



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

June 2018



PARTISPACE Policy brief no. 6

## ADDRESSING CONFLICTS AS MOMENTS OF PARTICIPATION

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

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. **Conflicts are moments of participation** in which claims for inclusion face mechanisms of exclusion.

This policy brief is concerned with the **conflictual structure of participation and the participatory potential of conflict**. It gives recommendations on dealing with social conflict in a way that recognises the needs and claims of young people involved and empowers and supports their participation. It is addressed primarily to **policy makers at local level** who are concerned with conflicts of young people in public space, to **practitioners** in educational contexts such as school and youth work, and also to the **police** as responsible for maintaining public order. However, findings and recommendations are also relevant for national and European policy makers concerned with youth participation.

### KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. **Recognise that in diverse societies claims for participation are necessarily conflicting**

Young people develop different needs and interests which may be in conflict with each other as well as with institutional perspectives. In diverse societies, this is normal and essential for democracy.

→ **Young people need possibilities to enact conflicts and expressions of difference.** This applies to all spaces in which young people are present such as school, university, training, employment, streets, parks, squares, youth centres, shopping malls, residential care and the internet.

## 2. Non-conformist claims of participation should not be criminalised, especially where emerging from conditions of inequality and precariousness

Especially on the margins of society, young people's **identities are structured by inequality, stigmatization and repression**. Accepting conflicts as participation does not necessarily mean giving way to all claims but recognizing young people's attempts to find their place in society.

**Street musicians, Eskisehir**, represent a counter-culture in a double sense – they are Kurdish playing Kurdish music and they practice an alternative lifestyle: *“We are not welcome, they cannot accept our music style. Even if we became a part of the mosaic of the city, we are a black part of it.”*

→ Accepting conflicts and offering dialogue is a way of recognizing **the diversity of young people's contributions to society** rather than silencing them in a 'preventative' way.

## 3. Policy makers and practitioners who want to empower young people's participation must not be afraid of conflict

Conflicts are often seen as barriers towards participation but often they are moments of participation and lived democracy where young people are actively searching for solutions to real life concerns. Also in formal representation settings, young people struggle to make them fit to their needs:

**Student Committee, Zurich**, is a student representation of a private grammar school. The mandate is limited to social activities and they do not have a vote in the school board. They see themselves trying to *“change things that never get changed ... We can't change the teachers either ... fire them and hire new ones ... just trivial things like copy cards or an event. Sometimes it's like a fight to say what I want and that they take me seriously ... At the end of the day, they [the teachers] are a superpower.”*

→ Being open for enacting conflict requires reflexivity of professionals. The **PARTISPACE training module** provides insight and practical exercise aimed at supporting reflexivity in policy and practice (→ [www.partispace.eu/downloads/trainingmodule](http://www.partispace.eu/downloads/trainingmodule)).

## 4. Participation is learned 'by doing' in everyday life – also from conflicts

Learning participation and citizenship happens most effectively through experiences of practice and conflict in public spaces such as streets, squares, parks, institutions, or the internet rather than in formalized settings. This includes learning from and reflecting on experiences with conflict:

**Girls group, Frankfurt**: A group of young girls have discovered and conquered a youth centre as stage for experimenting with gender roles and youth cultural practice. They constantly provoke conflicts with staff: *“We do what we want, we're our own youth workers. They [youth workers] only pretend taking us seriously.”*

→ **Policy** needs to ensure young people have **opportunities to experience** social & political participation beyond the classroom in everyday spaces.

→ **Practitioners can offer possibilities of reflection** through dialogue and recognition

## 5. Towards a European Charter of Youth Rights

**A European Charter of Youth Rights would be a powerful sign of recognition of young people** empowering them in situations of conflict. Such a Charter should be a dynamic and open process co-created by young people and put forward by the *Structured Dialogue* and the *Youth Partnership* of European Commission and Council of Europe. The EU might give an example by making funding from programmes like ERASMUS+ and the Youth Guarantee conditional to subscribing such a Charter. Local governments in Frankfurt and Manchester are already moving in this direction.

## ABOUT THE PARTISPACE PROJECT

PARTISPACE 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 the 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. 3 spaces of participation
- Policy Brief no. 4 biographies of participation
- Policy Brief no. 5 learning 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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<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: 1,985,711.00 €
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