

“Have Your Say!”



Manual
on the Revised European Charter
on the Participation
of Young People
in Local
and Regional Life



HAVE YOUR SAY!

Manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

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Preface

The aim of the Council of Europe's youth policy is to provide young people with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to play a full part in all aspects of society. The programme of the European Youth Centres in Budapest and in Strasbourg and the projects supported by the European Youth Foundation are living examples of the involvement of young people in exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens. It is often at the local level – in schools, youth and cultural centres, in local youth councils, in participative budget projects, in sports and cultural projects, that youth participation is meaningful to the lives of most young people.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the political assembly of elected representatives from the grassroots levels of the Council of Europe member States, is deeply committed to fostering greater participation of young people in the democratic structures and processes of our societies, particularly at the levels at which its representatives undertake their work.

Through its work to find responses to the challenges of modern society, the Congress issues policy recommendations and encourages local and regional authorities to implement them. If these policies are to be successful and meet the needs of all citizens, the Congress firmly believes that citizens, especially young people, should be actively involved in the decision and policy-making processes. It is precisely at the local and regional levels that a culture of citizen participation can most effectively take root.

The Congress supports the Council of Europe's system of co-management, in line with the decision-making principles developed and espoused by its youth sector in its forty-odd years of existence. This system, which involves the collective taking of decisions on all issues by public authorities in partnership with youth representatives and their organisations, takes young people, their concerns and their ability to take decisions and accept responsibility seriously. It is through co-management systems that young people can best be encouraged to engage with the authorities and in society. This is of particular importance at a time when research shows young people are increasingly rejecting traditional methods to have their say.

The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life is the key instrument in promoting co-management at regional and local levels. Indeed it was itself produced by a group of young people and local and regional authority representatives working in equal partnership. The Charter is aimed principally at local and regional authorities and is a guide to implementing sectoral policies that will benefit both young people and other citizens.

It is also a tool that young people can use to encourage local and regional authorities to implement policies in full consultation with them, as well as for co-operation between young people, youth organisations, and local and regional authorities.

Young people must have the right, means, space, opportunity and support to participate in decision and policy making. The aim of the Charter is to promote this process. There are many examples to illustrate the importance

of meaningful youth participation at local and regional levels, but much work still needs to be done to achieve this goal throughout Europe, and the manual “Have Your Say!” will no doubt serve to further this process.

The first edition of this manual has been one of the most successful publications of the Council of Europe youth sector. This bears witness to the fact that Europe is moving forward and increasingly accepting the importance of citizen participation. This manual is an important and valuable tool in this process, and we invite everyone, and especially local and regional authorities, to use it to promote a society which better reflects young people’s needs throughout Europe.

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Introduction

Welcome to *Have Your Say! – a manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*.

Youth participation is not an end in itself, but a means of achieving positive changes in young people's lives and of building a better society. In recent years, there have been a growing number of initiatives promoting and strengthening youth involvement at very different levels – international, regional, national and local. New tools have also been created for those working in this area. One such tool is the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (hereinafter referred to as the Charter), adopted in May 2003 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.¹

Participation of young people was also one of the three main themes of the European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation, organised by the Council of Europe, in partnership with the European Commission and the European Youth Forum (2006/2007). This manual is one of the initiatives undertaken in the framework of this campaign.

The revised charter is designed as a tool to support young people, youth workers, organisations and local authorities in promoting and enhancing meaningful youth participation at local level across Europe and it may be used in a variety of different ways. Some users might be able to implement it immediately, while others might need support in order to learn how to make the best use of the revised charter in their own environment. The questions: “What do I do with the charter?”; “How do I use it in practice?” or “Why should I be interested in this document?”, have often been asked by those working in youth participation at local level. The aim of this manual is to help find the right answers for different European contexts.

The manual is not a ready-to-use guide on how to implement the charter at a local level – the situation varies enormously throughout Europe. It is rather a collection of reflections and questions that can help those working at local level to find their own ways of achieving meaningful participation by young people. The publication is divided into eight chapters, each of them focusing on a different aspect related to youth participation and the charter itself.

Chapter 1 provides a basic introduction to youth participation by presenting definitions, principles and factors influencing participation. Chapter 2 contains details about the charter, its content and target groups and also some background information about the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. Chapter 3 explains the charter's approach to youth participation, which is based on the five key words – right, means, space, opportunity and support. Chapter 4 presents possible ways of using the charter in practice,



1. The name of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe was changed on 14 October 2003 to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The latter will be used throughout this publication.



focusing on a step-by-step approach that can be used at a local level. Youth projects play a very important role in promoting and strengthening youth participation and Chapter 5 looks at issues related to organising a youth project. The charter can be best used if local actors interested in youth participation co-operate and work in partnership. Thus, Chapter 6 provides ideas on how to develop good co-operation at a local level, especially between youth organisations and local authorities. The charter can also be seen as a tool for the creation of local youth policy, and Chapter 7 explains how this document can be used to formulate or to review youth policies at community or regional level. Finally, Chapter 8 presents a number of educational activities that can be used as learning aids related to youth participation and especially to the revised charter. In addition, each chapter contains sections called “reflection time”. These are a collection of questions that can help a reader to discover the best ways of using the charter in his/her own context.

This manual is the result of co-operation between the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) and the Congress which started many years ago. Indeed, the foundation for what was to become the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life was laid at the first and second conference on youth policies, organised by the then Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, in Lausanne (June 1988) and in Llangollen (September 1991) respectively. The revised charter, to which this manual is a companion, resulted from a conference to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the original 1992 charter. This conference, entitled “Young People – Actors in their Towns and Regions”, was organised by the Congress, in partnership with the DYS, in Cracow, Poland, on 7 and 8 March 2002. Apart from evaluating progress made in the field of youth participation during the charter’s ten years of existence, the participants furthermore called for a revision of the charter, in order to take account of new challenges faced by young people in contemporary society. Since the adoption of the revised charter, the Congress and the DYS have co-operated on initiatives to promote its implementation; the Congress itself continues to work on issues of concern to young people, at local and regional levels, through its various structures and texts.

This manual could not have been created without the contribution of several individuals. Special thanks are due to Żaneta Goździk-Ormel, for her dedicated work as the manual’s author. Words of thanks are also owed to the reference group for their involvement, support and advice.

Chapter 1

introduction to participation



1.1. Basic definitions and approaches to youth participation

When dealing with youth participation, one can observe a variety of practices as well as a diversity of approaches and theories. Youth workers, youth organisations and local authorities approach the concept of participation from different angles due to the diversity of their backgrounds and experience. The motivation behind their work in the area of youth participation is often very different too: some may be motivated by social change and the building of more democratic societies; while others may be interested in the development of young people or may simply be motivated by their own political aims. The debate related to different aspects of youth participation is an ongoing one and various answers can be given to the same questions.

Reflection time

1. *How does your community/organisation define youth (age limit, psychological criteria or other criteria)?*
2. *Who are the young people you work with? To what extent are they a homogenous group?*
3. *How is “youth participation” understood in your organisation/institution?*
4. *How do you know this? Is there an agreed definition/approach or rather your own assumption and perception?*
5. *What does your organisation want to achieve in the area of youth participation?*

If answers to the above questions were collected from youth workers, leaders, authorities’ representatives or other people interested in youth participation throughout Europe, the result would probably be as many ideas as persons asked. It is not realistic to expect that it is possible to create one definition or approach, agreed on by everybody. Here are a few examples of how some organisations or groups understand youth participation:

- “In a nutshell participation means to be involved, to have tasks and to share and take over responsibility. It means to have access and to be included.”²

2. Lauritzen, P., keynote speech on participation presented at the Training Course on the development and implementation of participation projects at local and regional level, the European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, June 2006.



- Participation means “helping to steer and to form”.³
- “Participation is about talking and listening, expressing your own views and listening while others express theirs. It can mean working together for a solution or a course of action. Participating doesn’t just mean becoming a young activist, it can also mean taking advantage of opportunities that are being offered, like joining clubs to learn a new skill, or groups that feel strongly about an issue.”⁴

Reflection time

1. *What are the similarities between your understanding of youth participation and the definitions presented above?*
2. *What are the main differences?*

For the purpose of this manual, youth participation will be understood as defined in the preamble of the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life:⁵

“Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.”

The above definition goes beyond a narrow understanding of youth participation solely as political involvement or participation in youth councils. It stresses that to participate means having influence on and responsibility for decisions and actions that affect the lives of young people or are simply important to them. In practice, therefore, this could mean voting in local elections as well as setting up a youth organisation or an Internet forum to exchange information about hobbies and interests or other creative ways of spending free time. The charter’s definition of participation also shows a shift in the approach to young people and youth involvement. Young people are not treated as victims or as a vulnerable group that needs protection and help (the so-called “problem-based approach”). They are not treated as objects of adults’ intervention, with the adults assuming that they know what is best for young people. Young people are now seen as active players in organisations or in community life; they are seen as partners with lots of potential, talents and strengths. They should have the opportunity to express their needs and to find ways of satisfying them. An African proverb says “the one wearing the shoes knows exactly where they hurt”. That is why young people must be involved in dealing with issues that affect them and why they should be supported by others rather than instructed by them.

3. Jans, M. and De Backer, K., *Youth and social participation. Elements for a practical theory*, Flemish Youth Council JePI, Brussels, 2002, p. 2.

4. *Discussing global issues: what is participation?* UNICEF, United Kingdom, 2004, p. 1.

5. *The revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, May 2003.



Reflection time

1. *Are young people in your community/organisation seen:*
 - *as a group that needs to have its problems solved by somebody else?*
 - *as a group not wanting to take responsibility?*
 - *as a group that needs protection?*
 - *as clients that need to have everything provided?*
 - *as persons having strengths and talents?*
 - *as a group that is capable of contributing to the solving of their own problems?*
 - *as a group that wants to do things by itself (not accepting help)?*
 - *in any other way?*
2. *Is there anything that needs to be changed in the way young people are perceived in your community/organisation? If so, what?*

In the last decade youth participation has often been referred to as a right (the so-called “rights approach” to youth participation). UNICEF, for example, sees participation as a human right and therefore the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child underlines children’s right to participate. Roger Hart (author of the concept called the “ladder of participation”) says that participation is a fundamental right of citizenship because it is a way of learning what it means to be a citizen. In the Council of Europe, youth participation is perceived as “the right of young people to be included and to assume duties and responsibilities in daily life at local level as well as the right to influence the processes of their lives democratically”.⁶ Participation being a right also means that all young people can exercise this right without discrimination – no matter where they come from or what language they speak.

Youth participation can also be seen as a form of a youth-adult partnership. “Partnership is about doing things together. It is about listening to everyone’s voice and taking different ideas seriously”⁷. In practice this means that aims, objectives, roles, responsibilities, decisions, etc., are negotiated and agreed upon, and that young people and adults know precisely:

- where they are going;
- what is expected of them;
- what they expect of others;
- how they are going to do this;
- what kind of support they are getting and from where.

The advantage of youth-adult partnership is that it brings together the skills and talents of young people and the experience and wisdom of adults. It also ensures that all individual contributions are recognised and valued, thereby motivating the partners to undertake more initiatives and projects.

6. Boukobza, E., *Keys to participation. A practitioners’ guide*, Council of Europe, 1998, p. 10.

7. Stacey, K., “Theoretical underpinnings of youth partnership accountability”, unpublished paper, Adelaide, 1998; quoted in *Youth participation handbook for organizations. A guide for organizations seeking to involve young people on boards and committees*, Government of South Australia Office for Youth, 2003, p. 15.

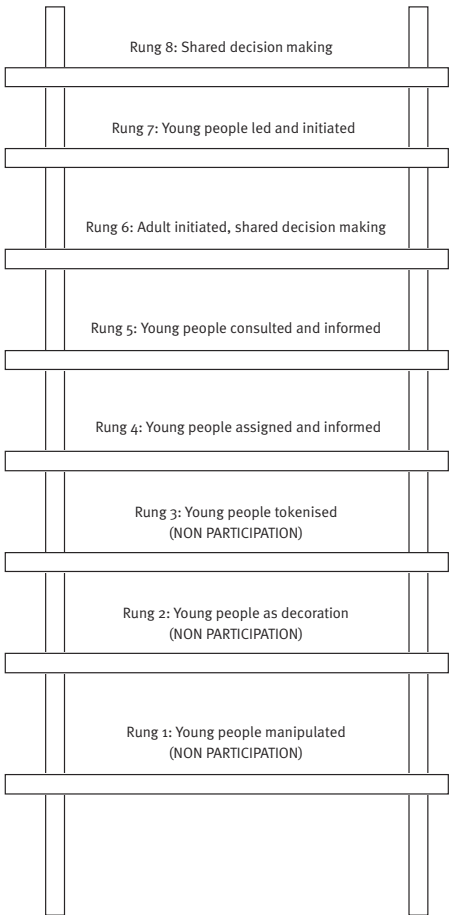




Reflection time

Look at your organisation or community. Would you say that a partnership between young people and adults already exists there?

1. If yes, what form does it take?
2. If not, why do you think it does not exist? Is there anything that can be done to promote it? What can you do?



Adapted from: Hart, R., *Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 1992

It is not enough to say that young people do or do not participate. There are different degrees to which youth can be involved or can take over responsibility, depending on the local situation, resources, needs and level of experience. Roger Hart proposes a model of the so-called “ladder of children’s participation”,⁸ which illustrates the different degrees of involvement of children and young people in projects, organisations or communities.

Roger Hart defines eight degrees of youth involvement, each of the degrees corresponding to one rung of a ladder:

Rung 8: Shared decision-making

Projects or ideas are initiated by young people, who invite the adults to take part in the decision-making process as partners.

Rung 7: Young people led and initiated

Projects or ideas are initiated and directed by young people; the adults might get invited to provide any necessary support, but a project can carry on without their intervention.

Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decision making

Adults initiate projects but young people are invited to share the decision-making power and responsibilities as equal partners.

Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed

Projects are initiated and run by adults, but young people provide advice and suggestions and are informed how these suggestions contribute to the final decisions or results.

Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed

Projects are initiated and run by adults; young people are invited to take on some specific roles or tasks within the project, but they are aware of what influence they have in reality.

Rung 3: Young people tokenised (tokenism)

8. Hart, R., *Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 1992. This model has been based on S. Arnstein's “ladder of citizen’s participation”, published as “A ladder of citizen participation”, *JAI*P, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-24.



Young people are given some roles within projects but they have no real influence on any decisions. The illusion is created (either on purpose or unintentionally) that young people participate, when in fact they have no choice about what they do and how.

Rung 2: Young people as decoration

Young people are needed in the project to represent youth as an underprivileged group. They have no meaningful role (except from being present) and – as happens with any decorations – they are put in a visible position within a project or organisation, so that they can easily be seen by outsiders.

Rung 1: Young people manipulated

Young people are invited to take part in the project, but they have no real influence on decisions and their outcomes. In fact, their presence is used to achieve some other goal, such as winning a local election, creating a better impression of an institution or securing some extra funds from institutions that support youth participation.

The ladder of youth participation can be a very useful tool for practitioners, who want to look critically at how participatory projects or initiatives work in their own communities. But this model can also falsely suggest a hierarchy of degrees of youth participation⁹ and can encourage efforts to reach the highest rungs at any price. It is therefore important to remember that the degree to which young people are or should be involved depends on the local situation, on what needs to be achieved, what experience exists, etc. It can sometimes be rather difficult to see precisely what the level of participation is within a project, either due to its complexity or to the fact that there are no clear borders between different rungs. The degree of involvement can also evolve over time.

Reflection time

1. *Where is your project or initiative on the ladder of youth participation?*
2. *How do you know this?*
3. *On which level of the ladder would your project be most effective? Why?*
4. *How can your project reach this level?*

When talking about youth participation, one can ask a very legitimate question: “participation in what?” The United Nations General Assembly distinguishes the following areas of youth participation:¹⁰

- economic participation – relates to employment and work in general, to economic development, eliminating poverty, building a stable economic situation in a society, a region or for young people as a group;
- political participation – relates to authorities and governments, public policies, exercising power, the influence on the distribution of resources at different levels;
- social participation – relates to involvement in the life of a local community, addressing local problems and challenges;
- cultural participation – relates to different forms of art and expression (visual arts, music, film, dance, etc.).

9. There are also a few other models of degrees of youth participation, which do not imply a hierarchical structure. Compare, for example, the models of Davis Driskell or Phil Treseder.

10. The United Nations Youth Agenda, *Empowering youth for development and peace* at: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/agenda.htm (last visited on 3 October 2006).



These areas can be interrelated, and sometimes when looking at an initiative or project it becomes clear that this initiative deals with more than one area. It is not easy to say which areas of participation interest young people the most, but research among British youth shows that they are mainly interested in the production and consumption of music, dance and different forms of art, as well as in sporting activities.¹¹

Reflection time

1. *What could be examples of concrete activities or projects within the four above-mentioned areas of participation?*
2. *Look at different youth initiatives that are currently taking place in your region or local community. In which areas of youth participation do most of initiatives take place? In your opinion, what is the reason for this?*
3. *In which area of youth participation is your organisation/institution involved? Why?*

-----> **1.2. Benefits of and barriers to youth participation**

Reflection time

1. *What benefits of youth participation would you like to see in your local community or your organisation?*
2. *What benefits do you already witness?*

Youth participation can bring very concrete and visible benefits, not only to young people themselves, but also to the organisations/institutions and communities they are involved in. We cannot assume, however, that participation will always bring positive results. Evidence shows that if it is dealt with in an inappropriate way (represented, for example, by the lower rungs of the ladder of participation), it might actually have a negative impact on those involved.¹²

Youth researchers and youth work practitioners indicate that meaningful youth participation:

- *Makes a positive difference in the lives of young people*

Participation should not be seen as an end, a final goal to reach, but as a means to an end or an effective way of achieving a positive change in society. Young people can contribute to this change, especially when they see positive developments in their own lives.

- *Makes young people heard*

Young people, just like other groups in society and the local community, want to have a say about different issues, want to be heard and want to have their views taken seriously. By getting involved they can express their opinions in different fora and have a chance to get their opinions taken into account.

11. Thornton, S., *Club cultures: music, media and subcultural capital*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995. Quoted after: Griffin, C., "Challenging assumptions about youth political participation: critical insights from Great Britain", Forbrig, J. (ed.), *Revisiting youth political participation. Challenges for research and democratic practice in Europe*, Council of Europe, 2005, p. 152.

12. Kirby, P. and Bryson, S., *Measuring the magic? Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision-making*, Carnegie Young People Initiative, London, 2002.



- *Stimulates young people to develop new skills, gain more confidence*

By getting involved in different initiatives young people can acquire new knowledge, develop new skills, attitudes, and leadership ability, and can form their aspirations for the future. This can happen by means of appropriate educational activities, as well as through “learning-by-doing” when fulfilling some concrete tasks. The opportunity to use these new skills and knowledge helps young people to improve their performance, as they can practice them in their immediate environment.

- *Helps adults to recognise young people’s talents and potential*

By working with young people and supporting them in achieving new goals, adults get a chance to challenge common stereotypes about youth (that young people lack the required skills or that they are not interested in community life, for example). Adults then often discover that young people are not less gifted, they just need to be given support and the opportunity to demonstrate their talents.

- *Stimulates young people to take responsibility for their own actions and decisions*

Young people learn that the one who takes decisions also carries the responsibility for the consequences (and vice versa – s/he who has responsibility can also take decisions). This means that if young people want to participate at a local level, they need to assume the ownership of their own actions.

- *Helps young people to understand how democracy works and how it should work in real life*

In a democratic system, people should be able to participate in making decisions affecting their lives. These processes can take place in the framework of various institutions or structures and at very different levels, including at local level. Participation at a local level can be a very good starting point for young people to learn more about the workings of a democracy, about its limitations and potential, and to experiment with the rules of democracy in a familiar environment.

- *Creates space for young people to use their talents and strengths for the benefit of the whole community or organisation*

Young people are often highly motivated to use and develop their strengths and talents. It is therefore very important to create opportunities for them to use these talents for the common good, so that the local community can benefit and young people can get satisfaction from their contribution.

- *Helps adults to understand the needs and the point of view of young people*

Working with young people directly and involving them in the consultation process can create an opportunity to get reliable information about young people’s needs. Some researchers claim, however, that there is little evidence to prove that consulting young people about their views and needs provides better quality information than other sources (such as consultations with parents or teachers).¹³

- *Develops adults’ skills so that they can work efficiently with young people*

When working together with young people, adults have the chance to learn how participatory work in co-operation with youth should function. However, substantial support might be needed (in the form of training courses or literature for individual study, for example) in order that adults can develop the skills necessary to work efficiently with young people.

- *Creates an opportunity for adults to share their knowledge and experience in a non-patronising way*

Young people do not always want to be told what to do. They want to explore and learn by experimenting. They also keep their eyes open and learn by observing those who have more experience and knowledge. If adults do not impose their decisions, young people are more willing to learn from them, and thereby benefit from their experience.

13. Ibid., p. 18.



- *Makes the decision-making process more representative*

Young people constitute a relatively large group within local communities. If decisions taken at a local level have an effect on the lives of different groups, all members should have a chance to be heard and to shape the final outcome, in order that their needs can be met. Therefore, if young people participate in a decision-making process, there is a greater chance that their views will be taken into account and their needs met.

- *Stimulates new approaches and ideas in solving local and regional problems*

Traditionally, young people have been involved in decision-making processes only to a limited extent, as adults have exercised power and governance. It has been observed, however, that inviting young people to co-operate in solving the local problems that concern them can bring a new perspective or new and fresh ideas, and can stimulate thinking to go beyond the traditional ways of tackling the problems. Such new ideas and methods are perhaps better suited to the development of contemporary society.

Your task:

You are already working on youth participation or you are planning to do so. You understand the importance of identifying positive changes brought into your community or organisation through the involvement of young people. The questions and suggestions below will guide you through the process of planning a change in your local environment.

Remark: this exercise is not directly related to planning and implementing a specific project. It is aimed at helping you to introduce such a change.

1. *When does your project/initiative on youth participation start?*
2. *To what extent will the project evaluation identify the changes that youth involvement has brought in your environment?*
3. *What else (apart from evaluation) needs to or could be done to properly identify the benefits of youth participation in your context?*
4. *Do you feel you have necessary skills and resources (such as time available) to do this work? What are possible ways of developing these skills and obtaining these resources?*
5. *If yes, then:*
 - *decide on which specific areas of the community/organisation operation you want to focus when identifying the benefits of youth participation;*
 - *make a step-by-step plan on how you are going to identify them;*
 - *decide on what kind of support you will need and where you can get it;*
 - *decide on when you want to do this.*
6. *If no, then:*
 - *find out who can do this for you;*
 - *decide together on which specific areas of the community/organisation operation you want to focus when identifying the benefits of youth participation;*
 - *make a step-by-step plan together on how things will be done;*
 - *decide together on what kind of support you will need and where you can get it;*
 - *decide on when the things should be done.*

Put this into action.



Those working on youth participation sometimes face challenges and obstacles. Such obstacles might originate from the general situation in a community, the accepted values, political issues, or cultural reasons, etc. Researchers¹⁴ and practitioners mention the following:

- different values and habits of young people and adults;
- different time schedules of young people and adults;
- different communication styles;
- different levels and types of experience;
- lack of skills;
- insufficient support provided to young people and adults;
- lack of expertise on how to involve young people in a meaningful way;
- different learning methods of adults and youth;
- place of youth in the social hierarchy (in some cultures young people traditionally have a very low position and little influence);
- patronising of youth by adults;
- mistrust between adults and young people;
- negative stereotypes (“all young people are ...”; “all the adults are ...”), mutual misconceptions and biases;
- lack of youth-friendly procedures and policies within organisations (for example, large amounts of formal documents to read, analyse and react to);
- the belief that it is someone else’s job to work on youth participation;
- costs related to youth participation;
- location;
- lack of information;
- lack of other necessary resources (extra time, for example);
- high turnover of young people;
- accessibility for disabled people;
- meetings that are too long;
- school commitments;
- other interests;
- belief that nothing will change, even if a young person participates;
- young people who participate are not representative of youth in general.

Reflection time

1. *What are the biggest barriers to youth participation in your local context?*
2. *What can you do to address these challenges?*
3. *Who can be your ally in this process?*

14. See the bibliography at the end of the manual.

