

Principles for child and youth participation

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High-quality child and youth participation that values young people and creates benefits for all sides does not happen on its own but requires appropriate framework conditions. Further helpful information (in German) on the impact and legal basis of child and youth participation can be found at www.jugendbeteiligung.at.

Young people have a [right to participation](#). This attitude shapes not only the daily work with children and young people, but also projects and processes that are implemented specifically for the participation of young people.

Young people (under the age of 30) are not a homogeneous group and reflect the diversity of society. Their diversity must therefore be recognised and adequately taken into account. Diversity characteristics are considered in their interplay (intersectionality). Relevant aspects may include ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical abilities, age, nationality and social background (= internal, non-variable dimensions) as well as socio-economic background, level of education, place of residence, family status, religious affiliation and world views (= external, variable dimensions).

Participation of children and young people is an opportunity to shape political processes and thus society in a sustainable way. Participation strengthens the understanding of democracy and identification (with the living environment), promotes solidarity and a sense of responsibility, fosters social cohesion and encourages shared solutions.

The following principles for effective child and youth participation highlight which aspects need to be taken into account. They are listed in alphabetical order and do not represent a prioritisation. The specific implementation must be adapted, formulated and designed specifically for each participation format, whereby the aim should be to implement the principles as comprehensively as possible.

Accessibility

Commitment

Continuity

Diversity and inclusion

Documentation and evaluation

Expertise

Intergenerational dialogue

Involvement of the social environment

Non-partisanship

Public outreach

Respect and appreciation

Safety and protection

Self-efficacy and the joy of joint actions

Spaces for encounters

Support

Variety of methods

Voluntariness and self-determination

Accessibility

Information, activities and venues are organised in such a way that they are accessible to all children and young people interested without barriers or costs. This is also reflected in the open invitation to participate. A variety of working methods are used to appeal to young people in all their diversity. Special attention is paid to ensure that the active participation of (socially) disadvantaged groups and young people with disabilities is supported and encouraged. The participants' support needs are assessed in advance and taken into account in all phases - from planning to implementation and follow-up. The time frame is organised in such a way that as many young people as possible can take part.

All information is communicated in a way that is understandable for everyone involved, ensuring that the participation process and its content are transparent and comprehensible. Barrier-free communication is also taken into account in documentation and public outreach. Effort is also taken to ensure that digital formats are accessible and usable for all participants.

Commitment

At the beginning of the participation process, the organisers clarify the extent to which the outcomes can be binding and communicate this transparently to all participants. The results developed by the young participants are comprehensibly recorded and made accessible. The organizational or political decision-makers are responsible for providing the resources required to implement the results.

Continuity

Participation is a continuous process - regardless of whether it is a one-time activity or a complex, long-term project. Every opportunity of participation includes preparation and follow-up work as well as continuous involvement of all participants. The organisers ensure that the young people's issues and recommendations can be passed on to e.g. political decision-makers and thus become effective.

Diversity and inclusion

The diversity of perspectives is seen as an enrichment for the entire process. All young participants are supported according to their needs. No one is singled out because of individual characteristics, forced into a special role or burdened with additional expectations. Care is taken not to exclude anyone and to give everyone the opportunity to participate. To ensure that all voices are heard, targeted measures are taken to include underrepresented groups. In order to create an inclusive environment, diversity should not only be reflected among participants, but also accompanying persons.

Documentation and evaluation

The steps and results of the participation process are continuously documented and made available to all participants in an understandable, comprehensible and transparent manner. Feedback from all participants regarding the framework conditions, the process and the results is collected and considered. All experiences - whether problems, challenges, successes or failures - can also be utilised for future participation processes.

Expertise

Children and young people have valuable expertise on the reality of their own lives. The experiences of all participants are respected and included in the participation process as long as they are in line with principles such as respect, diversity and democracy. If necessary, professional expertise is brought in for planning, implementation and follow-up.

Intergenerational dialogue

During the participation process, an open and respectful dialogue takes place between participants from different age groups. This dialogue promotes mutual understanding of the diverse needs and perspectives of each generation.

Involvement of the social environment

The entire environment is considered in the participation process (e.g. local politics, other users of the public space, local associations and institutions). Depending on the age and needs of the young participants, relatives and care givers are provided with transparent access to information about the participation process.

Non-partisanship

Children and young people are encouraged to think independently and politically, without being instrumentalized for a political agenda. There is non-partisanship with regard to political parties, denominations or ideological positions. The organisers support the young participants by taking a (reflected) stand for their needs and interests.

Public outreach

The participation process and its results are made public in order to convey the concerns of young people to society. Various communication channels such as social media, press releases and public events are used to inform the general public. This ensures that the concerns and opinions of young people are not only taken into account in the participation process, but are also visible in society.

Respect and appreciation

It is the responsibility of the organisers to create the necessary framework conditions for respectful interaction. Cooperation between all those involved is based on a dialogue on equal footing in which different opinions are taken seriously and appreciated. The time invested by young people who volunteer, often in their free time, is valued appropriately.

Safety and protection

Participation needs a safe framework. This means a supportive environment, respectful interaction and consideration of the individual needs of the participants. To ensure this, a corresponding protection concept is applied. This includes precautions against all forms of violence and discrimination as well as clear procedures to follow in case of incidents. All those involved are informed about the protection concept and requested to comply with it. In addition, contact persons are available during activities to ensure compliance with the protection concept.

Self-efficacy and the joy of joint actions

Children and young people are actively involved in all phases of a participation process and consciously experience how they can help shape it. Qualified support helps the young participants to strengthen their confidence in their own abilities and promote solution-orientated thinking and action. Positive experiences and (partial) successes are made visible and celebrated.

Spaces for encounters

Throughout the participation process, spaces are created for encounters, either on site or in digital format. This can range from communication channels set up in advance, onboard meetings, to sufficient time for informal exchanges in the activity programme. These spaces are not only complementary elements but also contribute significantly to the success of the participation process. They make it easier for the young participants to build trust in each other and work together.

Support

The organisers clarify the time, personnel and financial resources in advance and define the framework for the participation process. They establish the link with the decision-making structures (politics, administration, schools, etc.) and ensure that the processes are suitable for children and young people. People with appropriate pedagogical and methodological training or experience accompany and support the young participants and ensure that a protection concept is followed. They are also responsible for transparently informing all participants on the onset about the intentions and objectives of the participation process.

Variety of methods

Various methods and approaches are used to meet the different needs of children and young people. In particular, non-formal learning methods are applied, as their interactive and dynamic nature fosters active participation. The selected methods help to make the participation process engaging while maintaining the focus on the content. A key aim is to strengthen motivation and commitment by choosing age-appropriate methods that are inclusive and appealing to young people. This allows all participants to discover and develop their own strengths.

Voluntariness and self-determination

Children and young people take part voluntarily and in a self-determined way. This also implies the possibility of dropping out at any time. They decide for themselves which thematic aspects they would like to focus on. The young participants play a decisive role in determining which results are recorded at the end of the participation process.

Responsible for the content: National Working Group on Youth Dialogue and Youth Participation
c/o Coordination Office for Youth Dialogue at the Austrian Youth Council, www.jugendbeteiligung.at

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