

STUDY SESSION

YOUTH DEMOCRACY ACADEMY FOR YOUNG POLICY-MAKERS

27th October – 1st November 2024
European Youth Centre
Strasbourg, France

Report of the Study Session held by
DYPALL Network in co-operation with the
European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe

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.

Reference number of the report: **DFD-YD/ETD (2025) 17**

Strasbourg, 23 January 2023

AUTHORS

Sofia Vacchi

CONTRIBUTORS

Team members, participants and speakers of the study session

PHOTO CREDITS

Mila Lukić

GRAPHIC DESIGN

António Boto and Anna Rusinova

Special thanks to Mila Lukić as an Educational Advisor and Patrick Norlain as a Youth Department Programme Assistant.

Any contribution made to this Report can be published as an integral part of it. Reproducing or using this Report is possible, provided the source is acknowledged and the copyright holders grant permission. The authors of this publication have put their best effort into the accuracy of the facts presented in it. DYPALL Network is grateful for the remarks for improvement.



INDEX

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	05
<hr/>	
2. INTRODUCTION	06
2.1 Presentation of the organisation	06
2.2 The need for this Study Session	08
<hr/>	
3. PREPARATION	09
3.1 The team preparation	09
3.2 Profile of the participants and selection criteria	10
<hr/>	
4. PROGRAMME - INPUTS AND DISCUSSIONS	11
Day 1	12
Opening session and getting to know each other	12
Democracy and youth participation	13
My local youth participation — sharing local realities	15
Day 2	17
Plenary session led by experts	17
Our democracies at risk — threats and opportunities for local youth participation	18
Local policy dialogue in action — “Meeting the Mayor”	19
How (else) do we participate?	20
Day 3	21
Visit to the Palais de l’Europe and exchange with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities	21
Lecture by expert	22
Day 4	23
Quality Charter on local youth councils (LYCs)	23
Presentation of the European Youth Foundation (EYF)	24
Evaluation and closing	24
<hr/>	
5. FOLLOW-UP PLANNING	25
<hr/>	
6. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS	27
6.1 Main outcomes and learning points	27
<hr/>	
7. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY SESSION TO THE COE YOUTH PRIORITIES	28
<hr/>	
8. PARTICIPANTS’ EVALUATION	28

9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FORESEEN FOLLOW-UP	30
APPENDIX 1 LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	31
APPENDIX 2 PROGRAMME	33
APPENDIX 3 VISIBILITY	35

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Study Session Youth Democracy Academy for young policy-makers organised by DYPALL Network in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe took place from October 27th to November 1st at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg (EYCS), France. It brought together 20 young people from 16 Council of Europe member states, including members of local youth councils and political parties, youth leaders, municipal workers and elected representatives. The Study Session's primary aim was to empower participants with skills to revitalise democracy and effectively engage young people in participatory processes at the local level.

Key findings emphasised democratic challenges and best practices among Council of Europe member states, underscoring the significance of youth-led initiatives in sustaining democratic values. The Study Session effectively advanced participants' understanding of the importance of revitalising pluralistic democracy and young people's access to rights and information, aligning with the Council of Europe's goal of promoting active citizenship among the youth.

2. INTRODUCTION



The report includes more information about DYPALL Network, the aims and objectives of the Study Session Youth Democracy Academy for young policy-makers, its outcomes and learnings including identified current opportunities and threats to democracy and how young people can actively address these challenges at the local level, highlighted best practices of youth participation and unconventional and innovative methods of youth consultation. The activity had a strong emphasis on the criteria and indicators that make quality local youth councils, by implementing the “Quality Charter on participatory and inclusive local youth councils” assessment tool developed by DYPALL Network, along with framing together with the participants a support network for LYCs, which was later launched and sustained by DYPALL Network as a follow-up of this activity within the framework of Winter Democracy Academy (WDA), in December.

2.1 Presentation of the organisation

WHO WE ARE



The session was organised by DYPALL Network (Developing Youth Participation at Local Level), which is a European platform of civil society organisations, local authorities and research institutions focusing on youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level. We stand for active and meaningful involvement of young people in local democracies through cooperation with local authorities and we provide the space and the resources for capacity building and exchange of good practices among our members.

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

4

PROGRAMME AREAS

60+

PROJECTS

220+

ACTIVITIES

WHAT WE DO



Capacity building

We offer mobility opportunities for municipality representatives, youth workers and youth leaders with the aim of building their capacity for effective engagement of young people in local policy and decision-making.



Research and Innovation

We produce innovative resources, guidelines and educational publications in the field of youth engagement in local governance. We collaborate with research institutions and various stakeholders to collect data and document best practices of youth participation in local decision-making.



Consultancy

Our consultancy service offers tailor-made support to municipalities in developing sustainable involvement of youth in decision-making processes such as youth policy design or establishing structures for youth participation at the local level.

OUR VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

01

Democratic values

02

Respect for diversity

03

Complementarity between public & private sector

04

Shared decisions

05

Equal opportunities

06

Sustainability

2.2 The need for this study session

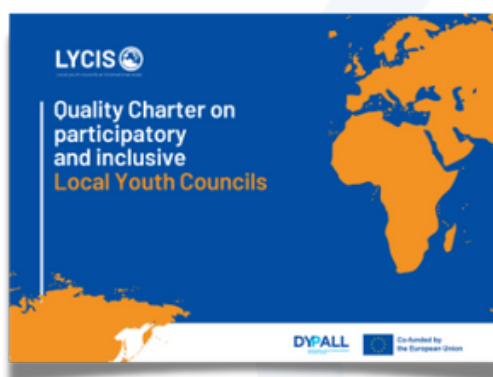
One of the significant challenges that local communities face, especially in small and medium-sized towns, is the outflow of young people. With the rise of remote work, education, and other opportunities, adapting local conditions to young people's needs is crucial to reversing this depopulation trend. Rebuilding trust in democracy in today's Europe requires empowering youth and involving them in decision-making, giving them a central role in shaping policy. The focus has shifted to implementing effective youth participation strategies, providing diverse opportunities to contribute to their communities and to influence decisions affecting their lives —essential for healthy democracies and responsive policy-making.

Local Youth Councils (LYCs) offer a common platform for this, enabling youth voices and influence. Despite variations across countries, LYCs share similar aims and challenges. We believe that promoting LYCs as powerful tools is vital, as they offer not only influence but also empowerment, skill development, and contributions to youth policy, particularly for marginalized youth. However, their often-limited impact highlights the crucial role of local and national governments in their further development and in ensuring meaningful youth participation.

For instance, the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” further emphasizes this commitment, recognizing LYCs as important tools for youth involvement in local and regional governance. The EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) with its three core areas of action - Engage, Connect and Empower - is clear in its aim to encourage youth participation in democratic life by supporting social and civic engagement, with the main intention to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. The United Nations and the Council of Europe, among many other European and global institutions, state the urgent need to expand and strengthen youth participation in decision-making at all levels.

To address these challenges, DYPALL Network developed the “Quality Charter for participatory and inclusive Local Youth Councils (LYCs)”. This charter serves as an assessment tool for those involved in establishing, reforming, or revitalizing LYCs, offering specific indicators to evaluate their structure and function and enhance participation, inclusivity, and impact. It also supports a long-term strategy for the sustainable improvement of LYCs and their influence at all levels. We envision that implementing this charter will empower LYCs across Europe and beyond to become key actors in shaping their communities' future, promoting equitable youth participation, serving as models of meaningful engagement, and fostering sustainable participation in decision-making for more effective policy and cohesive societies. Aligned with the EU's "A new push for European democracy," these quality LYCs can play a fundamental role in strengthening our democracies.

With this Study Session, we aimed to raise awareness of the importance of strengthening democracy through youth participation and local policy dialogue, along with establishing a support network to gather LYCs together and promote their mainstreaming and quality development, whose need has been highlighted in DYPALL Network's previous work and activities, to foster youth participation and ensure active representation in local governance across Europe.



3. PREPARATION

3.1 The team preparation

The preparatory meeting was held in the European Youth Centre Strasbourg (EYCS) from 7th to 10th September 2024. During the meeting, the team discussed the Study Session timeline, its agenda, the division of tasks, and the working methods based on the principles of non-formal education, intercultural learning, and experiential and participatory approaches, aiming to foster and encourage the inclusion of the participants in the learning process.

The planned learning process was based on a participative and active learning approach allowing participants space for sharing, exchanging, and exploring new topics and points of view on citizen participation from local to European levels. The planned sessions combined theoretical and practical parts where participants were offered to connect with the core values and principles of democracy and youth participation at local and European levels. To a great extent, the team used resources from the Council of Europe (e.g., Manual for facilitators, Have Your Say!, Compass) and DYPALL Network (e.g., Educate for Democracy, LYCIS toolkit, Quality Charter) to develop the programme of the Study Session. The expertise and guidance of the Educational Advisor were invaluable throughout the process, ensuring adherence to Council of Europe quality standards and supporting the team in programme development.

Following the initial meeting in September, the team continued developing a detailed programme by having monthly online meetings, and a final preparatory meeting at the EYCS on 26th October. The sessions were facilitated by the team, with the support of the Educational Advisor and contributions from Council of Europe experts and lecturers. All the team members actively contributed to the successful implementation of the study session.



3.2 Profile of the participants and selection criteria

The profile of the participants was one of the following:

- Youth leaders and young people with a strong interest in youth policy and participation at the local level
- Local youth council representatives
- Young members of political parties
- NGOs and municipality representatives
- Elected officials
- Young people working with different socially excluded groups (young people residents in rural areas, from minority groups, or vulnerable groups)

The selection of participants was made by the preparatory team, respecting the fundamental principles of gender balance and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, disability, marital or parental status, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion or belief, fundamental criteria in the selection process.

When spreading the call among DYPALL Network members and on SALTO, we specifically underlined these criteria. Our past experience in implementing Study Sessions was beneficial when finalising the composition of the group.



4. PROGRAMME - INPUTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This Study Session aimed to empower participants with the skills to revitalise democracy and effectively engage young people in participatory processes at the local level. The activity was based on a non-formal education approach and was delivered through various sessions conducted using different methods, such as simulations, role plays, plenary discussions, presentations and group exercises. Sessions were geared towards establishing an informal network of young city councillors, to have direct means of intervention at local and regional levels around Europe on the topic of democratic engagement and citizens' participation.

The specific objectives of the study session were successfully achieved:

- To raise awareness of the importance of strengthening democracy through youth participation and local policy dialogue
- To equip young policy-makers with skills to educate young people about democracy by using tools and manuals of DYPALL Network and the Council of Europe
- To exchange good practices that will inspire young policy-makers to explore the youth perspective in policy-making
- To establish a network of young policy-makers to support collaboration and exchange about democratic engagement and citizens' participation on the local level.



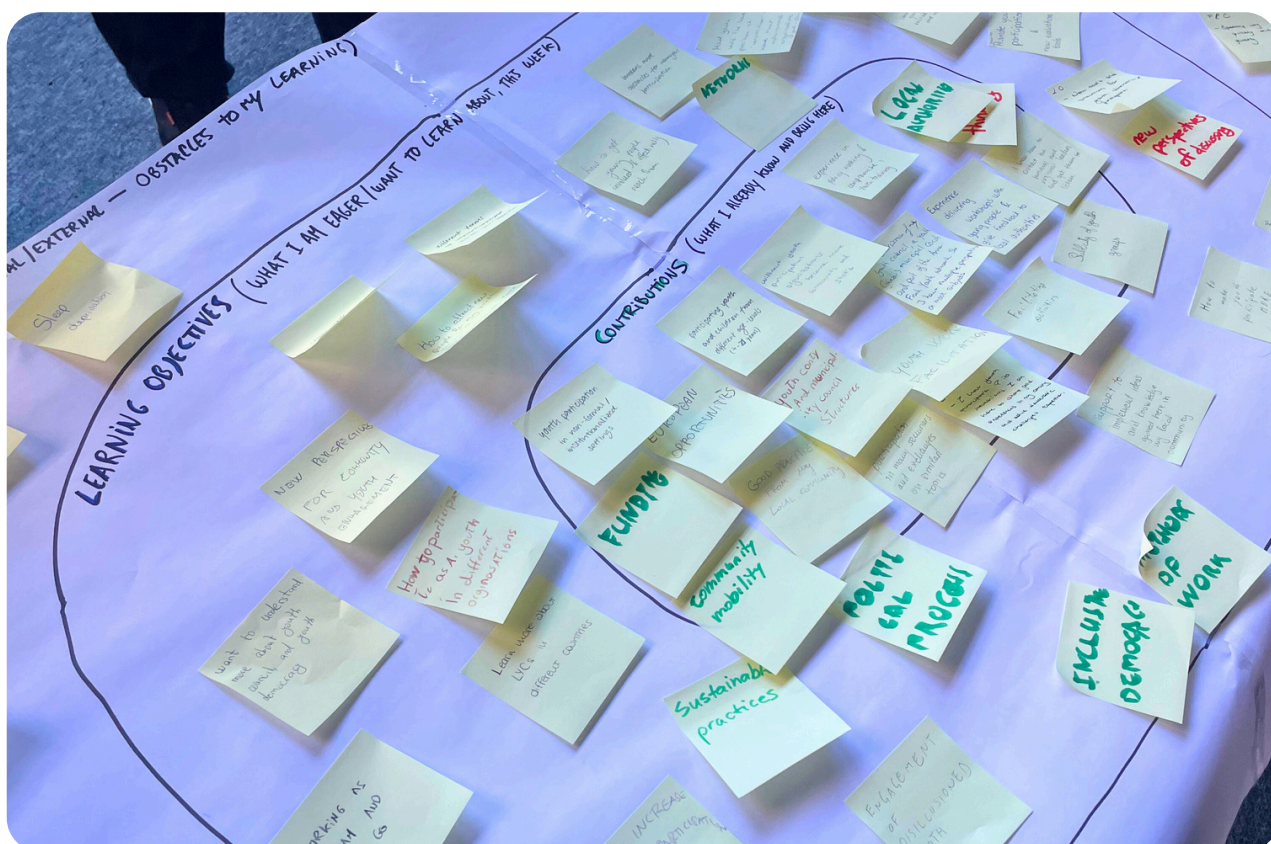
DAY 1

The first day of the Study Session Youth Democracy Academy for young policy-makers aimed to establish a collaborative group and build a shared understanding of the Study Session's core themes, introducing the topics of youth participation and democracy to the participants.

Opening session and getting to know each other

The first-morning session began with an introductory speech by Gordana Berjan, Head of the European Youth Foundation. The Course Director, team members, and the Education Advisor then introduced DYPALL Network, the Council of Europe, and the Study Session's aims and objectives, followed by an outline of the programme and an introduction to non-formal education.

To facilitate connection, ice-breaker activities were conducted, leading to a discussion of participants' expectations, contributions, and potential learning obstacles for the upcoming days. These interactions fostered a sense of community by deepening understanding of each other's backgrounds and experiences.



Democracy and youth participation

Participants explored the core values, principles, and models of democracy and youth participation. The discussion centred on key questions, including: "Why is democracy important?", "What constitutes a real, meaningful, inclusive, and representative democracy?", and "Why is the empowerment of individuals, particularly young people, in decision-making processes essential?".

Building upon this discussion, an immersive disguised role-play simulation immersed participants in the dynamics of participation. This exercise provided a practical opportunity to consider real-world scenarios, such as those within local youth councils, fostering reflection on negotiation processes, power dynamics, and effective participatory and democratic strategies for addressing collective concerns.

Outcomes from disguised role-play simulation

Presented as a moment to empower participants to shape the week's agenda and practice collaborative decision-making, the exercise became a demonstration of how power can be exercised to manipulate outcomes, when one individual's influence dominates the process using tactics such as leveraging louder voices, rushing discussions, and dismissing alternative viewpoints, reflecting primarily one person's perspective.

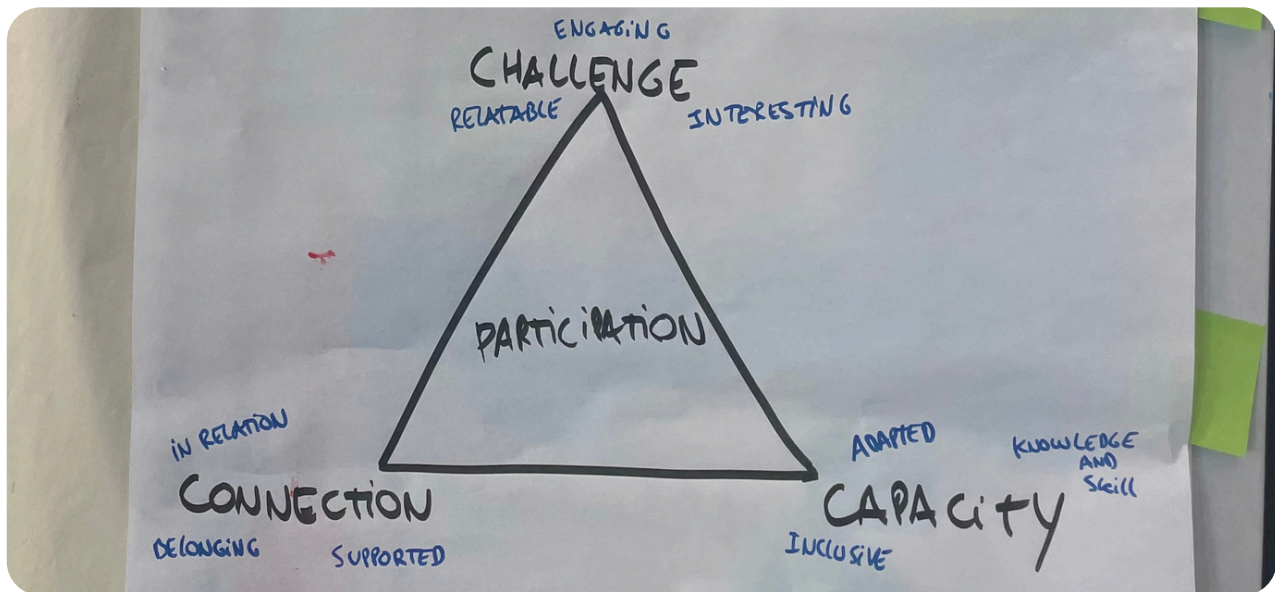
Participants highlighted how this activity revealed a significant disconnect between the stated aim of democratic participation and the reality of power dynamics, and underscored that simply declaring a space "participatory and democratic" is insufficient, active measures must be taken to ensure equitable power distribution and authentic engagement.



Principles of Meaningful Participation “Have Your Say!” manual

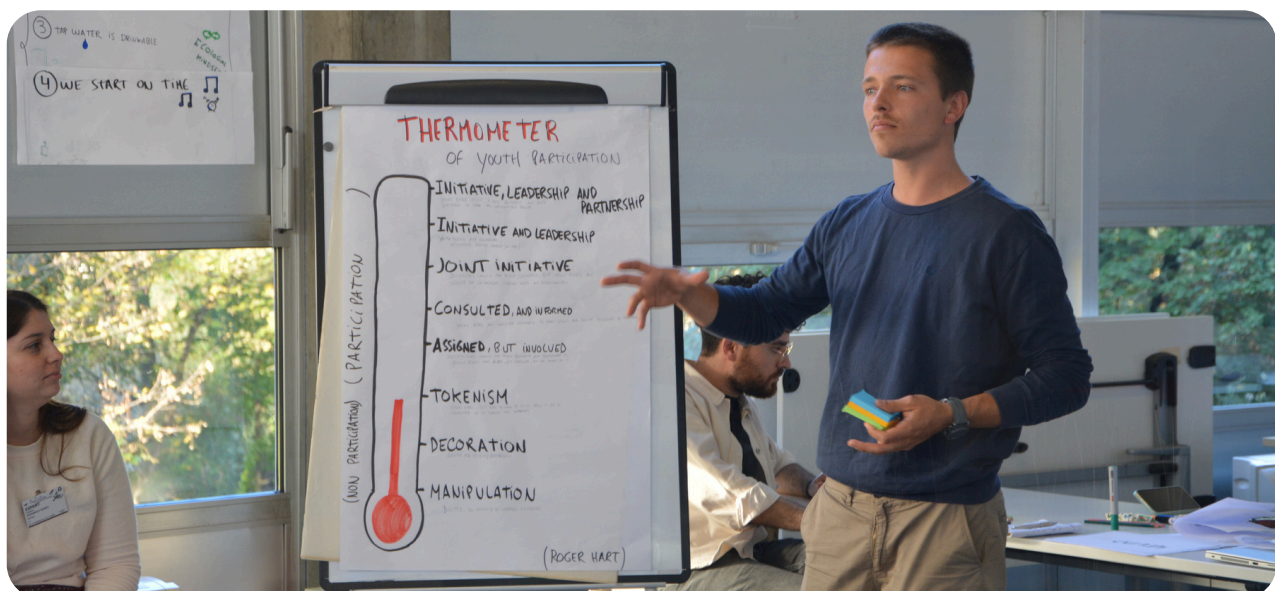
Participants explored the Principles of Meaningful Participation of young people in the “Have Your Say!” manual.

This practical application of the principles served as a valuable framework to debrief and assess their involvement in the previous disguised role-play simulation and provided valuable insights into effectively promoting and navigating meaningful youth participation in similar real-world contexts.



Ladder of Youth Participation By Roger Hart

Participants were also introduced to Roger Hart's “Ladder of Youth Participation”, which facilitated an exploration of tokenism and manipulation, helping participants gain a clearer understanding of the different levels of youth participation and engagement in decision-making processes.



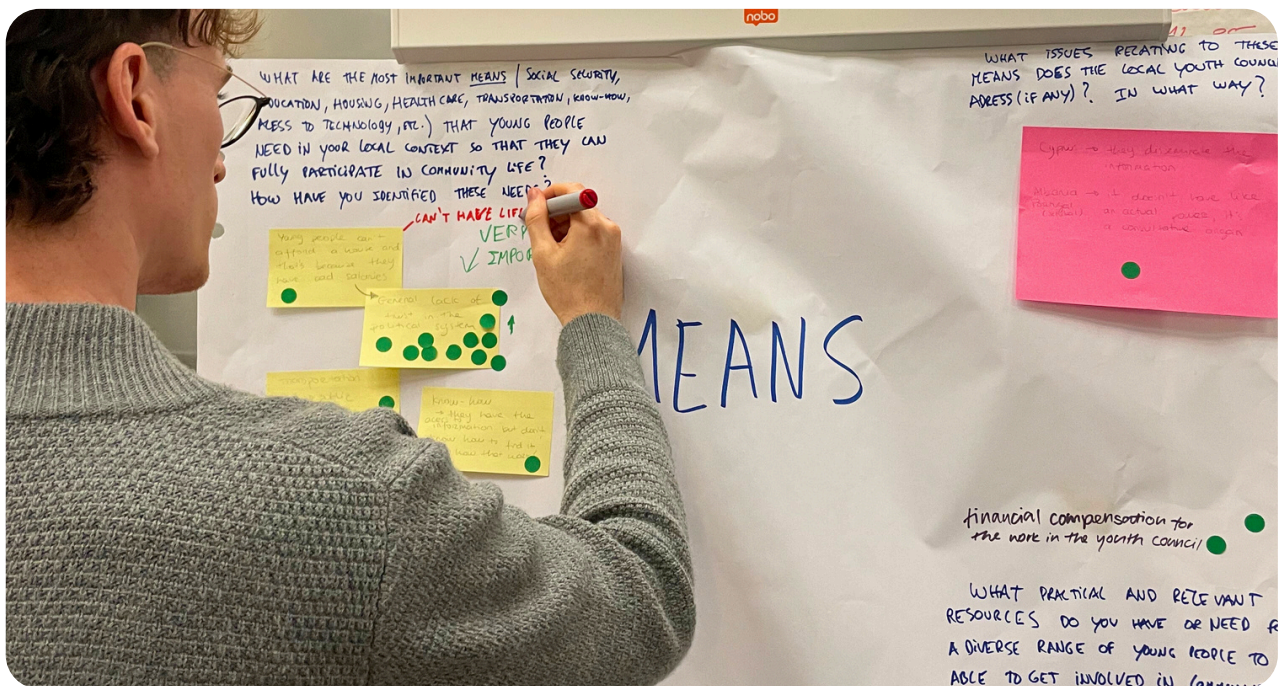
My local youth participation — sharing local realities

RMSOS Framework

Rights, means, space, opportunity, and support

Participants reflected on the definition of "youth", and discussed different forms of youth participation, and the key actors involved. By applying the RMSOS framework (rights, means, space, opportunity, and support), they assessed how each of the five core factors contributes to youth participation in their community. This exchange of experiences and best practices provided a comprehensive overview of the local context and empowered participants to identify challenges, explore solutions, and critically evaluate the RMSOS framework's applicability to their reality.

Based on the growing cohesion of the group and the introduction of various models and tools for youth participation, the final session had a strong emphasis on participants' local realities.



Outcomes from participants' assessment considering their local communities and LYCs

Rights

- Right to be aware of how to participate in the decision-making process
- Right to be involved in the consultation process
- Right to have access to an efficient information management platform to get data-driven updates, and not being only exposed to misleading political speeches
- Right to have a comprehensive and multi-level approach to anticipate self-doubt and auto-exclusion

Means

- General lack of trust in the political system which leads to youth disengagement
- Lack of know-how, young people have access to information on how to get involved in their community but aren't aware of where to find it
- Challenges related to housing availability and affordability, limited employment opportunities inadequate compensation make it difficult for young people to develop life prospects and future plans

Space

- Ensuring the presence of youth centres for young people
- Guaranteeing inclusiveness through online apps and groups (e.g., Zoom, Slack)
- Creating a network with local stakeholders to promote common interests in exchange of spaces
- Voting and being voted
- Taking part in civic engagement forms, such as protests, demonstrations, and petitions
- Participatory budget
- Advocating and encouraging others to advocate
- Expressing views through public hearings and public panels

Opportunities

- Several barriers hinder youth engagement in community life, existing opportunities are highly competitive, limiting accessibility. Furthermore, these opportunities are often poorly promoted, making them difficult for young people to find
- Within LYCs, a bureaucratic and non-youth-friendly communication style often creates a language barrier

Support

- Involving young people in more activities
- Educating youth
- Financial support
- Support in decision-making
- Providing documents in non-bureaucratic language
- Logistical support
- Funding
- Spaces

DAY 2

Building on the first day's overview, Tuesday's programme delved deeper into democracy and youth participation through diverse and engaging activities, aiming to foster an understanding of how youth can have a meaningful role and impact in democratic processes and decision-making at both local and European levels, addressing the challenges they face.

Plenary session led by experts

Co-management and Reykjavik Principles for Democracy

The morning began with a plenary discussion on Co-management and the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy, led by experts Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and Eva Kotnik, member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe.

Participants actively engaged in open dialogue, exploring the practical application of these principles and structures within the Council of Europe, their crucial role in strengthening democracy and fostering meaningful youth policy dialogue, and the Advisory Council on Youth's approach to engaging youth policy-makers.

The discussion highlighted that effective co-management is characterized by dedicated space, resources, and involvement in shaping young people's lives. However, challenges are involved such as power imbalances hindering genuine participation, the need for active engagement beyond simply providing space, and balancing experienced voices with diverse, especially younger, perspectives. The EYCS Advisory Council on Youth addresses this through two-year terms and a focus on representing the "oldest part of the young population".

Effective strategies to overcome these challenges include persistent engagement, networking with other youth organizations, fostering open dialogue with policymakers, and ensuring consultations lead to concrete action.

Furthermore, the discussion addressed a critical question: *what are the key threats to democracy today, and how can young people and local youth councils effectively address these challenges?*



Our democracies at risk — threats and opportunities for local youth participation

Following up on the morning's discussion, the first-afternoon session aimed to raise awareness among participants of current threats to democracy and empower them to become active advocates within their local communities.

This activity provided participants with an overview of contemporary threats, including disinformation and media manipulation, political polarisation and right-wing extremism, the erosion of civil rights and freedoms, and declining youth and civic engagement, trends evident in recent times. This exercise provided a crucial space for dialogue and reflection on these issues.

Next, participants worked in small groups to identify and discuss the specific threats to democracy they face in their communities. Each group then presented their findings, highlighting their potential role in addressing these challenges and exploring solutions.



Results of the group presentations Threats to democracy identified

- **Political discontent:** voting right-wing is often a way for citizens to express dissatisfaction with current politics.
- **Youth disengagement:** young people feel their voices are not valued, leading to high rates of abstention. This is exacerbated by economic pressures, such as the need to prioritize earning money over volunteering, especially post-Covid. A general sense of fatigue and disillusionment with the lack of tangible change also contributes.
- **Media influence:** media outlets often portray issues in a skewed or out-of-context manner, influencing public perception. Politicians also leverage social media to disseminate their ideas, sometimes using fear and threats to gain votes and promote harmful ideologies.
- **Communication barriers:** complex political language used by established parties alienates many, while right-wing parties capitalize on this by creating a false sense of being heard without offering concrete solutions.
- **Political polarisation:** this creates a divisive environment that further fuels political disengagement and the appeal of extremist views.

Potential solutions and mitigation strategies

- **Strengthening media literacy:** it is crucial to combat media manipulation and misinformation, helping individuals understand how information is financed and used.
- **Fact-checking and consulting multiple sources:** these are crucial self-defence mechanisms against online misinformation, particularly regarding right-wing extremism.
- **Protecting marginalized voices:** while not explicitly a "solution" in the same way as the others, the discussion highlights the need to protect marginalized voices and human rights in the face of rising extremism. This implies working towards greater inclusion and representation.

Local policy dialogue in action — “Meeting the Mayor”

The following session engaged participants in a role-play based on a case study developed by the preparatory team.

Challenged to apply their new knowledge and critical thinking, participants represented specific characters, advocating for their principles and beliefs in a simulated meeting with the Mayor. This meeting required them to discuss proposals and collaboratively develop action plans on a critical community issue.

Participants highlighted that this exercise provided a practical link between theory and practice, encouraging them to consider how they could transfer the skills and insights gained to enhance civic engagement and democratic participation in their communities.



How (else) do we participate?

Participants concluded the third day of the Study Session by examining traditional forms of youth participation and critically assessing their effectiveness and meaningfulness based on their diverse backgrounds. The discussion then broadened to explore more unconventional approaches to youth consultation, emphasizing critical thinking and active dialogue delving into various traditional forms of youth participation, critically evaluating their effectiveness and meaningfulness, based on their points of view coming from different backgrounds.

E-participation was a central focus of this session, with participants reflecting on its definition, potential benefits, and whether it could be more effective than traditional methods for achieving meaningful youth impact. Reflecting on the previous simulation, they explored how digital tools could have been used to address the case study's challenges and considered alternative approaches to the meeting with the Mayor.



Identified positive and negative sides of e-participation

Accessibility & Participation:

- Positive: increased accessibility and inclusivity for people with disabilities and those in remote areas, broadening overall audience reach.
- Negative: can lead to a diminished sense of personal involvement.

Communication & Information:

- Positive: facilitates connections with diverse individuals and backgrounds, enriching perspectives and leading to more informed decision-making; allows for direct and unfiltered expression of opinions.
- Negative: creates challenges in ensuring clear and effective communication.

Governance & Accountability:

- Positive: generates valuable data for advocacy and lobbying efforts with external stakeholders.
- Negative: increases vulnerability to manipulation and corruption; reduces accountability due to anonymity; creates difficulties in developing sound legislation.

Alternative mechanisms identified

Crowdfunding donations, advocacy, volunteering, law, self-organised civil disobedience, events, online pools, participatory budget

DAY 3

As the activity drew to a close, Wednesday's programme shifted participants' attention from the theoretical and practical exercises of the Study Session to the exploration of best practices in democratic processes through a Study Visit and an expert-led lecture.

Visit to the Palais de l'Europe and exchange with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

To further explore Council of Europe instruments to promote local youth participation, Wednesday's programme began with a Study Visit to the Palais de l'Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. The visit facilitated an exchange of good practices and increased their understanding of the Congress' work, initiatives and contribution to youth participation and youth policy-making.

A presentation by Maren Lambrecht from the Social Inclusion Committee introduced the Congress, followed by an open dialogue and discussion with Mathieu Mori, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on pertinent political issues, the Reykjavik principles for democracy, youth participation and strategies for fostering and sustaining the commitment of local authorities to young people.



Lecture by expert

Youth Against Racism: Empowering Change in Our Communities

In the afternoon, the expert Serpil Temiz Unvar led a presentation on “Youth Against Racism: Empowering Change in Our Communities”, offering participants a unique opportunity to learn from an impactful voice in anti-racism advocacy and human rights.

Through her personal experience, insights, and practical approaches to addressing racism, Serpil equipped participants with a deeper understanding of how they can connect their local actions with broader European youth initiatives, empowering them to contribute to inclusive and equitable communities and play an impactful role in promoting human rights at all levels.

Participant feedback highlighted her presentation as a powerful example of youth empowerment, demonstrating how young people can drive positive change in their communities. Her talk inspired meaningful reflection on the diverse and impactful forms participation can take, motivating participants to explore creating inclusive and transformative local projects.



DAY 4

The final day of the programme was dedicated to reflecting on learning outcomes and developing follow-up plans to improve LYCs' quality while identifying together with the participants the key first step to establish a support network for local youth councils, which was planned to be launched by DYPALL Network within the framework of Winder Democracy Academy (WDA) in December.

Quality Charter on local youth councils (LYCs)

During the morning session, participants focused on the criteria and indicators that make a quality local youth councils.

Working in smaller groups and divided by country, participants reflected on their LYC's framework, such as the legal framework, who is involved and represented, who leads and organizes meetings, resources, budget and so on, and assessed it by using the criteria and indicators of the "Quality Charter on participatory and Inclusive Local Youth Councils", an assessment tool developed by DYPALL Network, designed to evaluate the structure and functioning of Local Youth Councils (LYCs) with a focus on enhancing their participatory and inclusive nature and increasing their impact.

Participants outlined the areas of improvement and best practices implemented, presenting their local reality to the others and hearing back from their peers. This assessment and exchange allowed participants to determine if they had sufficient information to fully assess all aspects of their LYC, recognize existing efforts to drive change and identify areas for further development, gather best practices from other contexts and learn how LYCs function in different countries.



Presentation of the European Youth Foundation (EYF)

Participants attended a presentation on the European Youth Foundation (EYF) led by the Educational Advisor together with Mara Georgescu, Project Manager of the EYF, which allowed them to discover opportunities to actively develop their local plans, in order to foster meaningful changes in their communities.



Evaluation and closing

One of the main outcomes of the Study Session was the creation of a comprehensive mind map based on the inputs acquired during the week. During this very last session of the programme, participants focused on the learning outcomes of the week, the evaluation of the activity and received their certificates of attendance to the activity.



5. FOLLOW-UP PLANNING

Network of Local Youth Councils (LYCs)

In previous DYPALL Network activities and projects, groups of participants identified the need for creating a platform to support the functioning and quality development of local youth councils, a space to share best practices and overcome challenges in such structures, especially given that international realities can differ greatly. With this Study Session and its programme, DYPALL Network aimed to gather local youth council representatives' inputs to launch such an international network for young policy-makers as a follow-up activity.

The primary outcome of the Study Session “Youth Democracy Academy for young policy-makers” was the initial, informal creation of such a network, which was planned to be officially launched during DYPALL Network’s Winter Democracy Academy in December. This event was not only to kickstart the network but also to disseminate the Study Session’s outcomes and raise awareness of DYPALL Network and the Council of Europe’s work to a broader audience.

The idea was to reflect together with the participants in Strasbourg on the platform’s framework, and how participants would see the network actually work and be useful to its members - content, initiatives, projects, and functioning wise - to significantly contribute to shaping public policy at the local level, alongside with signing a declaration of common interest from them in creating and joining it.

Participants showed strong interest and commitment to be active members of this new network, providing valuable input that shaped its framework, identifying the needs, and benefits expected and expressing the contributions they can provide to the structure.



Identified needs and main outcomes of the reflection over the network's structure

Management and governance

- **Structure and operations:** volunteer working groups, collaboration with national youth networks, a platform for shared statements (national and European), cross-border youth council cooperation, a clear and public internal structure, recognition by partners, identification and sharing of best practices, mandatory quarterly meetings, potential monthly leadership rotation, institutional support, local authority representation, a coordination commission (with nationally chosen representatives), a dedicated project manager/office, and inter-country project groups (correspondent exchange model).
- **Membership and participation:** debate on membership (youth councils only vs. all youth organizations), emphasis on equality among members, exchanges between youth councils, a mentorship program (including ambassadors), accessible and sustainable membership with support structures, and local authority representative involvement, the network being focused on LYCs but with a broader vision of youth participation.
 - **There was a lack of consensus on which actors should be part of the network, highlighting the need for clear membership criteria.**

Resources and possibilities

- **Funding:** seeking funding from institutions like the Council of Europe, stakeholders, and through fundraising events, utilising the European Youth Foundation (EYF) funding, potentially in partnership with municipalities, charities, or companies, exploring membership fees.
- **Communication and collaboration:** collaboration with NGOs (potentially offering publicity in exchange for support), collaborative space for meetings and joint projects, online discussion platform and shared cloud storage to share resources and tools.
- **Training and support:** online training and annual in-person training rotating between countries, promoting visits among LYCs (with planned trips and funding), supporting members to advertise the network's work (with training, funding, tools, and content), access to academia and universities through research collaborations, rotating headquarters and directing mandates for shared responsibility.

Outreach and communication

- **General outreach:** strong online presence (social media, website), seeking and valuing public opinion, integrating local heritage with personal stories, developing a participatory and evolving visual identity, vocational/territorial analysis, involving the work/economic dimension, intercultural experience sharing and promotional videos, publicly addressing key issue, promoting network members, study visits and national/regional events, open access to events (e.g. streaming).
- **Visibility and networking:** collaborations and sponsorships, consistent hashtag usage by members, exchanges and study visits, and connections with other stakeholders.
- **Communication platforms:**
 - **Internal:** WhatsApp, newsletter, Slack, Discord, Zoom/MS Teams, billboards, info packs.
 - **External:** Instagram (with ads), TikTok, LinkedIn, website, Facebook, X (Twitter), radio, public opinion polls.

6. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The sessions throughout the programme were strategically designed to provide participants with valuable new knowledge and skills related to enhancing youth participation at the local level, and the interactive nature of each session and the diverse array of topics covered fostered a holistic learning experience for all involved. Recognising the need for increased opportunities for exchange, the Study Session facilitated a valuable platform for participants— including LYC members, young policy-makers, and municipal officials— to share best practices and learn about existing approaches and policies implemented in other communities. This exchange empowered them to initiate similar activities within their LYCs and municipalities, fostering meaningful local-level change.

A significant outcome of the activity was the informal creation of a network of young people and policy-makers, envisioned to share knowledge and expertise on improving quality in local youth councils, to be sustained as a follow-up of the activity. Participants demonstrated strong interest and commitment to be actively involved in the new LYC network launched and sustained by DYPALL Network, whose initial framework was directly shaped by their contributions. Furthermore, participants expressed a strong commitment to applying the knowledge, skills, and resources gained during the Study Session to enhance local practices promoting meaningful youth participation.

The activity successfully achieved its aim of empowering young policy-makers with the competencies and tools to engage and represent youth in decision-making processes. In doing so, it directly aligned with DYPALL Network's both short-term and long-term objectives and priorities, fostering growth in youth involvement within local governance structures.

6.1 Main outcomes and learning points

Youth participation and democracy

- **Challenges:** limited opportunities for participation, inadequate policy representation of youth, restricted access to information, and insufficient awareness of democratic processes.
- **Best Practices:** bottom-up policies, increased engagement in simulations and protests, and the crucial role of youth-led organisations.
- **Positive Examples:** participants identified initiatives at local, national, and EU levels that are working to revitalise democracy through active youth engagement in promoting democratic values.
- **Outcome:** participants achieved a significantly enhanced understanding of the challenges facing democracy and the vital role played by youth-led organizations.

Local youth councils

- **Identified issues:** LYCs struggle with engaging diverse youth, raising awareness of their activities, ensuring youth understanding of governance, and guaranteeing that youth voices are heard and valued by decision-makers.
- **Enhancing understanding:** effective LYCs utilise youth-friendly communication, provide training and capacity-building for members, offer financial compensation for their work, create inclusive environments that value diverse perspectives, and establish clear communication channels with local authorities. This approach enables successful LYCs to advocate for youth-friendly policies, equip members with valuable skills applicable to future pursuits, and foster a stronger sense of community and civic engagement among young people.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY SESSION TO THE COE YOUTH PRIORITIES

With this Study Session, DYPALL Network aimed to support further the implementation and promotion of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and to implement the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec (2015)3, namely by supporting the active participation of young people in decisions and actions at the local and regional level and addressing the impact of socio-economic inequalities and injustice on youth political participation.

The publication "The Future of Europe" (2017) points out how young people feel disconnected from a political system that does not represent them. The polarisation of political discourse has caused the distancing of young citizens from the traditional structures of participation. On the other hand, they seem more and more politically engaged in a broader sense (petitions, protests, informal groups, volunteering). With this Study Session, we aimed to tackle this issue by training a group of young local policy actors and political decision-makers on the topics of youth participation in local democracies.

The Study Session significantly enhanced participants' comprehension of democracy and civil engagement, fostering an appreciation for diverse viewpoints and values within democratic frameworks, highlighting inclusivity, and promoting tolerance. This emphasis on access to rights, and information, and encouraging youth engagement in democratic processes directly corresponded with the Council of Europe's priorities. By aligning with these goals, the study session effectively contributed to the Council of Europe's mission to strengthen democratic institutions and cultivate pluralistic societies.

In addition, the young people had the opportunity to get to know everything that the Council of Europe does and to see what possibilities the Council of Europe offers to them and their organisations. The study session was also a space to develop the capacity of DYPALL Network and its members; therefore, the facilities and educational support from the European Youth Centre Strasbourg contributed to the event to achieve greater relevance and importance among the participants.

8. PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

Study Session Youth Democracy Academy for young policy-makers

All 20 participants completed a comprehensive evaluation survey through an online form, following an overall reflection on the whole experience. The main outcomes from this assessment were a generally high achievement of aims and objectives, an expressed development of competencies to a large extent related to youth empowerment and promoting meaningful youth participation.

All the participants stated that their expectations and motivations were fully aligned with the Study Session's programme, aims and objectives and that they would recommend this activity. They highlighted the importance of having such spaces and moments like the ones we provided, to gather together and exchange experiences. In general, all brought and demonstrated great experience and expertise on the topic and willingness to learn and further develop their competencies related to the topic, being very participative and committed to the project.

Despite the participant group having a slightly lower average age than originally projected when planning the Study Session, they brought valuable experience and knowledge to the discussions and demonstrated a strong commitment to developing their skills. Their engagement and dedication were evident throughout the activity, ultimately contributing positively to the achievement of its objectives.

Overall, the programme integrated theoretical learning, practical application, and reflective sessions, allowing participants to learn through different methods, which was strongly appreciated based on their feedback, especially practical sessions such as role-plays and simulations. Each day's sessions were strategically built upon the previous, culminating in actionable plans to apply their learning within their local communities.

Some direct quotes from participants:

"What I've taken away from this session is how much the other youth have enriched and stimulated me. I've learned a lot through our similarities, and differences, each added value but also about how we can overcome together the challenges we are facing through open dialogue and by sharing our own experiences. We live in the same community, so we need to believe in unity".

Ombline De Villeneuve, member of Paris Youth Council, France.

I wanted to participate in the study session because I believed in the project, it seemed very well thought out and the possibility of being part of such a thing was really an honor to me. That thought alone made me want to participate without much thinking. I was hoping to better develop my leadership skills, learn about more youth groups at a European level, as well as understand different political and youth-related realities throughout Europe.

The different realities have different outcomes to how a person sees the youth action in their country. The main takeaway I got is that it is very important to invest in more international actions, in the sense that observing other European realities would facilitate the development of every youth council throughout Europe, and that observation and consideration of similar examples are the key to the success of Youth Councils.

Its networks like this ones that allow for better communication and faster development of pretty much any project, I personally envision the informal network to help me connect with other associations or projects similar to the ones I participate in, and as so, I can shape some aspects of the organisations I'm a part of based on the good aspects of other like-minded organizations that without a network like those I would have no access to".

Tiago Daniel Hipólito Cabral, project manager, Valongo Youth Municipal Council, Portugal.

"Being part of this program allowed me to learn from experts and peers about fostering democratic values at the local and regional levels. It was a truly collaborative environment that inspired innovative thinking.

This session reinforced my commitment to promoting youth involvement in decision-making. The diverse perspectives shared in Strasbourg were eye-opening and will guide my future initiatives".

Ivana Vukićević, member of Mladi Evrope (The Youth of Europe), Montenegro.

"The facilitators were well organised and prepared and they brought lots of knowledge with them. They organised sessions in a really engaging way that allowed us all to share our own experiences".

Eugene McCarthy, chair for South Essex Young Greens and political education officer for the Young Greens of England and Wales, England.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FORESEEN FOLLOW-UP

For European Youth Policy & Council of Europe:

- Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to exchange best practices and learn about diverse approaches and policies implemented in similar structures across different countries. This led to the informal creation of a network of motivated young policy-makers, eager to share knowledge and expertise on improving local youth councils. However, sustaining this momentum requires ongoing support through more robust and sustainable networks and international activities such as this Study Session that can maintain participants' engagement and foster future collaborative projects.

Enhancements for Future Sessions:

- Extending the study session by one day (five days instead of four) would have significantly enhanced the learning experience. While participants' engagement was high, an additional day would have allowed for deeper peer-to-peer exchange on their experience, by adding to the programme an open session in which participants could have led themselves, with organisers' support. This extra time would also have enabled the implementation of valuable participatory methods that were mentioned during the Study Session, such as the living library, which is most effective when trust within the group is already established, typically in the later stages of a programme.

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Albania

Elvis Çaushaj, Youth Council of Tirana
Klaud Feçi, Elbasan Youth Council

Cyprus

Dylan Guetta, Municipality of Nicosia

Finland

Seela Pasanen, Vaasa Youth Council
Saara Helo, Vaasa Youth Council

France

Ombline De Villeneuve, Paris Youth Council

Georgia

Ana Okuashvili, Umbrella NGO

Germany

Luise Klingler, City Council of Weil de Stadt

Ireland

Mariana Chihenseck Blanco, Academy of the Near Future

Italy

Riccardo Liani, Europiamo
Samantha Wright, DYPALL Network

Kosovo*

Donika Ahmetaj, Democracy Plus

Montenegro

Ivana Vukicévić, Mladi Evrope

Netherlands

Lara Roovers, Democracy Reloading

Norway

Marius Kjelle Roppen, Agder County Municipality

Portugal

Carolina Saramago Nunes, Divisão de Juventude da Câmara Municipal de Setúbal
Tiago Daniel Hipólito Cabral, Concelho Municipal Jovem de Valongo

*All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Türkiye

Gaye Tuğrulöz, Social Climate Association
Rezan Kağanarslan, People's Equality And Democracy Party

United Kingdom

Eugene Mccarthy, Green Party of England and Wales (& Young Greens)

Preparatory team

Bilal Ata Aktas
Sofia Vacchi
Andrea Borraccetti
Dorotea Strelec

Course director

Afonso Borges

Lecturer

Eva Kotnik, Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe
Serpil Temiz Unvar

Educational advisor

Mila Lukić

Council of Europe

Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of the Youth Department
Gordana Berjan, Head of the European Youth Foundation
Mara Georgescu, Programme Manager, European Youth Foundation
Mila Lukić, Education, Training and Cooperation Division
Patrick Norlain, Youth Department Programme Assistant

APPENDIX 2

PROGRAMME

Study Session

Youth Democracy Academy for young policy-makers

Study session organised within the Youth for Democracy programme
in cooperation with DYPALL Network

European Youth Centre Strasbourg 3rd Floor, Room 3.1
27 October - 1 November 2024

Sunday, 27 October 2024

Arrival of participants
19:00 Dinner
20:30 Welcome evening

Monday, 28 October 2024 - Day 1

08:30 Participants' registration at the dining area, with Patrick Norlain, Programme Assistant, Council of Europe Youth Department
09:30 Official opening, with Gordana Berjan, Head of the European Youth Foundation, Council of Europe Youth Department
Introduction to the study session, its aims, objectives and the programme
Icebreaker with connection to following exercise
Exercise to collect participants' expectations, contributions and fears/concerns
11:00 Break
11:30 Team-building and getting to know each other
13:00 Lunch
14:30 Democracy and Youth Participation
16:00 Break
16:30 My local youth participation – sharing local realities
18:00 Reflection groups
19:00 Dinner
Free time

APPENDIX 2

PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 29 October 2024 - Day 2

09:30 Co-management and Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (exchange with Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of the Youth Department and Eva Kotnik, member of the Advisory Council on Youth)

11:00 Break

11:30 Our democracies at risk – threats and opportunities for local youth participation

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Local policy dialogue in action - “Meeting the Mayor”

16:00 Break + Logistics for Dinner out

16:30 How (else) do we participate?

18:00 Reflection groups

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Intercultural evening and networking

Wednesday, 30 October 2024 - Day 3

09:15 Walk to the Council of Europe

10:00 Visit to the Palais de l'Europe

Exchange with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (joint activity with the Revitalising Democracy project study visit group)

12:45 Walk back to the Council of Europe

13:00 Lunch break

14:30 Youth Against Racism: Empowering Change in Our Communities, with Serpil Temiz Unvar, activist

16:00 Free time in the city

Dinner out in the city

Thursday, 31 October 2024 - Day 4

09:30 Quality charter on Local Youth Councils

11:00 Break

11:30 Presentation of the European Youth Foundation, with Mara Georgescu, Programme Manager at the European Youth Foundation, Council of Europe

Follow up planning / Working on the network

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Follow up planning - continued

16:00 Break

16:30 Evaluation and closing

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Farewell party (invitation for self-organised moment)

Friday, 1 November 2024

Departure of participants

APPENDIX 3

VISIBILITY

The Study Session team and participants organised their efforts during the week to take photos, make posts on social media and use the relevant hashtags for visibility reasons. An article has been prepared and published about the process of the Study Session on DYPALL Network's webpage.

DYPALL Network used appropriate logos and disclaimers in all social media posts, alongside the tags (@coe_youth @dypall_network) which have been used for all the posts.

Posts can be found here:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/C9KpEcjgJ0F/?igsh=MWc5MzFjam0wdXZjNQ==>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DAVqFOUMErQ/?igsh=MWRneTY1ZTh1dGtuaw==>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DCOw0sto4Sq/?igsh=MW9idmZmMjR0c3Q4cQ==>

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=894078799423144&set=a.618021310362229>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EC2rARbr7/>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AiF8VMVr7/>

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dypall-network_youthdemocracy-youthparticipation-localgovernance-activity-7261720118416601088-pQZK?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop



LEARN MORE ABOUT DYPALL NETWORK

