



Youth-Led Model

Policy Recommendations for Youth Development



Youth Participation



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1. Welcome to the BePart Youth-Led Model

The BePart Youth-Led Model is a document designed in the context of the BePart - Youth-Led Development for Schools' Participatory Management project, to inspire and support other schools, students, and professionals (teachers, school leaders and school staff) to design and implement Models of Youth Participation (MYP) in their schools, providing specific guidelines and recommendations that can support them on this. In this way, the Youth-Led Model aims to share knowledge, strategies and good practices already tested during a piloting phase with teachers, school leaders and school staff.

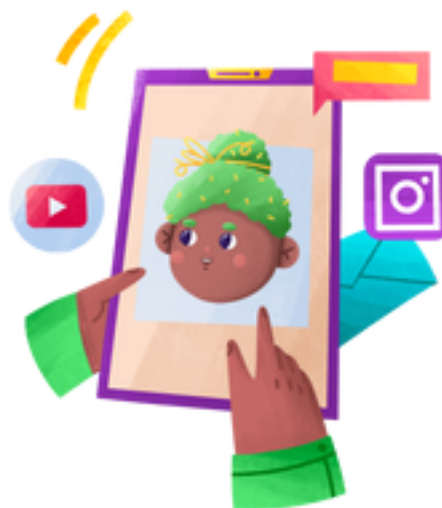


The participation of youth in social, economic and political fields is considered strategic by European Commission. Several studies reveal that there is a lack of social, economic and political participation and engagement of youth in the different spheres of society, and youth participation and engagement is considered to be crucial to promote youth awareness and competencies, allowing them to embrace and act as full European citizens. Youth-led development is an approach that places youth in the centre of their development and learning processes, essential to guarantee meaningful learning and students' motivation and engagement in the learning process and schools' activities. Jointly with youth-led, youth empowerment is also a goal of some policies and guidelines of the European Commission, fostering the increase of involvement and engagement of youth in society, which is also embraced by

the BePart project.

The document comprises two blocks, which enjoy precedence among themselves and are complementary and distinctive in their theoretical content. The first part "About the project" addresses the past, and what already happened and is organized into three units: BePart approach, an introduction to the project; process (methodology), an overview of the main concepts and steps of the project; and impact, an explanation of the impact the project had in the students, the teachers and the school community.

The second block, the "Recommendations" addresses the future and the contributions to the youth participation field. Is organized in a way that adults and young people can benefit from and as specific actions to be put to the test.



2. About the project

BePart project is a 3-year European project implemented by a consortium of 8 partners from 4 different countries: Mentortec (coordinator), Centre for Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE) and Escola Secundária de Paços de Ferreira (ESPF) from Portugal, Platoniq and Escola Virolai from Spain, Action Synergy and 2o Gymnasio Geraka from Greece, and Valmiera Pargauja Primary School from Latvia.

BePart aims to develop, implement and evaluate an innovative participatory youth approach to be implemented in regular schools, fostering inclusive education while promoting citizenship competencies and youth empowerment.

The project relies on five main concepts and methodologies:



These combined five main concepts will assure innovation in the promotion of the acquisition and development of students' civic competencies.

BePart project focus on the development of an innovative model fostering youth participation in decision-making and management of schools, a methodology tested and evaluated, in terms of impact, during 2 years of the project's implementation, by the school partners of the project.

The innovative participatory youth approach designed relies on the youth-led development concept, that places the youth at the centre of their own change, development and growth. This has been made by challenging students, aged between 13-15 years old, to take part in the process of decision-making in their schools and, in this way, acquire and/or develop their civic competencies, empowerment and, ultimately, their social

inclusion. Along with their own development and growth, by implementing the BePart methodology, students also acted as agents of innovative and positive change in the process of management of their schools, by implementing a set of initiatives based on the Models of Youth Participation (MYP). In these models, youth and adults cooperated to co-create strategies and initiatives, enabling youth to contribute with ideas and mobilise their skills in the process of decision-making.



2.1 BePart approach

BePart project was designed to promote the teacher's skills and resources, allowing them to guide and support the students, particularly those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, in planning, implementing and evaluating MYP in their schools.



• **How does the BePart project promote that?** By promoting the active involvement of students in the process of decision-making of their schools, teachers and schools will be able to contribute to the acquisition and development of their civic competencies, following the pedagogy of project-based learning (PBL). As a student-based pedagogy, PBL allowed students to strengthen and reinforce their civic competencies, by actively exploring, investigating and responding to different challenges related to the process of management and decision-making in their schools. Students were able to learn by doing, assuming a central role in their learning process, and having teachers acting as facilitators instead of instructors.

• **Why was the BePart project designed on these principles?** The ambition of the BePart project is to contribute to the integration of methodologies and strategies in regular schools, fostering citizenship education, essential for the full exercise of students' citizenship, in all contexts of their lives: educational/training, professional, social

and familiar. Considering that citizenship competencies are critical for an individual to establish and maintain contact with others and the world, it becomes clear that to be able to acquire and develop these competencies, a student needs to be in "action" instead of being a passive receptor of knowledge.

• **Which competencies students acquired by being involved in the implementation of the BePart project?** Considering that students are put in the centre of their learning and that the project is based on the implementation of MYP in the school context, the BePart project contributes to the acquisition, development and/or strengthening of the 4 key competencies of the citizenship education (besides technical and subjects-related competencies):

1. Interacting effectively and constructively with others: at the beginning of the project, the selected teachers and students, established the school fellowships, which comprised working groups for the students to prepare, implement and evaluate



the MYP in their schools. These working groups were crucial for the exchange of experiences, clarification of doubts, sharing of knowledge and supporting decisions among the students actively involved in the implementation. Thus, by integrating and participating in these working groups, students were able to develop their interpersonal skills, essential to effectively and constructively interact with others. Additionally, during the period of implementation of the models, the selected students structured and promoted a set of small-scale events, with different goals and participants and participated in the international mobility of students, allowing them to learn how to interact with others in different contexts.

2. Thinking critically: students were able to implement different MYP in their schools, which allowed them to contribute to and support the management and decision-making in this context. Decision-making is an ability that needs to be acquired and developed as well and that is intrinsically related to the ability to think critically. So, by being involved in the implementation phase and the decision-making processes of the school, students were able to develop and/

or reinforce their critical thinking.

3. Acting in a socially responsible manner: schools are communities that involve different persons with different roles with the same goal: to learn and promote learning. As a community, schools have rules, their specific culture, shared spaces and diversity. So, schools are like small societies and to be able to be part of the management and decision-making processes of the schools, students need to be part of the society, respecting the rules, culture, spaces and diversity. This means that students actively involved in the implementation had the opportunity to learn or improve their skills of acting in a socially responsible manner, respecting differences and sharing similarities.

4. Acting democratically: according to the BePart methodology, students can play a key role in the management and decision-making of their schools. However, they did not act alone, they were able to contribute to the process of decision, but teachers, head classes and directors were, ultimately, the final decision-makers. So, to take part in a participatory decision process, students needed to be able to act democratically.

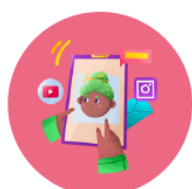


2.2 Process (methodology)

BePart fostered the promotion of innovation in the schools' approach related to citizenship education. The project relies on five main concepts and methodologies that combined, assured innovation in the promotion of the acquisition and development of students' civic competencies:



Youth Empowerment: it aims to improve quality of life and is a process in which youth takes the charge of their lives, by being active in their contexts and following their beliefs, values and goals.



Co-creation Process: a management strategy in which two parties cooperate in the process of designing and developing a product, methodology or event, that will be an added value to both.



The backbone of the **Models of Youth Participation** is the establishment of strategic partnerships between youth and adults, fostering the promotion of youth skills and autonomy in the participation in decision-making processes.

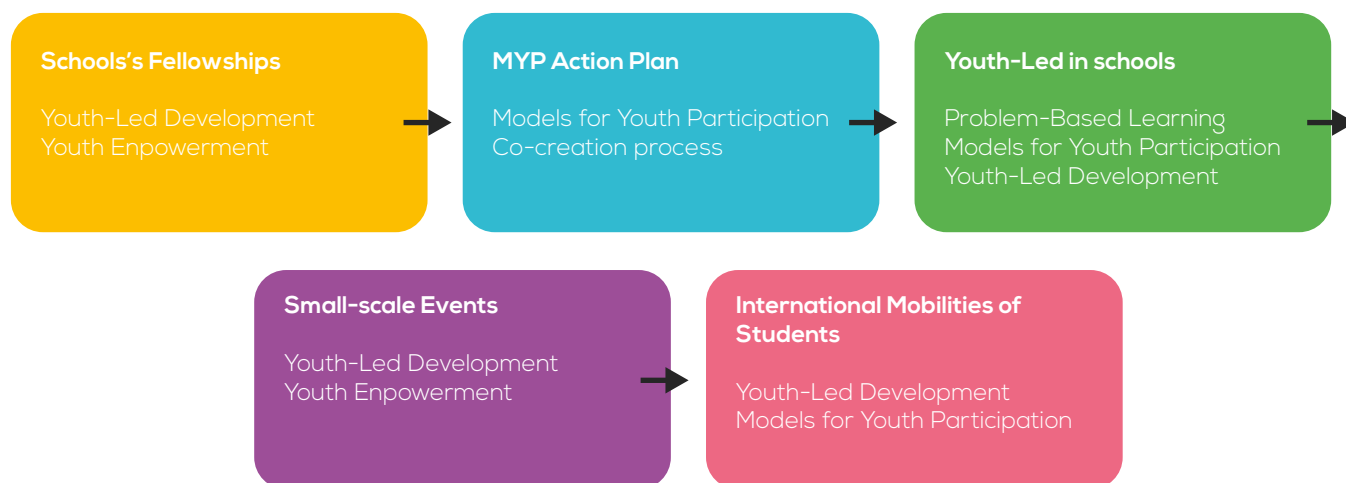


Project-based learning (PBL): this student-centred pedagogy promotes active learning by involving learners in the exploration of real-world challenges and problems.



Is a **participatory approach** that places youth in the centre of their development and growth and comprises 5 main principles: 1) the definition of the goals and objectives of youth development is defined by them; 2) a social and physical place, in which youth can take their activities, needs to be created, allowing the regular contact with them; 3) the development axis is the interaction and cooperation with others, so mentorship from adults and peer-to-peer mentorship are encouraged; 4) one of the most important roles of youth is as a role model, in which they need to encourage other youth to be engaged and participate in the development; 5) the integration of youth into local and national development programmes and frameworks are crucial.

Based on these key concepts, also identified as being strategic at the European, the project promoted the active involvement of students in the decision-making of their schools and invested in the capacity building of teachers in the field of citizenship education. This was done through the following process:



Different theories, models and types of youth participation were already defined and tested in different initiatives and countries, revealing relevant impact, not only, on the learning process of youth, but also youth interaction with the world and others. The models can be transferred and adapted to different contexts with different goals and are important to promote education & training of professionals and youth, accurate knowledge about the different models and types of cooperation fostering the youth participation in the different sectors of society. Having this in mind, the BePart project methodology integrates models for youth participation in methodology that were selected and compiled in a handbook that is available here. Students were responsible for the activities of preparation, implementation and evaluation of the MYP in their schools, benefiting from the guidance and support of their teachers. The process was based on student-teachers cooperation and that's why BePart contained a capacity-building programme for teachers, endowing them with the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to act as facilitators of these students, during the phases of preparation, implementation and evaluation of the MYP. A world of continuous change and development, based on increasing diversity and heterogeneity, requires a different approach concerning the policies of education

& training and social inclusion. Co-creation is identified by the European Commission as a process that can be useful to answer societal and educational challenges and will be also the axis of the BePart methodology. BePart also provided a co-creation manual for teachers and a co-creation manual for students, two manuals aimed to provide teachers and students tools and tips to help them to implement real participatory processes and be the protagonists of change! Since the implementation phase was in 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, not even the pandemic stopped students to participate and be active in the development of the activities that they set out to accomplish. The project defined a set of activities and initiatives achieved by the students during the implementation of the MYP for them to share results and raise the awareness of other students, teachers and schools about the project outcomes. The action planning, the face-to-face meetings, and the student's mobilities were life lessons for the students that were directly involved. The identification of a problem or a situation that mattered to them so they could find and work on a solution was a challenge, and that is shown in the Implementation Guides, developed by the students to guide other students from the same or different schools on how to implement the MYP.

2.3 Impact

To evaluate the impact of the BePart project, the perspectives and experiences of both teachers and students that were involved in the implementation of the project were collected. Both teachers and students noticed a positive impact of the project, thus highlighting the active involvement of all agents and changes produced by the project in both students and teachers. The collection of this feedback allowed the project partners to design some ideas for future developments and upscaling. Here we present a summary of the main conclusions of teachers and students after the two years of implementation:

The project was an opportunity for the teachers and students to redefine and analyse the school problems they already had and the challenges they already face.

“Everybody [should have] voice and [should have] opportunities to say what they think”, so the school partners chose the Models that they think are useful to give voice to their students and empower them to ask for more participation.

Students have not even thought in the past that they are allowed to take part in decision-making on different topics. “They don’t believe that their voice matters”

It was difficult to take part in decision-making in contexts or topics such as curriculum and other institutional topics in several contexts

We need to change the culture of each educational system: students, teachers, parents, and policymakers need to believe in the right of participation of every educational agent

All students together created a poster on the Model they chose and implemented based on their experience and offered tips for implementation to other schools who would like to implement the same Model to practice participation in the school. This was an interesting and still training exercise, as they developed also metacognitive skills.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the project was successfully implemented and some activities perfectly worked online too

Every project team involved also many students and other agents in their school context

Disadvantaged students (in some partner schools they were 50% of the project team) needed more support and time from the teachers part but were the ones who benefited most, through developing research and presentation skills, and learning how to participate democratically, talk in English, not be shy etc

All participants developed confidence

Even the younger students were interested and participated in the project. However, the younger students were not responsible and mature enough to reject cyberbullying, protect themselves online, and develop more technological and critical thinking skills

The students from the core groups flourished during the project work. Their critical thinking skills developed, their sensitivity evolved and they are now ready to organise different relevant workshops in their classes for their classmates

At the beginning of the project some school teachers tried to undertake lots of work, however, the project is now ruled by the students themselves. The teachers “are working with them, but the students are now responsible”. We need to trust them more.



As one of the school's partners said "the students flourish little by little, they develop their critical thinking and they enlarge their sensitivity and their tolerance towards the Other". The fact that the students were the centre of their development and growth and the teachers took on the role of facilitators allowed them to experiment with activities that create motivation and free their minds in different ways.

This had an impact on the way they lived this experience since they faced situations never experienced before, such as i) knowing how to deal with problematic situations of school management for which they have to make decisions, ii) having access to budget and knowing how to manage and spend it and be responsible for it, iii) organizing events at school, for the local community, and colleagues from other countries, iv) have time and space to be active in their school management. Knowing how to work as a team in sharing ideas, carrying out specific actions or dealing with problems that were not part of their concerns before but have now a higher level of awareness (many of them have arisen through COVID), has allowed young people to have an empowering experience.

In this sense, it is possible to say that by fostering research and building knowledge on youth and by youth, the project expects to contribute to policy recommendations with real information. As mentioned above, during the project, students felt engaged in the design, implementation, monitoring and

evaluation of the activities. They explored their interests and potential, getting curious and empowered. Participating in this project promoted the well-being and development of young people and strengthened their commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy in the school setting. By trusting in their abilities as leaders and active citizens, they will be more active in the decision-making process of the school management outcomes in the future. By recognizing that their voice matters and promoting the full and active participation of young people at local, national and European levels, the BePart invested in and ensure the participation of girls and boys, empowering them to lead the change.

Sum-up, by showing the BePart approach as innovative and with impact it is possible to show to other organisations and countries the added value and impact of the BePart approaches in citizenship education, in general, and in the promotion of youth civic competencies, in particular.



3 Recommendations

This section aims to list different recommendations for the design/preparation, implementation and monitoring/evaluation of other MYPs in schools. These recommendations resulted from the implementation of the BePart project in the four countries of the partnership and focus on two main target groups: professionals (comprising teachers, school staff, school leaders, and school psychologists) and students. Each recommendation aims to respond to a specific objective and incorporates direct actions that can be implemented at different levels.



Professionals (comprising teachers, school staff, school leaders, and school psychologists)

Recommendation	Objective	Actions	Level
<p>Raising awareness of the importance of youth participation</p>	<p>To prepare school professionals to empower youth participation within the school environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver policy workshops with experts to debate the importance of school participation of students • Disseminate the Models of Youth Participation Handbook through schools inside and outside the countries of the BePart consortium • Promote focus groups with teachers that implemented the BePart methodology to evaluate the impact of the project's implementation • Create discussion groups and forums with teachers that implemented the BePart methodology aiming to share their visions on the impact of the project and the importance of promoting youth participation • Provide schools with a budget to allow students to participate in the decision-making process of school management Include students in the board of the school, so their voices can be listened to and taken into account • Invest in partnerships with organizations outside the school allowing young people to interact and be more active in the community 	<p>School Community Policy</p>
<p>Promoting the participatory youth approach in schools</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver policy workshops with experts to debate and discuss how to promote youth participation in schools • Capacitate teachers, school staff and school leaders in youth participation through the delivery of training • Disseminate the Co-creation manual for teachers through schools inside and outside the countries of the BePart consortium • Promote visits to the schools that implemented the BePart project's activities within the countries of the BePart consortium • Encourage and share good practices regarding the promotion of youth participation with other schools and school communities • Promote and strengthen permanent mechanisms of consultation with young people through funding, school projects/activities... 	<p>School Community</p>

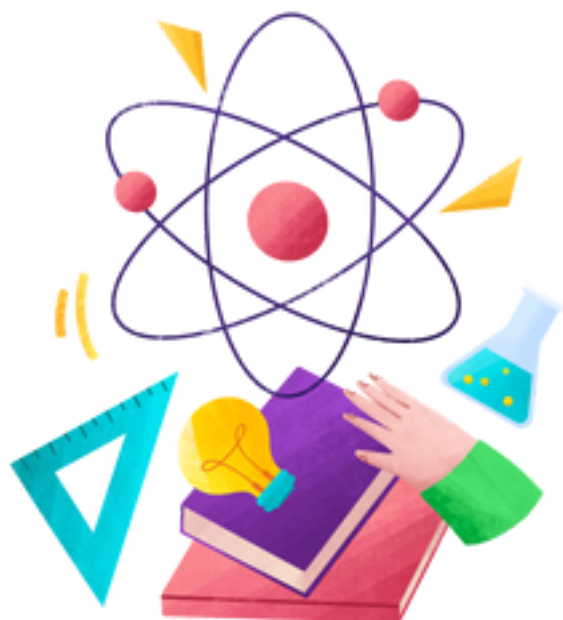
Students

Recommendation	Objective	Actions	Level
<p>Promoting school participation among students</p>	<p>To foster inclusive education To promote citizenship competencies and youth empowerment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote focus groups with students that implemented the BePart methodology to evaluate the impact of the project's implementation • Create discussion groups and forums with students that implemented the BePart methodology aiming to share their visions on the impact of the project and the importance of promoting youth participation • Disseminate the Co-creation manual for students and the Implementation Guides through schools inside and outside the countries of the BePart consortium • To provide the students with the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate and relate with others Implement students councils in the schools • Create the space and the time for the students to participate in ALL topics of a school life • Allow students to organize workshops, do peer mentoring to young colleagues or their classmates • Promote international mobilities for students to share experiences and good practices between cultures 	<p>School</p>
<p>Integrate BePart methodology into the school curriculum</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote forums with policymakers to discuss the integration of the BePart methodology and resources in the school curriculum inside and outside the countries of the consortium • Promote the participation right of all agents involved in education • Present this methodology to teacher's training centres to include them in their offer, so it could be worked at a grassroots level in the school curricula 	<p>School Policy</p>

4 Conclusion

The lack of trust in young people’s potential and not fully understanding their interests and needs is one of the main barriers that prevent young people’s voices from being heard and acted on. Engaging with youth cannot be seen as a symbolic activity or a procedural requirement, a box-ticking exercise, without any potential for meaningful contribution on the subject or any follow-up. It is crucial to change the resistance of institutional actors because young people are interested, and their opinions and abilities have value. So, to ensure that no citizen is left behind, it is crucial to promote young people’s participation in decision-making that impacts their future. So let’s start by doing it in the school setting, the place they know better and where they can start to make a difference and to be prepared to be actively participative in democratic life, outside the school setting.

“Through active participation, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn vital life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship and to promote positive civic action. To participate effectively, young people must be given the proper tools, such as information, education about and access to their civil rights.”



One of the lessons learned from this project is how to engage young people and how to motivate them to be more active and participatory, how to motivate them to lead the change and understand that their voice matters and is heard. Some of the feedback collected over these years that we tried to present in this document is that students need to feel motivated, they need to know they are heard and their actions mean something. They highlighted strategies such as the students-centred approach, teamwork, project-based learning methodology and peer mentoring as important tools to promote their participation in school management. They declared that they were not used to planning, thinking critically, and to do mentoring their classmates, so it is important to train the young people on these skills. Probably the most important policy recommendation to give is to institutionalise participation as a right and possibly even as a duty for all agents involved in education. Young people have a lot to give!













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