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Participation and Youth Empowerment Through Civic Education

Best practices, participatory activities and
tools for youth civic engagement



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Introduction

Civic participation gives young people opportunities to express their views, contribute to decisions that affect their communities and take an active role in democratic life. Civic education can support this process by providing young people with the knowledge, skills and practical tools needed to understand social and democratic processes, engage with others and turn ideas into action.

This collection brings together **real examples of youth civic engagement from the Balkans**, highlighting initiatives, workshops and participatory experiences that give young people an active role in addressing community issues and contributing to democratic dialogue. Alongside these examples, the collection presents practical approaches and resources that can be adapted to different local contexts.

The experiences presented focus on **learning by doing**: through discussion, collaboration, storytelling, simulations and engagement with real-life issues, young people can develop the confidence and competences to participate meaningfully in civic and democratic life.

What can civic participation develop?

Civic competences

Understanding community needs, democratic processes and opportunities for participation.

Dialogue & collaboration

Working with peers, communities and stakeholders to exchange perspectives and develop shared solutions.

Critical thinking & active participation

Identifying issues, assessing different perspectives and taking informed action.

Awareness of EU youth priorities

Connecting local experiences and concerns with broader European priorities for youth participation and democratic engagement.

Democratic values

Promoting inclusion, respect, equality, participation and shared responsibility at the local level.

Youth voices shaping the future of democracy

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Tirana, Albania

YouthDecide 2040 is a European initiative that gives young people an active role in imagining and discussing the future of democracy. Through a series of participatory workshops, young people are invited to reflect on democratic life, share their perspectives and collectively explore possible futures.

On 21 March 2026, a National Workshop was held in Tirana, bringing young participants together in an interactive process based on discussion, creative exercises and collective reflection. Rather than approaching civic education only through the transmission of knowledge, the workshop created a space for participants to contribute their own ideas and perspectives and engage with different views.

The methodology is based on participatory foresight: participants explore possible futures and work together to develop visions of how democracy could evolve. The process also introduces different forms of democratic innovation and participation, connecting reflection about the future with practical examples of how citizens can take part in decision-making.



What makes it relevant?

The Tirana workshop shows how civic education can be connected to active participation and co-creation. Young people are given a structured opportunity to express their views, listen to others and contribute to a collective discussion about democratic life.

The approach can support the development of dialogue, critical thinking, collaboration and civic participation, while encouraging young people to see themselves as active contributors to the future of their communities and societies.

Explore the initiative:

<https://youthdecide2040.eu/home>

<https://youthdecide2040.eu/national-workshops>

Brezovica/Brezovicë, Kosovo

In July 2026, the Council of Europe organised a three-day **citizens' assembly simulation** in Brezovica/Brezovicë, Kosovo. The activity brought together 30 participants from nine municipalities, alongside representatives of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities and the Ministry of Local Government Administration. Its aim was to provide participants with first-hand experience of **deliberative democracy** and of how citizens can work collectively to develop recommendations for public authorities.

The simulation allowed participants to experience the different stages of a participatory decision-making process. The activity followed a structured progression from information and discussion to collective recommendations, voting and institutional follow-up. The overall process can be summarised as:

INFORM → DELIBERATE → DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS → VOTE → RESPOND



Citizens' Assembly Simulation, Brezovica/Brezovicë, Kosovo, July 2026

What the methodology shows

The simulation highlights several elements that can contribute to meaningful civic participation.

Informed participation is established through access to reliable information and different perspectives before participants are asked to formulate proposals. This creates a common basis for discussion and supports more informed contributions.

Deliberation and dialogue give participants the opportunity to listen to different viewpoints, exchange arguments and work towards shared conclusions. Participation therefore becomes a collective process rather than simply the expression of individual opinions.

The transition from discussion to **concrete recommendations** gives the process a clear outcome. Participants are involved in transforming their reflections into proposals that can be prioritised and communicated.

Finally, the connection with **public authorities and institutional follow-up** gives the process a dimension beyond the workshop itself. The preparation of an institutional response plan demonstrates how participatory processes can create a link between citizens' recommendations and institutional action.

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A transferable model for youth participation

Although the simulation was not designed exclusively for young people, its structure can be adapted to youth civic education. The methodology provides a framework for connecting **civic knowledge with practical participation**, while allowing the topic, level of complexity and roles to be adjusted to the participants and local context.

A youth-focused version could follow the same five-stage progression:

1. Information

Building a shared understanding of a local issue through accessible information and different perspectives.

2. Deliberation

Discussing the issue, exchanging viewpoints and considering possible responses.

3. Co-creation

Developing concrete proposals or recommendations in groups.

4. Collective decision-making

Prioritising or voting on the proposals developed by participants.

5. Dialogue and follow-up

Presenting the results to relevant stakeholders and creating opportunities for further discussion.

Key takeaway

The Kosovo experience demonstrates how civic education can combine **information, dialogue and action** within a structured participatory process. By allowing participants to move from understanding an issue to developing and prioritising collective proposals, the simulation turns democratic participation into a practical learning experience.

Resources for further exploration

https://www.coe.int/en/web/pristina/news/-/asset_publisher/yUT5dJfWbvyJ/content/citizens-assembly-simulation-pioneering-local-deliberative-democracy

<https://rm.coe.int/how-to-organise-a-deliberative-process-at-the-local-level-a-guide-for-/1680b264af>

U-Report Western Balkans

U-Report Western Balkans is a youth engagement platform developed by UNICEF and available across **Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro**. It provides young people with an accessible channel to express their views on issues affecting their lives and communities through online polls and consultations.

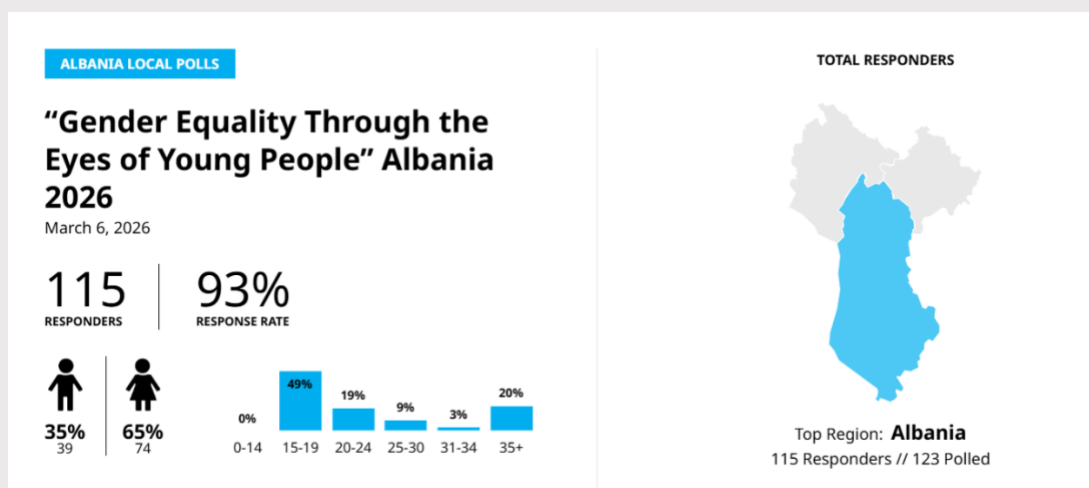
The model connects **youth voice, data collection and dialogue with decision-makers**. Instead of relying only on formal meetings or face-to-face participation, it creates an additional channel through which young people can contribute their perspectives and make their priorities visible.

A digital channel for youth voice

U-Report is built around a relatively simple mechanism: young people respond to short consultations on specific topics, and their answers are collected and presented as data.

The Western Balkans platform includes consultations addressing issues such as **education, volunteering, human rights, youth participation and access to local services**.

The importance of the model lies in what happens beyond the individual response. When responses are collected from a wider group, they can provide an overview of young people's experiences and priorities and become a basis for further discussion with organisations and institutions.



Screenshot from: <https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/opinions/>

A concrete example

The Western Balkans platform provides a range of published consultations that show how the model can be applied to different topics.

For example, consultations have asked young people about **local services and human rights**, generating data that can be used to identify perceptions and priorities among young respondents. Other consultations have focused on issues

such as **youth well-being and gender equality**, demonstrating how the same participation mechanism can be applied to different areas of young people's lives.

These examples illustrate an important methodological point: a digital consultation does not need to cover a broad range of topics to be useful. A focused set of questions around a clearly defined issue can generate information that can subsequently support discussion and decision-making.

From digital participation to local action

The U-Report model can be particularly useful when digital participation is connected to **offline civic engagement**.

A youth organisation could use a short poll to identify how young people perceive a local issue, analyse the responses and then bring the findings into a workshop. Participants could use the results as evidence to discuss the issue, develop recommendations and present them to relevant stakeholders.

This creates a bridge between **digital voice and participatory action**, allowing young people's experiences to inform a wider civic process.

What can be transferred from the model?

The main transferable element is not the platform itself, but the principle of creating a **clear connection between asking young people for their views and using those views afterwards**.

For youth organisations and local initiatives, this can mean:

- using short consultations to identify priorities before a workshop;
- collecting wider input from young people who are not directly involved in an activity;
- using consultation results as evidence during discussions;
- combining quantitative responses with qualitative discussion;
- presenting findings to stakeholders as a basis for dialogue;
- using the results to inform recommendations or subsequent activities.

This approach can make participation more **evidence-based, inclusive and connected to concrete follow-up**, while maintaining a relatively accessible entry point for young people.

Explore the tool

<https://westernbalkans.ureport.in/>

Best Practices for Meaningful Youth Participation

The practices explored in this collection reveal several elements that can make youth participation more meaningful and effective. Although the initiatives use different methods and operate in different contexts, they share an approach that places young people at the centre of the participation process.

Creating spaces for youth voice

Meaningful participation starts with giving young people accessible and structured opportunities to express their experiences, views and priorities. This can take place through digital consultations, facilitated discussions, creative activities or deliberative formats. The method may change according to the context, but young people need to have a genuine opportunity to contribute rather than simply receive information.

Connecting participation with real issues

Participation becomes more relevant when it is linked to issues that young people can recognise in their everyday lives and communities. Working around a concrete topic allows civic education to move beyond theoretical knowledge and become an opportunity to explore problems, understand different perspectives and consider possible responses.

Turning perspectives into collective learning

Individual contributions become more valuable when they are brought into a process of dialogue and exchange. Participatory activities can help young people listen to different experiences, discuss contrasting perspectives and develop ideas together. This collective dimension is particularly important for building competences such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and negotiation.

Using evidence to inform participation

The experiences examined highlight the value of backing participation with evidence. Poll results, observations and testimonies help participants spot patterns, clarify needs and understand an issue better, turning personal experiences into concrete proposals.

Creating pathways towards action

Participation should not end when a discussion or consultation is over. Its impact can be strengthened when participants have the opportunity to formulate recommendations, communicate their findings or engage with relevant stakeholders. Establishing a clear connection between participation and follow-up also makes the process more tangible for young people and helps demonstrate how civic engagement can contribute to local change.

From Balkan Practices to Local Action

The examples explored in the Balkans show that meaningful youth participation works best when young people are given a concrete issue to investigate, opportunities to contribute their own perspectives, tools to collect and discuss information, and pathways to engage with relevant stakeholders. The LOCT-IN activity in Tempio Pausania (Sardinia, Italy) brings these principles together in a local participatory process focused on public spaces, accessibility and inclusion.



From knowledge to participation

The activity begins with a training on local governance and public space management, providing participants with the institutional and legal knowledge needed to understand how public spaces are managed and which responsibilities belong to different municipal bodies. This creates the foundation for informed participation, rather than relying only on personal impressions.

Observing and collecting evidence

Participants then move from learning to first-hand investigation. Working in small teams, they observe selected public spaces using the LOCT-IN Observation Checklist, document their findings through photographs and notes, and conduct brief conversations with people using the spaces. This combines structured observation with community perspectives, reflecting the value of evidence and youth voice highlighted by initiatives such as U-Report.

From individual observations to shared findings

The collected information is brought back into a synthesis workshop, where participants compare findings, identify recurring patterns and distinguish between isolated issues and broader needs. They then develop and prioritise

recommendations, considering their relevance, feasibility and the responsibilities of local institutions.

Bringing youth perspectives into institutional dialogue

The process culminates in a structured roundtable with municipal representatives. Participants present what they observed, explain what the findings mean in relation to the relevant legal and institutional framework, and formulate concrete recommendations. This creates a direct connection between youth participation and local decision-making, echoing the deliberative and dialogue-based approaches found in the Balkan examples.

From participation to a civic output

The process concludes with a Local Observation Report, bringing together the evidence, findings, recommendations and institutional responses. In this way, LOCT-IN does not treat participation as a one-off consultation: it creates a sequence from learning and observation to evidence, collective analysis, dialogue and follow-up.

The Tempio Pausania experience therefore brings together the main practices identified across the Balkan examples: creating meaningful spaces for youth voice, connecting participation with real local issues, supporting young people's perspectives with evidence, learning through dialogue and collaboration, involving relevant stakeholders, and creating a clear pathway from participation to action. By combining these elements within one process, LOCT-IN translates the lessons from existing participation initiatives into a locally grounded experience in which young people can investigate a real community issue, develop informed recommendations and bring their perspectives into dialogue with local institutions.



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