the digital dimension of youth participation.

Young people have fundamental rights connected to participation, and this right should be respected by the regional and local authorities also in the digital dimension. It is an issue also explored in the Recommendation on young people's access to rights.

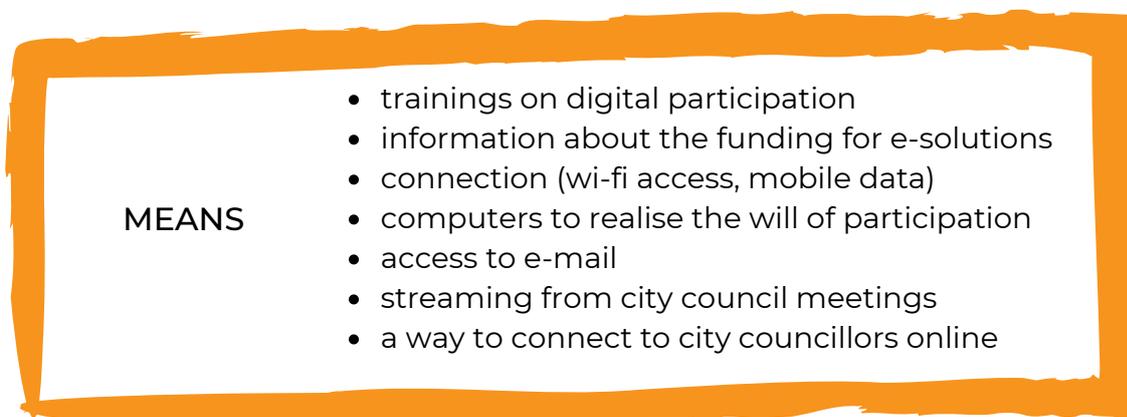
Here are some of the identified rights related to Digital youth participation:



RIGHTS

- right to participate digitally
- right to information
- right to connectivity
- right to privacy
- right to security

The means mentioned below are what young people need to realise their right to e-participate.



MEANS

- trainings on digital participation
- information about the funding for e-solutions
- connection (wi-fi access, mobile data)
- computers to realise the will of participation
- access to e-mail
- streaming from city council meetings
- a way to connect to city councillors online

Just like in the traditional RMSOS model, even more important than this “physical” space is to have a space to participate in the institutional framework of policy-making. The consultations, decisions, views exchanged and presented in the above mentioned spaces should have a real impact on the decisions that are made.

SPACES

- e-platforms available and adjusted to youth
- way to engage and take part, instead of just listening (breakout rooms)
- gamified digital participation solutions attract young people

OPPORTUNITIES

- local authorities should provide youth-friendly space for digital participation
- local authorities should provide opportunities for young people to take part
- the democratisation of information is required to allow young people to take conscious decisions
- democratic consolidation is necessary to enable young people to participate equally

Although young people are often fluent in the digital world, they still need support to participate digitally in decision-making processes.

SUPPORT

- education on participation processes
- support for personal development
- moderators and facilitators of participation spaces
- mentorship

2.3 LADDER OF DIGITAL PARTICIPATION

Another standard tool for understanding youth participation, presented in the “Have your say” Manual is Roger Hart’s Ladder of participation. Hart defines 8 levels of youth participation, each of them related to one rung of the ladder:

- Rung 8: Shared decision-making
- Rung 7: Young people led and initiated
- Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decision-making
- Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed
- Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed
- Rung 3: Young people tokenised (NON PARTICIPATION)
- Rung 2: Young people as decoration (NON PARTICIPATION)
- Rung 1: Young people manipulated (NON PARTICIPATION)

The higher on the ladder, the better is the quality of youth participation. However, is this format universal enough to apply to digital participation?

Together with our participants, we tried to find an example of digital youth participation for each of the rungs. We started from the bottom.

Rung 1: Young people manipulated (NON PARTICIPATION)

There are examples of online events that gather young people with concrete, defined ideas, during which there isn't any space for dialogue. Moreover, there is the growing popularity of so-called “cyber troop” activities, which is a term that describes politicians and government activities which use social media to manipulate opinion, attack dissidents, fight political opponents or divide society through fake, polarising messages.

Rung 2: Young people as decoration (NON PARTICIPATION)

Young people are often used as a quality virtual background, that would show the authorities as someone who is interested in youth participation, but in reality, there is no space to hear the voice of young people. For example, recently (September 2020) in one of the European countries there were elections of the national youth council, and the event was streamed live through social media channels. In reality, the decision-makers do not conduct any consultation with this body.

Rung 3: Young people tokenised (NON PARTICIPATION)

In some decision-making processes, young people might receive a role, which in reality has no real influence on decisions taken. The illusion of youth participation is created, but this participation has no meaning for the decision-making process. The Ministry of Sport and Youth in one of the European countries organised an online consultation with young people, to ask them for ideas and put them into practice. During the event, only a few young people could talk and give recommendations. No tangible output of these consultations have ever been published.

Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed

This happens when the adults initiate the project and assign young people with a limited role, of which young people are aware of. An example might be a digital fact-checking platform dedicated to young people – which is very important, since it helps young people to orientate in the overwhelming fake news world, but is not relevant for the decision-making process. Another example might be connected to volunteering, where authorities engage young people in the preparation of online consultations, but do not give them the voice.



Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed

In some cases, the adults initiate projects, where they reach out to young people to understand their perspective, opinion and ideas. They take it into account and inform young people about the final results. An example of this practice is a platform of the European Union, that asks young people to give an opinion on particular matters, and informs them about the developments in this area. In another example, the Youth Advisory Council in one of the European countries was assigned by adults with specific tasks, which were adopted by the governors one year later.

Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decision-making

In this case, adults initiate projects in which they invite people to take part in decision-making processes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of the activity of the local and regional youth councils was moved online. In many cases, the adults were proposing the projects to work on, but the young people are able to take part in the decision-making process equally.

Rung 7: Youth people led and initiated

The higher form of youth participation is possible when it is young people who initiate and lead the project. The role of the adults is to provide any necessary support without carrying on other interventions. This is the case of the national youth participatory budget in one of the European countries. Young people can propose their ideas for the budget online and choose projects in online voting. Adults are responsible for the technical verification of the projects and their implementation following the decisions and guidance by the young people.

Rung 8: Shared decision-making

The highest form of participation is when it is the young people who initiate the project and invite the adults to take part in the decision-making process as an equal partner. During the study session, we were not able to point out such an example in digital youth participation.

2.4 LEVEL UP THE LADDER!

During the Study session, we had difficulty in finding such form of participation connected to an online dimension based on a real example, that would allow us to position it on the 8th rung of the ladder.

However, we took a closer look at the specific case studies of digital youth participation in the decision-making process, and we reflected on what should be implemented to bring these examples to the top rung of the ladder. The CASE STUDY 1 was prepared based on our knowledge and experience. CASE STUDY 2 and 3 are quoted from the publication "*New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes*" by the Youth Partnership of the EU and Council of Europe.

CASE STUDY 1:

Project: *National Youth Participatory Budget*(OP Youth)

Localisation: Portugal

National Youth Participatory Budget in Portugal (OP Youth) is the first in the world youth participatory budget introduced at the national level. It is a democratic participation process in which citizens aged between 14 and 30 years old can present and decide on public investment projects. The government undertakes to respect the decision of the participants, executing the winning investments.

The process contemplates the global amount of 500 000 EUR. To be submitted, the proposals must respect the following criteria:

- Fit one of the thematic areas of Formal and Non-formal Education, Employment, Housing, Health, Environment and Sustainable Development, Governance and Participation and Equality and Social Inclusion;
- Respect the maximum amount of € 100,000;
- Do not involve construction of any infrastructure;
- Benefit more than one municipality;
- Be well specified and located in the national territory;
- Be technically feasible;
- Do not contradict the Government Program or projects and programs in progress in the different areas of public policy.

Proposals can be submitted in three ways:

- on the electronic platform of OPJovem;
- in Participation Meetings to be held across the country;
- in the deconcentrated services of IPDJ, IP.

After the submission, the project proposals are under a technical evaluation by different national departments responsible for a particular field. Proposals are then shaped into projects that will be put under the vote.

Promoters of the projects have time for a promotion campaign, that includes both offline and online interaction (for example establishing partnerships with institutions, finding media partners, a promotion at schools, in social media).

Each participant is entitled to one vote and can deliver it in two ways: through the OP Jovem page ([//opjovem.gov.pt](http://opjovem.gov.pt)) or via free SMS.

The state is responsible for the implementation of the projects in a limited time.

The participants discussed how this project can be improved so that the participation would be more meaningful, intensive and inclusive for the young people.

Here are the proposals on how to improve this example:

- It should be starting with consultations with young people to define how the process should look like;
- The young people should participate in deciding which are the thematic areas and priorities;
- Young people should receive experts support, to make sure that they can access the knowledge and skills to understand fully what and how happens in the process
- the young people should be involved in the process of implementation of selected projects, as well as, to propose adaptations of the projects if necessary;
- the digital platform should monitor how the selected projects are being implemented and how young people are involved in this process.

CASE STUDY 2:

Project: *Bienvenue dans ma tribu/Welcome to my tribe*

Location: French-speaking Community of Belgium

Welcome to my tribe online project was established in 2015 by the federal government of Wallonia.

The project aimed to create a dialogue between the young people and the government on a citizen's charter. The charter was created earlier, through a series of consultations between the society and the government. At some point, the governors realised that the youth was underrepresented in that process. *Welcome to my tribe* was created to consult young people directly and to promote the role of youth organisations. The project consists of a platform for the government to realise consultations with young people aged 10 to 25 and to educate them on the charter. Through a series of focus groups, young people were consulted to develop a text of the charter accessible for young people and a design and layout of the website where it will be presented.

At the project's core is a website themed around ten different tribes of creatures. Each tribe is depicted by an animated character and represents one of the ten articles in the charter. For example, the tribe "SÉKOUL-DÉTLIBRE" (c'est cool d'être libre – it's cool to be free) is represented by a striped, square-looking creature who believes Belgium is a democratic state that respects its citizens' human rights. Young people who visit the site are invited to explore information about each tribe and its beliefs, and to share their opinions on it through comments boards, videos and text. As well as exploring the existing tribes, young people can create a new tribe by designing its animated character, naming it and writing about the article of the charter that it represents. Tribes created are displayed on the site and can be shared using social media buttons.

The civil servants engage in dialogue with the young people directly through the messages and comments that come in on the platform. The new tribes created and comments on existing tribes are used to inform the work of the Ministry. This direct, informal and fluid dialogue with young people is a new approach for the government representing a fundamental shift away from consulting with young people through intermediary institutions and organisations.

As this project is educating and informing young people about an already existing charter, its biggest impact is likely to be on the young people directly. Some schools are also including the site directly in the curriculum for their citizenship lessons. The project's impact on future decisions about the charter, or new developments in the area of citizenship, will depend on how much the government listens to and acts upon messages coming out of the information gathered on the website. The project team reports that strong ideas from the project have been added to the charter, such as a new article on environmental rights and responsibilities.

The participants discussed how this project can be improved so that the participation would be more meaningful, intensive and inclusive for the young people.

Here are the proposals on how to improve this example:

- The young people taking part in the consultations should be selected in an open call. The call should be as accessible as possible.
- The young people should also have a say in the process of drafting the actual amendments, so that the wording used will fit with what the young people intend to express,
- After the consultations, young people should be involved in the implementation of all the selected activities,
- The young people should have a say on how the activities are evaluated.

Although adults have already initiated the project, young people are treated as equal partners in the process. After the improvements, this example can be positioned on Rung 8: Shared decision-making.

CASE STUDY 3:

Project: *Ichmache>Politik*

Location: Berlin, Germany **Form:** Digital

Ichmache>Politik is a project of the German Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring – DBJR) which uses digital methods (ePartool) to support young people's participation in policy-making at a national level. DBJR is the umbrella of nation-wide youth organisations and regional youth umbrellas based in Berlin.

Consultation with young people via the ePartool is structured in 'participation rounds' which lay out the different phases, from an introductory information phase right through to the follow-up stages which outline the (re)actions from policymakers to the contributions. A participation round on the ePartool consists of the following elements:

INFORMATION: Young people deal with a certain topic locally and in their own way. The ePartool offers background information and methodical help.

QUESTIONS AND INPUTS: All text, image, audio and video inputs will be gathered online on the ePartool. **VOTE:** On the ePartool, participants vote on the inputs they consider most relevant.

IMPACT: The voting results are included in the process.

FEEDBACK: Political stakeholders consider the results and give feedback. On the ePartool, the feedback and concrete measures are directly linked with the inputs

Everyone living in Germany aged 12-27 can use the online tool as an individual, as part of a self-organised group, or for example, in a class in school. There is a distinction between single individuals and groups of contributors (like organisations or project groups). Groups receive greater 'voting weight' based on their size.

The goal is not to be representative but to collect the insights and ideas of young people from a range of different backgrounds and circumstances, and to bring them into the decision-making process. As well as gathering the views and opinions of young people and young people's groups and organisations, the ePartool has a module that allows the prioritisation of the received inputs, based on a voting system. Once young people have contributed their views, they can vote on the issue or topic using a scale ranging from 'very important' to 'not important'.

The outcome of the votes is a ranking which allows DBJR to select the most important issues and to forward them to the decision-makers on the national and European levels.

The ePartool thereby links young people's contributions with:

- how those views and contributions were linked with similar points raised by other young people;
- how the topics and issues were then voted on by other young people (in terms of the level of importance);
- how they were presented to the policymakers and what were the response and outcome.

To make it transparent, follow-up reactions, feedback and responses to the original inputs are presented in the format of an interactive timeline. The contributors are automatically informed, but other young people can also subscribe to certain topics or items.

The participants discussed how this project can be improved so that the participation would be more meaningful, intensive and inclusive for the young people.

Here are the proposals on how to improve this example:

- After making the joint proposals, these ideas should be implemented using a co-management mechanism (50:50) where young people will have a say in the decision-making. In this way, the young people can also prioritise the concrete measures which the government should implement,
- To make sure that the young people involved in the co-management process represent different groups of youth in an inclusive way (representing groups with different backgrounds etc.)
- There should be a mechanism in place, that allows young people to choose these young representatives themselves.
- Young people should be involved in the process of implementation and evaluation of the results, for example as a part of a supervisory board.

Although adults have already initiated the project, young people are treated as equal partners in the process.

2.5 PRACTICES OF YOUTH E-PARTICIPATION

An important step to understand where the youth sector is at the moment concerning digital youth participation in decision-making processes is to look closely to our national level. Together with the participants, during the activity we tried to identify which practices of youth e-participation are already there and what are their main highlights and drawbacks.

Below is a list of some of the proposals from our participants:

- Polish National Youth Council conducted online research among youth in every region of the country in order to check the situation of youth during this pandemic in several fields as mental health, education, access to job market. The final report with results was conveyed to the Ministry of Education.
- Exempt from Theory (zwolnienizteorii.pl) is an Polish online space, a competition where young people can create their own social projects,

and where they receive mentorship and education on how to manage and implement them efficiently. Over 2800 projects were implemented until now.

- MyPolis (mypolis.eu) is an innovative award-winning Portuguese SaaS platform that opens e-participation to young people through its accessible design. Adjusted to the needs of youth it offers different modules for participatory budgets, ideas, consultation, etc.
- Com'ON Cluj-Napoca '20 (comoncluj.RO) is a participatory budget, where groups of young people aged 14-35 can submit proposals for the city, and every local citizen with a Facebook account can vote on them. The process is realised fully online.



- rISeUp IASI Transparency and Participation from Romania (iasicapitalatineretului.ro) is a local initiative which, among others, provides local youth a platform with accessible information on decision-making processes at the local level.
- Talento Para el Futuro (<https://www.talentoparaelfuturo.com/>) – a Spanish civil society initiative for political advocacy of youth people in the most relevant topics, such as human rights, innovation, employment, democracy, economy. All of the working groups are taking place in a digital space.
- Climate activist Greta Thunberg from Sweden called the young people to move the strikes to Twitter under a hashtag #DigitalStrike due to the amid coronavirus outbreak.



2.6 SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

Which are the strengths of the youth sector to introduce digital youth participation? Are these strengths comparatively better/worse from other sectors?

- the devices for e-participation are already there (phones, computers) and young people know how to use them
- it is accessible for some youth who cannot participate in its traditional form (youth from rural areas, youth with disabilities)
- for youth, it is easier to join the e-participation processes than its traditional alternative

What are the strengths of digital participation tools in comparison to the “traditional” forms of participation?

- e-participation is more traceable and transparent
- it is easier to measure its impact
- it is more environmentally sustainable because of the lack of travel
- it is more time-efficient
- there are already developed tools for e-participation, it is just a matter of adjusting them to youth

Advantages (opportunities)

Which are the advantages of digital youth participation processes for young people, the youth sector and for democracy and decision-making in general?

Which are the advantages of using digital tools in supporting youth participation?

- for the young people, digital youth participation processes are more time-efficient, more flexible
- digital youth participation can be more accessible and inclusive
- e-participation develops digital skills, that might be useful for the employability of young people,
- e-participation might be cheaper and more cost-effective than traditional forms of participation
- e-participation can also create wider visibility for the projects and initiatives
- it gives the young people easier access to the initiatives of the youth sector (organisations and public authorities)
- tools used for e-participation are or can be transferable and scalable
- digital youth participation creates new ways to connect with local authorities

Weaknesses

Which are the weaknesses of the youth sector to introduce digital youth participation?

How can these weaknesses be addressed?

How prepared is the youth sector to introduce digital youth participation processes and tools in its work?

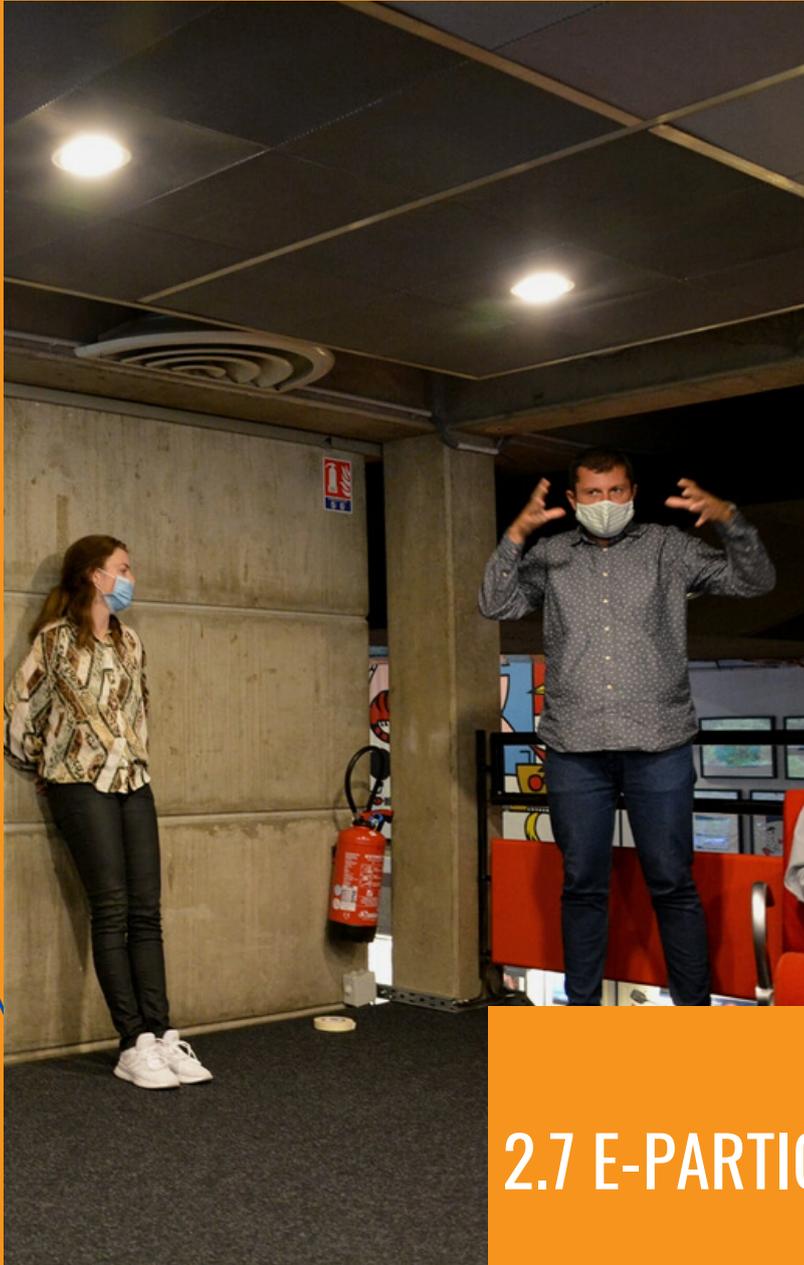
- youth workers sometimes have a conservative approach to new means for participation
- lack of devices and problems with connectivity, which can be resolved only by adults due to the lack of resources
- cybersecurity issues connected to the lack of education in this field for young people
- cybersecurity issues connected to the outside manipulation, fake news, data privacy, as participation relies on external ICT solutions
- lack of regulation in the public sector that allows to introduce and accept e-participation as well as to solve the problems with the necessary resources
- challenging implementation process

Challenges (threats)

What are the disadvantages of using digital youth participation processes for young people, the youth sector and for democracy and decision-making in general?

Which are the challenges of using digital tools in supporting youth participation which do not exist when using “traditional” tools of participation?

- it doesn't create bonds between the young people, and it limits spontaneous debates
- when the cameras are off, young people disconnect
- e-participation is boring for the participants due to the lack of interactions
- there is a loss of creativity compared to in-person participation
- it is easy to silence someone
- digital participation is a weaker experience
- the challenge of legal harmonisation
- liberty vs security – how can we ensure enough liberty of participation, when we need to secure the process
- the challenge of building quality, impenetrable participation tools



2.7 E-PARTICIPATION TOOLS

One of the problems of e-participation is that the people behind these processes – decision-makers, local authorities, youth workers – often strive to create new, dedicated digital tools to be used for a specific e-participation project or process. The tools they create are then limited to their particular needs and can hardly be scalable. E-participation would be much cheaper if we used what is already offered, with or without some necessary adjustments. From that assumption, we wanted to share briefly some examples of the existing digital tools, that might be used for e-participation processes.



OPIN.ME

Opin is free to use digital participation toolbox, from which organisations can choose from depending on their needs and projects. The platform was developed under Horizon 2020 project “Euth – Tools and Tips for Mobile and Digital Youth Participation in and across Europe”.

The basic functionalities OPIN provides are:

- Text review (collaborative text work)
- Brainstorming (collect ideas)
- Idea challenges (collect and ideas and vote)
- Agenda setting (plan meetings)
- Spatial tool (collect ideas regarding certain areas)
- Polling (customisable multi-step polls)

The platform is youth-friendly and has a number of successful implementations in the youth sector. It is now being updated within an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project “DIGY – Digital youth participation made easy,” which will deliver qualification and capacity building e-learning materials for initiators of digital youth participation projects.

Link: opin.me



ADHOCRACY+

Adhocracy+ is an open-source platform developed by a non-governmental organisation from Berlin – Liquid Democracy. It offers a set of tools for municipalities, citizen assemblies or associations and NGOs, such as:

- Participatory budgeting
- Polls
- Brainstorming
- Spatial brainstorming
- Idea challenge
- Text review
- Interactive event
- Prioritization

The strength of this solution lies in its open source license. The platform is not only free, but also open source. This means that the code of the platform is in the public domain and anyone with the necessary skills can modify it according to their needs. Although the platform is not designed specifically for youth, it might be a solid base for further developments in this direction.

Link: <https://adhocracy.plus/>



citizenlab

CITIZENLAB

The platform is a community engagement toolbox developed by CitizenLab, a start-up from Brussels with several international awards for social innovation. It operates in SaaS model (system as a service), which on the one hand generates cost for the user (a municipality or an organisation), but on the other release from the responsibility for the technical maintenance.

The platform offers the following functionalities:

- Ideation
- Citizen proposals
- Participatory budgeting
- Mapping
- Online workshops
- Polls
- Option analysis
- Survey
- Information

Moreover, due to the implementation of Natural Language Processing algorithms, it provides the operator with turns the inputs from the citizens into clear and structured data. The platform, however, is not yet explicitly adapted to the needs of young people, although it shares some case studies that prove it can be used in youth work.

Link: citizenlab.co



MyPolis

MyPolis

MyPolis is an award-winning e-participation platform from Portugal with several successful implementations in Portuguese municipalities. What differs it from the others, is that its functionalities are designed and adapted for young people, which makes it more accessible and user friendly for young people from different age groups. The platform is available in SaaS model (system as a service).

It offers the following functionalities:

- Ideation
- Citizen proposals
- Participatory budgeting
- Spatial mapping
- Polls
- Survey
- Information
- Gamification layer

Its great advantages are the gamification layer that makes the participation more engaging, and the Academy MyPolis, which is a digital education tool for introducing young people to decision-making processes. The biggest throwback is that the solution is now accessible only in Portuguese.

Link: mypolis.eu

3. CONCLUSIONS

One of the strategic priorities of DYPALL Network is to develop the capacity of local authorities and civil society organisations to better develop and implement structures that allow an effective and sustainable engagement of youth in local governance via e-participation. We believe that it is necessary to use all the available means that support youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level.

This session was a platform for youth workers to develop a common understanding of digital youth participation, map and discuss its threats and opportunities, reflect on the possible standards in digital youth participation and exchange and discover some of the existing good practices in this field. At the end of the session, the participants developed numerous follow-up activities to be implemented at the local level in order to disseminate the outcomes of the session and mainstream digital youth participation in decision-making processes.

The session also opened many questions, that still need to be assessed and discussed in-depth, for example in terms of the safety, accessibility, inclusiveness of youth e-participation, as well as its advantages and weaknesses compared to its standard alternative. In the evaluation of the study session, the participants expressed the need for further developments in this topic. They would like to find answers for the questions raised, take part in practical labs on the use and application of different youth e-participation solutions, build models for their implementation and discuss mainstreaming them with the decision-makers at the local, regional, national and European levels.

DYPALL Network will work further with the aim to meet the needs of the participants and develop the capacity of stakeholders in the important topic of digital youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level.

APPENDIX 1. PARTICIPANTS

List of participants

Bulgaria

Denitsa Andonova Association Mundus Bulgaria

Italy

Maria Pia Napoletano Europiamo ETS

Giovanni Giacomino Europiamo ETS

Poland

Magdalena Wilczyńska The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Poland

Piotr Nowak Polish National Youth Council PROM

Joanna Chabrowska Exempt from Theory (Fundacja Zwolnieni z Teorii)

Portugal

Pedro Miguel Gonçalves Costa Associacao Oficina da Abelha

Raquel Soares Youth Delegate- Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Romania

Raluca Iordachianu Youth Federation of Nongovernmental Organizations in Iasi - FONTIS

Gabriel Brezoiu GEYC - Group of the European Youth for Change

Spain

Viviane Ogou Corbi Puerta de África Think-and-do Tank // Youth Delegate of Spain in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Julio Guinea Bonillo University Europea de Madrid

Dagna Dudrak European Solidarity Corps

Sweden

Emelie Veronicka Quicker Nature and Youth

APPENDIX 1. PARTICIPANTS

Team members

Aleksandra Maldžiski	DYPALL Network, Serbia
Mateusz Hoffmann	DYPALL Network, Poland
Gianluca Rossini	DYPALL Network, Italy

Lecturers

Frank Sikkink	Specialist (online) youth work, Social Life, the Netherlands
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Council of Europe Secretariat

Rui Gomes, Head of Education and Training Division, Youth Department
Ahmet-Murat Kilic, Education Department, Council of Europe
Monia Guezoun, Education Department, Council of Europe
Sarah Walter, Deputy to the Executive Director of the European Youth Centre Strasbourg
Stefan Manevski, Educational Advisor, Youth Department
Marcio Barcelos, European Youth Foundation
Nina Kapoor, programme assistant, Youth Department
Mirjam Hagmann, trainee, Youth Department

APPENDIX 2. PROGRAMME

Study session “W(e)-participate! Harnessing digital innovation for youth participation at local level”

Study session organized by DYPALL Network in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe
European Youth Centre Strasbourg
27th of September – 3rd of October 2020

Programme

Sunday, 27th September 2020

Arrival of participants

20:00 Dinner

21:00 Welcome evening

Monday, 28th September 2020

07:30 - 9:15 Breakfast

09:30 Opening with Introduction to Study Session, Introduction of aims & objectives

11:15 Break

11:45 Group Building activity, Expectations & programme, working rules

13:15 Lunch

15:00 Building common ground (youth participation, youth participation in decision making at the local level)

16:30 Break

17:00 Presentation of CoE Charter of youth participation, RMSOS model

19:00 - 20:30 Dinner

21:00 Welcome café

Tuesday, 29th September 2020

07:30 - 9:15 Breakfast

9:30 Ladder of participation: traditional vs digital version

11:15 Break

11:45 Case studies of used digital participation in decision making at the local level

13:15 Lunch break

15:00 Practices of digital youth participation from the countries of participants

16:30 Practices of digital youth participation from the countries of participants - continuation

19:00 - 20:30 Dinner

21:00 NGO FAIR

APPENDIX 2. PROGRAMME

Wednesday, 30th September 2020

7:30 - 9:15 Breakfast

09:30 PART 1: SWOT analysis of digital youth participation in decision making at the local level.

11:15 Break

11:45 PART 2: Digital tools for participation vs E-participation

13:15 Lunch break

14:30 FREE AFTERNOON

20:00 Dinner in town

Thursday, 1st October 2020

7:30 - 9:15 Breakfast

09:30 Practical workshop on digital tool tools

11:15 Break

11:45 Workshops on Digital Citizenship Education, Youth Work, Cyber Security & Digital Footprint, Digital Social Media Engagement

13:15 Lunch

15:00 Workshops

16:30 Break

17:00 Workshops

19:00 - 20:30 Dinner

21:00 Group-proposed activities

Friday, 2nd October 2020

07:30 - 9:15 Breakfast

09:30 Action plans

11:15 Break

11:45 European Youth Foundation presentation – funding opportunities

13:15 Lunch

15:00 Next steps - Group conclusions and plans about what to do together, globally

16:30 Break

17:00 Evaluation and closing

19:00 - 20:30 Dinner Farewell party

Saturday, 3rd October 2020

07:30 - 9:15 Breakfast

Departure of participants

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European Youth
Centre Strasbourg



Centre Euro
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DYPALL
DEVELOPING YOUTH PARTICIPATION
AT LOCAL LEVEL

