



# EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

June 2018

PARTISPACE Policy brief no. 3



## MAKING SPACES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION ACCESSIBLE AND AVAILABLE

**Horizon 2020 Project “Spaces and Styles of Participation. Formal, non-formal and informal possibilities of young people’s participation in European cities”**

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PARTISPACE analysed **what participation means for young people** in different social positions and life conditions. The findings suggest that an understanding of participation is needed that is broader and that recognises the diverse ways young people claim being a part of society. **Participation implies exploring, appropriating and using public spaces in different ways.**

This policy brief is concerned with the **spaces of participation and the ways in which participation is connected to space.** To a large extent, these issues are local in character. **The policy recommendations suggested here are first directed to politicians, administrators and youth workers at city level.** However, they are also relevant to youth policy and policy makers concerned with urban development at national and European level.

The aim of the recommendations is to facilitate and promote young people’s access to a diversity of spaces in which they can cope with their everyday lives and experiment with their identities, and where they are recognised as members of society.

## KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Recognize that young people actively engage in their cities

Young people belong to their cities and their cities belong to them. Moving around in and enlivening the urban landscape in diverse ways is an important aspect of being a citizen in the sense of both social and civic membership. Young people participate in urban issues in many ways:

**The Ecological organization**, Plovdiv, is a group of young activists who observe and voice urban ecological interests. They share a political goal of creating a better city from an environmental point of view and they engage in preserving historically important urban areas. *“The focus of our activity is concentrated on the platforms for management of the Pirin, Rila and Vitosha parks ... within three months ... there was a change to be felt on the part of state authorities ... they have started to revise their plans.”*

→ It is vital that a participatory policy is based on **the recognition of young people as important actors and members of the city.**

### 2. Provide a multitude of spaces for young people and allow for diverse practices of participation

Participation has to take place somewhere and the data show a mosaic of spatial solutions and practices. Participation takes place in premises intended for it, but also in spaces appropriated and re-organized by young people themselves. Having stable and functional spaces and facilities is fundamental to participatory efforts as much as flexible solutions for new initiatives. There are many well-equipped premises for young people but sometimes they face constant temporary solutions:

**Open Education Collective**, Zurich, is a voluntary organization aimed at creating better living conditions for asylum seekers. The young activists offer language courses and a meeting place in order to facilitate migrants' possibilities to engage in city life. Access to stable premises has been a constant struggle and the organization has moved at least eight times through the years.

→ Urban youth policies need **a multilevel and dialogical approach.** They should **provide long-term facilities and accept diverse ways of using public spaces and public institutions.**

### 3. Do not constrain and restrict young people but interact with them on their appropriation of public space

New urban sports add to public life without changing public life or taking anything away. There is a need for sports and facilities to organize training, not least for all young citizens 'in the making':

**Parkour groups** in Gothenburg and Zurich provide young people with new and often adventurous ways to move in public space. Through climbing, jumping, flipping and running, they open up new possibilities of how to relate to spatial structures and physicality: *“We need a place where we can practice, where we can educate our trainers and develop new moves and techniques. And we need more space.”*

→ Urban policies in general and youth policies in particular should **acknowledge the possibilities of new uses of public space in which** young people engage.

#### 4. Recognize the social creativity inherent in the use of urban spaces

Young people sometimes appropriate abandoned spaces to create social meeting points and new participatory possibilities, and also to develop new forms of living and working together:

**The self-managed social centre**, Bologna, started in a squat. An abandoned barracks was rebuilt and is now used for social and political activities but also for social services (a social dormitory, a play room for children, and an organic garden). Recurrent public events are set up in order to promote this culture and lifestyle, and to encourage sociability. *"As far as I know, this is the first example of such an experience in Italy. New, innovative, which was done by a collective, which creates something hybrid."*

- Urban policies should apply **a positive attitude towards young people's appropriation of abandoned spaces and learn from the social creativity developed there.**

#### 5. Provide safe spaces for young people with basic needs

The need for a place to be is not merely connected to specific participatory activities. Some groups of young people lack the most fundamental space to become full citizens:

**The Box**, Manchester, is an arts-based social care charity in the city centre that works to empower young men (aged 18-30) who have experienced disadvantages such as homelessness, alcohol and drug addiction, and mental health issues. *"... sometimes it does just feel like a cycle of failure... it feels like I'm moving one step forward and two steps back, two steps forward, one step back."*

- Youth policy must also **identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups of young people** and provide them with access to very fundamental social support, while working with the young people in a participatory way ensuring choice and involvement in decision-making.

#### 6. Include youth participation in planning the use of urban space

In order to get an overview of the spatial realities of youth participation in a city, it can be productive to create a **planning document** where all youth participatory facilities are mapped. In this way, it is possible to get a picture of **the geographical distribution of youth participation** in the city and to see how it interacts with, for example, the local areas where many young people live. This mapping can be used to enhance transport possibilities for young people to reach different areas and to bring young people together across borders and communities.

- Programmes of **urban planning** and **urban regeneration** need to include young people's needs and uses of public space to ensure that their claims for being part of society into account. This includes shaping of transport, squares, streets and parks as well as institutions.
- **EU policies** may stimulate mainstreaming youth in urban planning and urban regeneration by making this conditional for funding from the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund or the URBAN and URBACT programmes.

## ABOUT THE PARTISPACE PROJECT

PARTISPACE has responded to a concern that young people do not participate enough in public affairs. The central research question of PARTISPACE was **how** and **where** young people do participate across formal, non-formal and informal settings. What **styles** of participation do they prefer, develop and apply and in what **spaces** does participation take place?

The study has undertaken a comparative analysis of young people's practices in the public and the ways in which they are recognised or not by other societal actors. The study was conducted in **eight cities across Europe** – Bologna (IT), Frankfurt (DE), Gothenburg (SE), Eskisehir (TK), Manchester (UK), Plovdiv (BG), Rennes (FR) and Zurich (CH).

**Theoretically** PARTISPACE starts from understanding youth participation as:

- **Discursive** practice that is produced by societal discourses addressing young people as 'citizens in the making' and that distinguishes participatory and non-participatory activities
- Being constituted out of (unequal) **relationships between individuals, institutions and society**, rather than a problem of individual attitudes or knowledge deficits
- Manifest through **youth cultural styles** of practice in the public domain by which young people present themselves as different from children, adults and other young people
- Situated practice embedded in structured **social spaces** while at the same time expressing the appropriation of social space
- **Participation biographies** expressing young people's individual processes of coping with particular life situations and constructions of self-identity
- Enabled and inhibited by **public institutions and policies** at local, national, transnational level

PARTISPACE has adopted a **mixed-method and multilevel approach**:

- National research literature reviews, youth policy and discourse analyses
- Analysis of youth participation discourse at European level
- Analysis of European Social Survey data on young people's participation
  - Local case studies in one major city per country including mapping youth participation, expert interviews, group discussions & city walks with young people
  - in-depth case studies of formal, non-formal, and informal practices of youth participation consisting of ethnographic observation, group discussions and biographical interviews
- Participatory action research projects led by young people on their own issues.

In summary, PARTISPACE findings suggest that youth participation is **relational** (not individualised), based on experiences of **recognition**, **political** (but not politics) and often **conflictual**. Participation is rooted in everyday life practices and struggles structured by social inequalities, inclusion and exclusion. It evolves in public spaces and thus includes claims to be a part of, and attempts to take part in, society.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Information, reports and working papers can be accessed at: [www.partispace.eu/downloads](http://www.partispace.eu/downloads)

Further PARTISPACE Policy Briefs: Policy Brief no. 1 project summary for policy and practice  
Policy Brief no. 2 recognize diversity of styles  
Policy Brief no. 4 biographies of participation  
Policy Brief no. 5 learning participation  
Policy Brief no. 6 address conflicts as participation

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	<b>Spaces and Styles of Participation.</b> Formal, non-formal and informal possibilities of young people's participation in European cities <b>(PARTISPACE)</b>
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<b>CONSORTIUM</b>	ALMA MATER STUDIORUM UNIVERSITA DI BOLOGNA (UNIBO) Bologna, Italy ECOLE DES HAUTES ETUDES EN SANTE PUBLIQUE (EHESP) Rennes, France GOETEBORGS UNIVERSITET (UGOT) Göteborg, Sweden JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE UNIVERSITAET (GUF) Frankfurt/Main, Germany NEW EUROPE CENTER FOR REGIONAL STUDIES SDRUZHENIE (NEC) Plovdiv, Bulgaria HOCHSCHULE FUR ANGEWANDTE WISSENSCHAFTEN (FHS) St.Gallen, Switzerland MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY (MMU) Manchester, UK UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD (HUD) Huddersfield, UK UNIVERSITE DE CERGY-PONTOISE (UCP) Cergy-Pontoise, France YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY VAKIF (YU) Istanbul, Turkey
<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", YOUNG-5a-2014, "Societal and political engagement of young people and their perspectives on Europe"
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