

# Climbing the Ladder of Participation

THEME/FOCUS: PARTICIPATION

 **Group Size**

10-20

 **Age Group**

16+

 **Total Time**

90  
Minutes

 **Level of Complexity**

2

 **Materials Needed**

Copies of the handout and to draw a ladder with the levels of participation in the floor

 **Keywords**

Youth participation, Citizenship

<b>Purpose/ Learning objective</b>	<p>This exercise provide space for critically explore on what degree we are fully participating or allowed to full participation in activities</p> <p>The objectives are to introduce the concept of the ladder of participation and to assess the degree of young people’s participation.</p>	
<b>Preparation/ Instructions for educator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Instructions step by step</b>
	30 min	<p>Start brainstorming on examples and practices of participation participants know (cultural, social, environmental, political, economical,...). You can write down these examples in a flip-chart. Then continue introducing the concept of degrees / levels of youth participation and the model of Ladder of Participation. Facilitators will find a theoretical introduction in the appendices.</p> <p>The exercise may incorporate a physical placement of participants along the working space, by locating the different steps of the ladder in the floor. In this case you can print the descriptions of each “rug” in a different piece of paper and locate them in order in the floor along the working space.</p>
	30 min	<p>Propose participants to analyse some real cases where they (or colleagues) have participated. From these real cases reflect on what stage of the ladder of participation they were. Facilitators may distribute the handout to each participant and allocate a time for reflection and clarifications.</p>
	30 min	<p>Locate papers with the titles of the ladder on the floor.</p> <p>Ask the participants to think and to stand by the relevant level of the ladder that represents best the degree of participation in their community. Let them explain the situation and why they have chosen that position.</p>

<p><b>Facilitation tips</b></p>	<p>For the debriefing avoid over-simplification and try to ensure a critical analysis of the reality. If the group is reluctant you may try to bring external examples and do the exercise with those examples.</p> <p>Potential questions could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel about the sharing results? Is the situation satisfactory?</li> <li>• Is there space for improving the level of participation?</li> <li>• Can the Ladder of Participation model support an improvement of participation at community level? How?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ideas for follow-up</b></p>	<p>Critically explore what are the levels of participation in the community for different groups (young people, women, minorities,...) Are there instruments in place to improve the situation?</p> <p>Collect ideas that could contribute to improve the levels of participation and how sense of initiative and taking responsibility may be promoted within the community.</p>
<p><b>Appendices</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handout for participants with the Ladder Rugs description</li> <li>• Theoretical Introduction to the Roger Hart's Ladder model</li> </ul>
<p><b>Source</b></p>	<p>Adapted from Rogers Hart's <i>"Children participation from Tokenism to Citizenship"</i> UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Firenze</p>

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## HAND-OUT

### Introducing Ladder of Participation

Roger Hart (the author of the concept called the Ladder of Participation) says that participation is a fundamental right of citizenship because this is the way to learn what this means to be a citizen and how to be one.

Participation being a right means also that all young people can exercise this right without discrimination – no matter the gender, the religion, where they come from, which language they speak or which culture they belong to. 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 take over the responsibility, depending on the local situation, resources, needs and level of experience.

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. The advantage of youth-adult partnership is that it brings benefits from the skills and talents of young people and from the experience and wisdom of adults. It also makes all the actors and their contribution recognised and valued, which motivates to undertake more initiatives and projects. Roger Hart proposes a model of the so-called Ladder of participation, which illustrates different degrees of involvement of children and young people in projects, organisations or communities. The model defines 8 degrees of youth involvement, each of the degrees corresponding to one ladder's rung:

It is important to remember that the degree to which young people are / should be involved depends on the context, on what needs to be achieved, what experience exists etc. Sometimes it can be rather difficult to identify precisely the level of participation within a project due to the fact that there are no clear borders between different rungs or due to the complexity of some projects. The degrees of involvement can also evolve in time.

#### Shared decision-making with adults

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

#### 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

#### Adult-initiated, shared decision making

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

#### 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

<p><b>Young people assigned and informed</b></p>	<p>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</p>
<p><b>Young people tokenized (tokenism)</b></p>	<p>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</p>
<p><b>Young people as decoration (decoration)</b></p>	<p>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</p>
<p><b>Young people manipulated</b></p>	<p>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.</p>