



Citizen participation

Key message

There is a huge lack of awareness on the concept of “citizen participation” and many preconceptions which reduce its use by civilian population. Youngsters need to get knowledge about the meaning of citizen participation to become direct participants of the management of their community and make use of the democratic means of action as an alternative to violent action groups (extremists).

Key words: Citizen participation, juvenile empowerment, preconceptions

Summary

A first step for young people to participate actively in their community is to integrate them in the process of political decision-making to raise their awareness about citizen joint management (institution-citizenship). Citizen participation is referred to a new way of institutionalisation of political relations based on a major involvement of citizenship as well as in the design, implementation and control of public policies. Bringing this scheme of democratic action closer to youngsters promotes juvenile empowerment and non-violent attitudes in conflict situations.

Module	Group size	Group age	Duration
• Prevention	• small • medium	• 16 - 19 • 20 - 24	• 15 min • 30 min

Purpose

- Introduce concepts related with active citizen participation.
- Recognise what is a myth by questioning its meaning.
- Identify and analyse myths and false beliefs about the role played by citizenship in public participation.
- Launch and encourage a counter-narrative to extremist speech by raising interest on the existing ways of action and resources.

Description

Introduce the subject of citizen participation. *What does it refer to? How does it work? Is there a way for young people to participate?*

Step 1: Make small groups and distribute from a list one false myth to each group. Ask participants to say whether they consider the statement is true or false and to give arguments that support their position. You can make rotations increasing the complexity of myths.

Step 2: Each group exposes which statements it agrees and disagrees with presenting arguments.

Step 3: Share a document to each group to introduce and briefly explain the concept of citizen participation (see handouts). Include in this document a text with the basic principles of citizen participation in this town (e.g. article from the Citizen Participation Regulations of the City Council). Read with the group and try to identify and contrast all the concepts which were mentioned in the myths.

Materials needed

paper, pen and General Disposal of Citizen Participation Regulations (e.g. Article from the Citizen Participation Regulations of the City Council).

Methodology

discussion board

Advice for Trainer

- Complete the document about Citizen participation with news that deal with its implementation and effectiveness.
- Encourage an open dialogue and do not impose your own opinion or the principles to be included in the debate.
- Evaluate the participants' attitude towards the democratic principles and the citizen joint management functioning. Explore the personal experiences and motivations.
- Structured Dialogue: Initiative of the European Commission to train young people in active participation and citizens.

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/dialogue_es

Source / Literature

García A. (n.a.). Materiales didácticos para trabajar la participación ciudadana. *Instituto Paule Freire and Ayuntamiento de Sevilla*.

Handouts

Some example of Myths (orientative use):

- *The responsibility of what is occurring in our town belongs to its political leaders*
- *Educating in democratic values at school is enough to educate about participation*
- *The debate between citizenship and its political leaders does not serve, everything is slower,*
- *Migrant people should not participate, their proposals are only focused on their collective interest*
- *We should first hear and meet the needs of the Spanish population; etc.*

WHAT IS CITIZEN PARTICIPATION?

It refers to a new form of institutionalisation of political relations, which is based on a greater involvement of citizens and their civic associations in both the formulation and execution and control of public policies. (Eduardo Bathía Gautier)

It gives an active role to citizens by giving them greater participation in decision-making on issues that affect them beyond that which gives them the right to vote in elections. Participation turns citizens into real protagonists in the political and social life of their society.

That young people actively participate in their community means that they are integrated into this process of political decision-making on issues that directly affect them or the community in which they live.

Active citizenship is learned on the ground, that is, by participating and becoming involved. But for young people to actively participate, they must have the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions, and engage in actions and activities as to contribute to building a better society (*Preamble to the European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life*).



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