



## Brief description

*The Educational centre for artistic development is an association led by young people and addressed to young people; it provides a space where young people can become involved in artistic activities and citizenship issues.*

This participation setting idea emerged from an association during the year 2015 and took concretely place from December 2015 to June 2016. It was led by a small bunch of very articulate young people who intended to organise a group of 25 young people to train them in questions of citizenship and participation through cultural activities.

Two main activities were set up. The training of youth participants during 6 months on the decision-making process, the project framework on the one hand and to two cultural activities on the (they had the choice of two practices out of five: cinema, theatre, dance, fine arts and music).

## What we have learned about participation

The leaders spend a lot of time developing their project. Volunteer work is also very important. Gathering public actors together in the project and raising funds take a lot of energy for a part of the team. Participants' participation in the project was more difficult for part of them because they were working or studying, or living outside of the city. The working group was therefore never the same, with very different levels of attendance.

The leaders' team is built on a strong relationship/ friendship basis. Legitimacy is not a problem, everyone is recognised for his/her skills whatever his/her status (volunteers, civic service volunteers, employees). Legitimacy towards the participants was not always obvious because some participants were roughly the same age and even older than the leaders. For example, Etienne was not authorised to give advice to an older participant whose life path was painful. They did not intervene so much because they were afraid of being too interventionists and were more comfortable to be "key people" than leaders.

The question of legitimacy was more difficult for the participants. The question of decision-making in large groups remained unresolved at the end of the 5-month period. The question of the experience of each of them and of the way to share it was also important (if unsolved) regarding the legitimacy question: *"Because the purpose of the project, precisely, is that we are not exactly equal and we are, well, like you said a while ago, we don't all have the same timetables, we're not all doing the same thing. So finally we are not all equal and suddenly we'd perhaps benefit from the people's special skills to perhaps end up with something."* (S, GD, Educational centre for artistic development).

Gaining the institutional legitimacy in terms of financial support was quite difficult but they finally succeed. The local committee participates in the legitimation process of the association. Within the leaders' team, founding members are leaders. Important decisions remain in their hands in an environment of shared trust with the rest of the team.

## Key challenges Identified

Relations between the participants and the civic service workers responsible for accompanying them were good, sometimes friendly. The question of distance to be maintained was quickly dropped in favor of a rather horizontal relationship. They lost some links towards the end, participants turned to other key persons or significant others (in particular the manager of the historical building in the city centre) instead of the organisers.

The desire or the difficulty of finding a place in a heterogeneous group was significant for some of them. It was mainly a human adventure rather than a source of technical or artistic learning. Self-assertion was tested in an ambitious and ultimately highly rewarding project (relation to place and to a network). This did not work in the same way for all. While some of them felt strengthened by this experience, other more vulnerable members experienced a new sense of failure and have cut contact with the group. We note that the notion of attachment and friendship is central in the overall dynamic of this project.